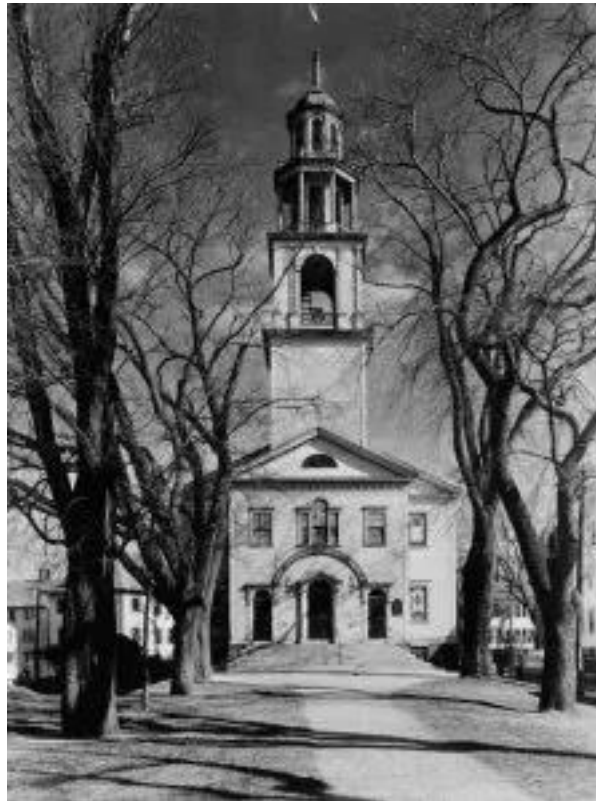


The Gift of
HERITAGE
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough

Resources for a month of reflection



(First Universalist Church, Gloucester, Massachusetts, USA)

The Gift of Heritage

Rev. Peter Boullata

This month in the Fellowship, we are exploring the theme of heritage. As individuals, as a congregation, and as a religious movement, we have inherited much from those who have gone before.

We often refer to such people as our ancestors. In our households and personal lives, our ancestry is expressed in the languages we speak, the kinds of foods we make and enjoy, the stories we are told about our grandparents, special or holy times of year we observe, among others. These patterns in our living ground us. Our ancestry can provide a story about ourselves. Our ancestors can provide us with contexts from which we cultivate a meaningful life. This can happen as we accept what we inherit—and how and what we reject. Our inheritance is something we sift through, curating what will be useful for us today.

The same is true for our congregation. We have inherited this Fellowship with thanks to those who established it in 1961 and those who carried it forward. The context those fourteen founding members had is quite different from ours today, as so much has changed over the past sixty years. Here, too, we have habits and customs, practices that continue to shape our common life together. Many of these are useful, some of them... not so much. Periods of transition are often when congregations like this one sort through and curate what we have been doing over the years. Last October, for example, the Transition Leadership Team led us through reflections on the fellowship's past.

Nineteen sixty-one is also the year that the Unitarians and Universalists officially consolidated their two movements into one, creating a combined association of congregations, the UUA (Unitarian Universalist Association). That year also saw the creation of the Canadian Unitarian Council to bring together Unitarian and Universalist congregations from across Canada. Here, too, we have seen tradition and change, the preservation of a heritage as well as innovation.

As individuals, as a congregation, and as a religious movement we have opportunities now to do the work (and play) of reorienting ourselves as we come out of a global pandemic and all that it has wrought, as we situate ourselves in a wider culture in which organized religion is increasingly marginalised, as Canada reckons or fails to reckon with its colonial past and present.

This month's resources for reflection centre on the personal and individual. Our Sunday services will explore Unitarian, Universalist, and UU historic testimonies—looking to this movement's ancestry with an eye to what is constant and useful and what could be remade anew. My hope is that as individuals and as a congregation we will become better grounded in who we are and where we are going.

INSPIRATIONS ON THE THEME OF HERITAGE

Tradition gets a vote, not a veto.

Reconstructionist Judaism

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

William Faulkner

History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme.

Mark Twain

Some people are your relatives, but others are your ancestors, and you choose the ones you want to have as ancestors. You create yourself out of those values.

Ralph Ellison

In times like these, I look to the past. I come from people not meant to survive, and here is our
bloodline, stronger than ever.

Brittany Packnett

To acknowledge our ancestors means we are aware that we did not make ourselves.

Alice Walker

When a society or a civilization perishes, one condition can always be found. They forgot where
they came from.

