

CUUC Journey Groups 2026-2027

September 2026

Beginnings

Exploring Themes for Deepening Wisdom

Materials provided by Soul Matters, soulmatterssharing.com



Gathering

Chalice Lighting

“At the Edge of Something New” ~ Rev. Michelle Collins

We gather at the edge of something new.

Summer’s looseness gives way to rhythm, and rhythm calls us home.

Whatever weariness, wonder, or waiting you carry through these doors, you are welcome here.

You are seen here.

You are needed here.

Let us breathe together and open our hearts to all that is waiting.

Come, let us begin our time together.

Check In

- What is on your heart as we gather?

Connecting

Community Agreements - What do we need to be fully present for and with one another?

This list of community agreements is a starting point from our Woven Congregation materials. In conversation as a group, please add, change, or remove agreements so that this reflects the unique experience of your group. We agree together on how we’ll be in this space:

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- We listen without interrupting, with one person speaking at a time
- We keep what is shared here confidential and private
- Share our own experiences, be willing to be vulnerable
- We don’t give advice unless it is asked for
- You can always pass or only speak briefly
- Share the space: speaking only once until all have had the opportunity to speak
- Phones are put away or on silent

Quotes and Thoughts

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting their bad advice...
little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own.
~ Mary Oliver

Too much of life is wasted trying to build and
control the “right” circumstance for making a
change. Instead, acting on what matters in
this finite life is better started today,
imperfectly, than on any someday... in every
moment of life, as finite humans, all we are
doing is choosing one set of problems over
another... The question isn't how to avoid
any bad consequences or what's the perfect
decision; it's what is the price you're willing
to pay.
~ Oliver Burkeman

One can waste years this way, systematically
postponing precisely the things one cares
about the most.
~ Oliver Burkeman

There is something deep in us that conspires
with what wants to remain within safe
boundaries and stay the same.
~ John O'Donohue

There is nothing more pathetic than caution,
when headlong might save a life, even,
possibly, your own.
~ Mary Oliver

It is never too late to be what you might have
been.
~ Adelaide Anne Procter

Another world is not only possible, she's on
her way. Maybe many of us won't be here to
greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very
carefully, I can hear her breathing.
~ Arundhati Roy

You don't have to see the whole staircase,
just take the first step.
~ Martin Luther King Jr

We seem to think that beginning is setting out
from a lonely point along some line of
direction into the unknown. This is not the
case. Shelter and energy come alive when a
beginning is embraced... We are never as
alone in our beginnings as it might seem at
the time. A beginning is ultimately an
invitation to open toward the gifts and
growth that are stored up for us.
~ John O'Donohue

Beginners are alive in beautiful ways. They
notice more. They ask better questions. They
remain open to what is emerging rather than
getting sidelined by what they “already
know.” There is humility in being a beginner.
And there is freedom.
~ Julie Bauch

Each friend represents a world in us, a world
possibly not born until they arrive, and it is
only by this meeting that a new world is born.
~ Anaïs Nin

Let every moment be a reminder that you are
more than the sum of your mistakes. A
sunrise is still beautiful no matter how bad a
day is. It's allowed to start over. And so
are you.
~ Rudy Francisco

Deepening

This Is Not a Dress Rehearsal

~ Inner Atlas Founder Cassie Krajewski

There's a phrase you might have heard before — "Life is not a dress rehearsal." It sounds simple enough, but let's unpack it. If you've ever been in a play or seen behind the scenes of a performance, you know the purpose of a dress rehearsal. It's a run-through where mistakes can be made, a space where perfection isn't expected because the "real" performance is still ahead. The stakes are low because it's not the actual show. But in life, there is no such thing. This *is* the show.

Yet so many of us live as if we're still waiting for the real performance to begin. Maybe you're waiting for the perfect conditions—when the career is just right, the relationship is just perfect, when you've "figured it out." Or maybe you're stuck in a loop of "when this happens, then I'll..." Then I'll take that trip, start that project, finally feel worthy, or start enjoying my life. The problem with this kind of thinking? It postpones joy, connection, and fullness.

We Are Taught to Wait

From an early age, many of us are subtly conditioned to believe that our life is something we're preparing for. We're given goals to achieve—graduate, get the job, find a partner, have kids, save for retirement—and somewhere along the way, we may start believing that happiness lies at the finish line of each of these accomplishments. We delay pleasure, joy, and satisfaction as if they are rewards for later, rather than experiences to be cultivated now.