Carl Sandburg

When heritage becomes a box instead of an inspiration, it has gone too far.

Brandon Sanderson

My father used to say that stories are part of the most precious heritage of humankind.

Tahir Shah

We are a collage—a remix—of our ancestors. We have spiritual DNA, as well as physical, and
our lot in life is to answer the questions posed by the people who came before us.

Austin Kleon

Whereas history pleads, "Protect what we put into place!" Heritage urges, "Know the plotline of
which you are a part." History is what happened; Heritage is a story still unfolding. History tends
to trap us in tales about what they did; Heritage inevitably gets us talking about what we are
called to do.

Rev. Scott Tayler

This is the thing: If you have the option to not think about or even consider history,... that's how you know you're on board the ship that serves hors d'oeuvres and fluffs your pillows, while others are out at sea, swimming or drowning, or clinging to little inflatable rafts that they have to take turns keeping inflated, people short of breath, who've never even heard of the words hors d'oeuvres or fluff.

Tommy Orange

The mission of your life should be to leave a better world behind than what you inherited.

Sri Ravi Shankar

I think that the spirits and the ancestors are absolutely fundamental to many, if not most, Indigenous cultures here on Turtle Island and around the globe. I think that if settler and newcomer cultural groups cannot understand what Indigenous people mean by "spirits and ancestors", we will be left with a yawning gap in communication. And ultimately, I have a strong intuition that our various processes of reconciliation will remain stymied unless we (Christians) are able to express our contrition and apology, not only to residential school survivors, not only to those who experience oppression from ongoing structures of racism and colonialism, but also to the ancestors and to the spirits of the land. Our churches' missionary histories cannot be understood without coming to terms with our intentional demonization and/or dismissal of the spirits who were, and are, so important to the First Peoples of this land.

It is time for us to apologize, in spiritual ceremony, honestly and directly to the spirits and the ancestors.

Rev. Shawn Sanford Beck

The only education I had came from the Canadian schooling system. The same system that built this land on oppression and genocide. It wasn't until I started to learn for myself and started working in spaces that were consciously amplifying Indigenous voices that I truly began to understand the horrible tribulations the Indigenous people of this land experienced and continue to go through.

Jessie Brar

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTING ON THE THEME OF HERITAGE

1. What metaphor best describes your relationship to your family heritage? A giant hug? A dinner table with everyone talking at once? An anchor? A guidepost?
2. What story told by (or about) your ancestors has shaped you the most?
3. How has staying close to your ancestors been healing for you?
4. If you could talk to one of your ancestors, who would you choose? And what would you ask them?
5. What is your favourite family memento? And why does it have such a hold on you?
6. If you could change one thing about your family heritage, what would it be?
7. Often parents consciously or unconsciously transfer their unfilled dreams onto their children. What have you learned about dancing with your parents' unfulfilled dreams?
8. How have your ancestors helped you understand and hold on to beauty?
9. What story do you want to be remembered by?
10. What article of clothing ties you to your ancestors?
11. We usually think of heritage as tied to people, but *places* shape us as much as our family trees. What "inheritance" was passed on to you by your childhood hometown or childhood house?
12. What's the legacy of your first embarrassment?
13. What's the legacy of your first award/triumph?
14. It's been said that we are remembered for the rules we break. What broken rule might you be remembered by? What rule did your parents break?

What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to find it.

PRACTICES

Option A

The Memento That Matters

Many of us have one: a favourite family memento that holds something important about our family heritage and history. Most of the time, these mementos also keep us grounded in a value or offer us comfort or inspiration when we need it most.

This month, reflect on one of your favourite family mementos and figure out why it has such a hold on you.

If possible, bring that memento with you to show to the group.

Option B

Record an Elder... or Yourself

Heritage is passed down in the stories we tell. It's even [more meaningful](#) when we can hear those stories in the voice of our elders and ancestors.

This month, record an elder. Ask them to share stories from your family heritage so they aren't lost. Or interview them to capture their story. You can find some [good questions](#) to ask from NPR's StoryCorps project. There also are some great questions to use in Option D below. Here's some general guidance about how to go about this project: <https://lifehacker.com/now-s-the-time-to-record-grandmas-family-stories-1843251629>

Or... if you are an elder, record yourself! We guarantee you that your loved ones will be grateful!

Consider bringing in a snippet from your recording to the group to share.