Waiting, striving, and preparing can leave us living life like a rehearsal, thinking that if we just practice long enough, we'll be ready to *actually live* once everything aligns. But, of course, life is messy. It's complicated. There's no perfect moment when all the stars align, and we become fully prepared to live as our truest selves.

Perfectionism and the Myth of Readiness

The myth of the dress rehearsal is often tangled up in perfectionism. We want to be ready, polished, and fully prepared before we take a leap, make a change, or even let ourselves fully enjoy something. Whether it's work, relationships, or creative pursuits, perfectionism convinces us that we must get it all right before we allow ourselves to live fully.

But if we keep waiting for everything to be perfect, we'll never arrive. Life, by its very nature, is imperfect. And the irony is that the beauty, growth, and magic often live in the imperfections—the missed cues, the unexpected moments, the courage to take action even when we're not entirely sure of the outcome. Life is unpredictable, messy, and sometimes uncomfortable. But that's where authenticity and meaning reside.

The Present Is All We Have

There's a quote often attributed to Buddha: "The trouble is, you think you have time." While we hope for long lives and plenty of time to accomplish our dreams, the truth is, none of us know how much time we really have. The only thing we are truly guaranteed is the present moment. Yet we're

so often preoccupied with the future or haunted by the past that we forget to fully inhabit where we are right now.

Our lives are made up of thousands of small moments. The cup of coffee in the morning, the conversation with a friend, the evening spent with a loved one. These are the moments that make up the fabric of our lives. The real joy doesn't necessarily come from achieving big goals (though those can be wonderful, too); it's often found in savoring the little things, staying present, and allowing ourselves to experience the fullness of each day, just as it is.

Living as Though This Is the Real Thing—Because It Is

So, what does it mean to live as though this isn't a dress rehearsal? It means giving yourself permission to live right now. It's deciding that you don't need to wait for some imagined future to pursue what matters to you, or to start fully showing up for your life. It's embracing the idea that you don't need to be perfect, ready, or have everything figured out. You simply need to start.

It means letting go of the endless "shoulds" and "if-onlys" and instead trusting that you are worthy of living fully, just as you are, in this moment. It's about realizing that life doesn't happen later—it's happening right now. You don't need to wait for the right time to enjoy your life. You can choose, right here and now, to embrace the imperfections, show up for yourself, and create meaning from the moments you have.

How to Start Showing Up for Your Life

If you've been living as though life is the dress rehearsal, here are a few ways to start embracing the main event:

1. **Get Clear on What Matters** – Ask yourself: What brings you joy? What makes you feel most alive? Start prioritizing those things. Let go of perfectionism and embrace the messiness of pursuing what matters.
2. **Take Imperfect Action** – Don't wait until you feel ready. Start now, with what you have. It's in the doing that we often gain the clarity and confidence we think we need beforehand.
3. **Savor the Moment** – Practice being present. Whether you're at work, with a friend, or alone, notice what's happening around you. Savor the small joys and pleasures, and remind yourself that these moments are what life is made of.
4. **Let Go of What No Longer Serves You** – Part of living fully means releasing old narratives, expectations, and fears that hold you back. What beliefs or patterns are keeping you in rehearsal mode? It's time to release them.
5. **Give Yourself Permission to Be Enough** – You are already enough. You don't need to achieve more, fix yourself, or prove anything to anyone to start living fully. Your worth isn't conditional on future accomplishments.

This Is It

We only get one shot at this – there is no second act, no do-over. But that’s not something to fear. Rather, it’s an invitation to embrace this messy, beautiful, imperfect life with open arms. So let’s stop living as if we’re still practicing. Let’s show up for ourselves and each other, knowing that this is it. The real thing. The main event.

Because life is happening, whether we’re ready or not. And the best part? You don’t need to wait for the curtain call to start living. The stage is already yours.

Bless the Beginning

~ Dr. David Breeden

As if expecting a ship,
we wait for what is to be,
yet we do not begin alone.
The Ancestors lean in.

Even as night clings
to the grass,
morning gathers.

Bless the beginning
though it does not arrive clean;
bless the first word after long silence;
bless the hand extended,
the quiet yes
gathering in throats.

Bless the beginning
not because it’s easy;
not because we are ready;
but because a path
creates the path.
The world is not finished.
Neither are we.