Option C

Cook & Share a Piece of Your Heritage

Heritage isn't just held in our minds and memory. Just as often, it's held in the food we eat, and the recipes passed down to us.

This month, reconnect with your family heritage with one or more of these food activities:

- Dig out an old family recipe and have your family cook it with you. As you do, share the stories connected with it.

- Invite over a small circle of friends and have each of them bring a dish from a family recipe or their particular culture. During dinner take turns sharing your stories connected to the dish everyone brought.
- Talk to a parent, aunt, uncle, or grandparent and ask them to share their favourite family recipe with you.

Whichever option you choose, consider making the recipe again the day of the group and sharing it with your Journeys friends! (Or... maybe just share the recipe).

Option D

Ask Them About Their Dance with Heritage

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to have conversations about them with people close to you. It not only deepens our conversations but also our relationships.

Use the list of “Questions for Reflecting on the Theme of Heritage” from this packet (above). Be sure to let your conversation partner know in advance that this won’t be a typical conversation. Telling them a bit about Journeys will help set the stage.

Come to the group ready to share what surprised you about the conversation(s) and what gift or insight it gave you.

Option E

Which Heritage Quote Calls to You?

Sometimes we read a quote which perfectly captures what’s going on for us right now. Or it allows us to view our current circumstances in a new light. Spend some time this month reading through the quotes in the *Inspirations* section to ***find the one that best illuminates your journey with the gift of heritage.***

We encourage you to use the same discernment practice with these quotes as you do with the packet’s list of questions:

- **Read through the list of quotes** a few times, noting which ones “shimmer” (i.e. call to you or have an emotional gravitational pull for you). It often helps to circle or star these quotes that stand out.
- With each reading, **narrow your focus** in on those that stick out, until you finally **settle on the one quote** that pulls at you the most.
- Then make space to **reflect** on the gift, challenge, or insight your chosen quote is offering you.
- Some of us may want to **go further** and capture your reflections with journaling or creative expression.

Come to the group ready to share your quote and the journey it took you on.

RESOURCES

The keynote address given by Rev. Peter Boullata at the 31st annual UU Midwinter Retreat in Schomberg, Ontario, 8 February 2020.

<https://peterboullata.com/2020/06/09/envisioning-the-emergent-future/>

Music

Two different playlists for our monthly theme: one in Spotify and another in YouTube. They are organized as a journey of sorts, so consider listening from beginning to end and using the playlists as musical meditations.

Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on [The Gift of Heritage](#).

Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [The Gift of Heritage](#).

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).

Videos & Podcasts

Sinead O`Connor - Arsenio Hall 1991

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAf7fGEeRQs>

On the legacy of a moral vision we forget

On the Heritage & Origin of "Race"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=926PqQUOVOg>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm-L9_yjjYo

Abigail DeVille Listens to History

<https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/abigail-deville-listens-to-history/>

Calling out official US history as "garbage," Abigail Deville uses discarded materials herself, like old furniture and tattered flags, to construct complex room-sized installations evoking the overlooked histories of Black people in the USA in all its messiness and grandeur.

What is Generational Trauma?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqFyXFjQcHw>

Can Trauma Be Inherited?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuIM39dcUs4&t=74s>

The Secret To Healing Trauma - Dr. Gabor Mate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgJJDBNkoQ8>

Reflecting On The Past To Understand The Present

<https://www.npr.org/2018/06/14/607757718/looking-back-reflecting-on-the-past-to-understand-the-present>

“So often we get stuck in the past, rehashing what we should have done, and what we no longer have...”

Debate: The World Will Be a Better Place in 5, 50 and 500 years

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYhvGnExyZc&t=1237s>

Articles

Reflections on the 1980s Article II Revision—and Why it’s Time to Revise Again

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/80sarticleii>

On our heritage of updating our guiding UU values.

Remembering The Black Empowerment Tragedy - UU World Magazine

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/empowerment-tragedy>

Channeling African Heritage to Empower Black Children

<https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2023/06/creativesoul-photography/>

Barbie Answers Oppenheimer

<https://annehelen.substack.com/p/barbie-answers-oppenheimer>

On challenging the heritage of a masculinist vision of the world

Books

Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents

Isabel Wilkerson

Kindred

Octavia Butler

There There

Tommy Orange

The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity

David Graeber & David Wengrow

Movies & T.V.

The Bear

On the haunting heritage of grief and the love that gets us through.

Harriet

Coco *(family friendly)*

Encanto *(intergenerational trauma, family heritage and family friendly)*