Reading

~ Maya Stein

And the body is holding its losses like a fist. And a fleshy hope is opening to an unprecedented vastness. And whatever we think we are leaving behind will keep insisting. And the things we desire will elude us. And our efforts will pose as failure. And we will not recognize how far we’ve come. And we will solve one problem and create another. And we will feel broken. And we will not be broken. And the silence will be deafening. And we will love destructively. And no one will appear to be listening. And there will be too many doors to choose from. And we will keep saying, “I don’t know how to do this.” And we will be more capable than we ever imagined.

From A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the 21st Century

~ Rebecca Ann Parker

There is no life apart from life together. In many Buddhist traditions, taking refuge in the sangha (the spiritual community) is necessary for enlightenment. “There is no salvation outside the Church,” said third-century Christian bishop Cyprian of Carthage. These may be startling claims if you have been steeped in the dominant U.S. culture of individualism, which suggests that looking out for number one is the only way to survive. But life is relational through and through. Everything exists in interaction and interdependence with everything else. The question is not whether we are social, interconnected beings. That is a given. The question is how we shape our modes of being with one another and with the sources that uphold and sustain life

On getting thrown out of the nest

~ Jocelyn K. Gleib

About a month ago, as I was drifting around the house on a weekend morning, I decided to consult Pema Chödrön’s classic text *When Things Fall Apart* like an oracle. I closed my eyes and opened it to a “random” selection and this is what I found:

The essence of life is that it’s challenging. Sometimes it is sweet, and sometimes it is bitter. Sometimes your body tenses, and sometimes it relaxes or opens. Sometimes you have a headache, and sometimes you feel 100 percent healthy.

From an awakened perspective, trying to tie up all the loose ends and finally get it together is death, because it involves rejecting a lot of your basic experience. There is something aggressive about that approach to life, trying to flatten out all the rough spots and imperfections for a nice smooth ride.

To be fully alive, fully human, and completely awake is to be continually thrown out of the nest. To live fully is to be always in no-man’s-land, to experience each moment as completely new and fresh.

At this curious moment in history, I think that many of us are starting to feel into this tossed-out-of-the-nest energy as we navigate a strange, liminal no-man’s-land, without our usual collection of trusty twigs to shield us from the unknown.

The question is: Can we see this strangeness, this disorientation, this confusion as an opportunity to feel even more alive, to become even more intimate with ourselves and each other?

Can we let go of the expectation of a smooth ride, and let the full-body jangle of these spiritual potholes shake us awake?

Can we turn the thing that we are scared of into the thing that is the most sacred?

I don’t know the answers but these are the questions I am asking.

And asking the questions creates the space for the answers to flow in.

There's no such thing as a fresh start

~ Oliver Burkman, <https://www.oliverburkman.com/freshstart>

“You can never start life afresh, because you're hopelessly stuck in this life; there's no breaking through to another one in which everything's different and better. The reason this is so liberating, for anyone with even a hint of perfectionism, is that it means you get to give up on the exhausting struggle to take charge of your life, so as to steer it in a new direction. You get to abandon all hope of one day finding the perfect time management system – or perfect relationship, job, neighborhood, etcetera – and relax back into the inescapable chaos and muddle of the one you have. And then – once you're facing your real situation, not fixating on a fantasy alternative – you suddenly find yourself able to start making a few concrete improvements, here and now, unburdened by any need for those improvements to usher in a golden age of perfection. This, in my experience, is the only way personal change ever really happens: by first seeing that it's always a matter of rebuilding the ship mid-ocean, making adjustments to a life you can't ever take back to port or trade for another...”

On Wisdom from Our Jewish Friends about Forgiveness (For the Jewish high holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur)

~ Rabbi Elliott Karstadt

It's not enough to say “I'm sorry” – for those modern Hebrew speakers in the room, Judaism does not require hitnatzlut, but t'shuvah. Hitnatzlut is apologizing – saying sorry – asking for forgiveness.

T'shuvah is repentance– turning away from our worse selves and not only resolving to be better people but being better people.

Hitnatzlut is something we do for ourselves.

It gives us peace of mind and reassures us that we can continue to go on as before.

T'shuvah is something we do both for ourselves and for others.

It requires change, turning towards a different way of being in the world...

The famous rabbi Avraham Kook argued that t'shuvah is not about becoming a new person, but about returning to our own true selves.

This journey is challenging and full of perils, but we hope (we know) that the destination is worth it, if it means that we end up living fuller and more meaningful lives.

There is something comforting as well as challenging about the demand of t'shuvah rather than hitnatzlut – turning, rather than apologizing.

Although it may sometimes be too late to say, “I'm sorry” and receive forgiveness, it's never too late to change our own ways; to turn away from the things that we do not want to continue and to build ourselves anew.

Explore Together

What has your most joyful and most painful beginning taught you about yourself?

Many say there is the seed of a new beginning in every ending. How has that widespread idea helped or complicated your endings?

We live in a culture that declares: “Winners never quit and quitters never win!” Could this cultural message be in the way of you beginning your next stage of becoming? What needs to happen for you to feel free to quit and begin anew?

Are you somebody who wants everything to be just right before you begin something new or somebody who is fine with “jumping in” and figuring things out as you go? Either way, have you figured out what made you that way?

Much of who we are is a result of a seed that was planted and nurtured by our younger selves. Our beginnings took root in their choices. So, if you could talk to your younger self, which of their choices would you most thank them for?

The psychiatrist Carl Jung wrote, “The greatest burden a child must bear is the unlived life of the parents.” In what ways might your life choices and paths have begun in the unlived life of your parent?

What old story is preventing your new beginning?

Aging is often seen as a series of endings. But it doesn’t have to be that way. How is aging asking you to see it as a series of beginnings?

What question wants to shape the next stage of your becoming?

Practice

The Story that Isn’t Done with Us Yet

A core focus of Soul Matters is inviting us to reconnect with parts of ourselves by reconnecting with memories and stories from our lives.

When we return to these stories, we often notice some new aspect of it or find ourselves viewing it through a new lens. Or to put it another way, quite often our stories are not done with us yet. They have something to say to us.

So, choose one of the prompts below to revisit a story from your past. Then come to your group ready to tell it, along with how you encountered it anew and how that left you with a message of comfort or challenge.

Revisit a personal story about...

- A small step that made a big difference.
 - Trying to invent a new life when everyone around you was pressuring you, directly or indirectly, to recover your old life and allow things to “go back to normal.”
 - Missing the boat: a time when you wished you would have taken a path but didn’t.
- Inspired by the following poem:

“Missing the Boat” by Naomi Shihab Nye

It is not so much that the boat passed and you failed to notice it.
It is more like the boat stopping
directly outside your bedroom window, the captain blowing the signal-horn, the band
playing a rousing march.
The boat shouted, waving bright flags, its silver hull blinding in the sunlight.
But you had this idea you were going by train.
You kept checking the time-table, digging for tracks.
And the boat got tired of you,
so tired it pulled up the anchor
and raised the ramp.
The boat bobbed into the distance, shrinking like a toy—
at which point you probably realized you had always loved the sea.

- A difficult ending that turned out to be a beautiful beginning.

Beginning with Covenant

For UUs, all journeys begin in covenant. And most often that covenantal work focuses on the people we are traveling with. We ask: How will we be together as a religious community? What relational promises should we make with our family, our spouse, our children, our ancestors?

But what if we expand our covenantal work to include processes, not just people? Specifically, the processes that make up our spiritual lives? That’s what this exercise invites us to do. To help us on our way, we turn to a particular framing of the spiritual life, inspired by the Sacred Design Lab. This frame views the spiritual life as made up of three processes and accompanying questions:

- Belonging – To whom or what do I belong?
- Becoming – Who am I becoming?
- Beyond – What is beyond me?

With this in mind, spend some time this month figuring out one covenantal promise you want to make for this coming year with each of these processes/dimensions of your spiritual life:

- What single commitment do you want to make to your belonging?
- What single promise do you want to make to your becoming?

- What single vow do you want to make with your relationship to what is beyond you and transcendent?

Then make a covenant with yourself to revisit these promises every 2-3 months this year, continually reprioritizing and reshaping what it will take to keep your three sacred promises.

Releasing

Chalice Extinguishing

“At the Edge of Something New” ~ Rev. Michelle Collins

New beginnings rarely arrive all at once. They gather slowly, like light before sunrise.

So, go into your week trusting the next step more than the whole path, the small stirring more than certainty. May you find rhythm in the ordinary, courage in the small start.

And may you always remember that life is always becoming and you can always travel anew.

Checkout Question

In one word, what is something you will take with you from our gathering?

Thank you for this time together, beloveds.