



June 2025

On the Journey

Exploring themes for deepening wisdom



Renewal

These pages are a collection of readings, poems, artwork, and rituals meant to encourage us to consider our theme of renewal. Take note of the readings, poems, and articles that connect to your understanding of renewal and please bring to your groups other readings, stories, lectures, articles that speak to you. May these pages be just the beginning as you and your group explore our June theme.

Gathering

Check-In

- What is on your heart as we gather?
- What do you need to leave at the door to be fully present in this space?

Chalice Lighting

Many Hopes in Our Hearts

~ Rebekah Savage

Welcome beloveds, welcome!

We come to spiritual community with many hopes in our hearts:

The hope for inspiration, the hope for comfort, the hope for renewal.

In this time and space, may inspiration water our thirsty souls.

In this time and space, may comfort blossom in the gardens of our hearts, and bring us sweet relief.

In this time and space, may renewal course through us,

as electric as a surge of energy,

as serene as a nourishing meal,

as contagious as joy,

and bring us vitality and rejuvenation.

May our time together honor all the hopes we hold within;

May our time together bless us with the gifts of inspiration, comfort and renewal.

Connecting

Covenant

From our CUUC Covenant: “We foster the journeys of our congregants across generations while in the embrace of community.”

In your final month of the 2024-2025 journey group year, what has the covenant meant to you this year? Did you group find the practice of considering your agreements to one another helpful? Was there anything you learned or anything that surprised you?

Invitation to Practice Creativity

Checking in on our invitation shared in last month's packet on creativity: Is there a way to turn an “oops” into something beautiful, interesting, silly, or into a small joy? Maybe it’s art, maybe it’s creatively solving a problem, maybe it’s something no one has thought of yet. What did you create over the last month?

Defining Moment

Renewal; renew

verb

renewed; renewing; renews

1: to make like new : restore to freshness, vigor, or perfection as we renew our strength in sleep

2: to make new spiritually : regenerate

3a: to restore to existence : revive

b: to make extensive changes in : rebuild

4: to do again : repeat

5: to begin again : resume

6: replace, replenish

7a: to grant or obtain an extension of or on

b: to grant or obtain an extension on the loan of

intransitive verb

1: to become new or as new

2: to begin again : resume

3: to make a renewal (as of a lease)

Quotes and Thoughts

“Things are always better in the morning.”

~ Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

“As wave is driven by wave

And each, pursued, pursues the wave ahead, So time flies on and follows, flies, and follows, Always, for ever and new.

What was before Is left behind; what never was is now; And every passing moment is renewed.”

~ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

“I can hardly wait for tomorrow, it means a new life for me each and every day.”

~ Stanley Kunitz

“Every single cell in the human body replaces itself over a period of seven years. That means there's not even the smallest part of you now that was part of you seven years ago.”

~ Steven Hall, *The Raw Shark Texts*

“Call your spirit back. It may be caught in corners and creases of shame, judgment, and human abuse. You must call in a way that your spirit will want to return. Speak to it as you would to a beloved child. Welcome your spirit back from its wandering. It may return in pieces, in tatters. Gather them together. They will be happy to be found after being lost for so long.”

~ Joy Harjo

“Even if my body and spirit are asking for a break, I expect myself to power through. But if I power through, I am not leaving room for guidance of the spirit.”

~ Rev. Darcey Laine

“We say that flowers return every spring, but that is a lie. It is true that the world is renewed. It is also true that that renewal comes at a price, for even if the flower grows from an ancient vine, the flowers of spring are themselves new to the world, untried and untested. The flower that wilted last year is gone. Petals once fallen are fallen forever. Flowers do not return in the spring, rather they are replaced. It is in this difference between returned and replaced that the price of renewal is paid. And as it is for spring flowers, so it is for us.”

~ Daniel Abraham, *The Price of Spring*

“I think of the trees and how simply they let go, let fall the riches of a season, how without grief (it seems) they can let go and go deep into their roots for renewal and sleep... Imitate the trees. Learn to lose in order to recover, and remember that nothing stays the same for long, not even pain, psychic pain. Sit it out. Let it all pass.”

~ May Sarton, *Journal of a Solitude*

“Each person deserves a day away in which no problems are confronted, no solutions searched for. Each of us needs to withdraw from the cares which will not withdraw from us.”

~ Maya Angelou

Deepening

The Story of Norbert Čapek's Flower Ceremony

~ Teresa Schwartz, David Schwartz (UUA WorshipWeb)

His mother was a devout Catholic, his father agnostic. He became an acolyte at age 10, in 1890 at St. Martin's Catholic Church. In the years that followed, he became disillusioned: his priest was a cynic. At 18, apprenticed to his uncle, a successful tailor in Vienna, Norbert discovered the Baptists and became a minister. He founded almost a dozen churches from Ukraine to Budapest. Yet, slowly, his faith became more and more liberal.

He left Bohemia under government threat and accepted a call to serve a Baptist church in New York City... until one day in 1919. That day, he wrote in his diary: "I cannot be a Baptist anymore, even in compromise. The fire of new desires, new worlds, is burning inside me."

Norbert and his wife, Mája Čapek, joined a Unitarian church in New Jersey in 1921 — for the same reason a whole lot of you did: their children liked the religious education program. That's the power of our Sunday School teachers. Kids, that's your power, too!

World War I ended. His home country now independent, he and Maja returned home to Czechoslovakia. His Unitarian church was the Prague Liberal Religious Fellowship. In just 20 years, his church had 3,200 members. The traditional Christian communion service of bread and wine wouldn't meet the needs of his congregation, because his church — like ours — had people who believed different things.

Čapek turned to the beauty of the countryside; to the beauty of flowers. In 1923, he developed the flower ceremony. He asked his congregants to bring a flower to church — from their gardens, the field, or the roadside. He invited each person to place their flower in a vase. There was the church community, no less unique for being united. Following the service, each person could take a flower from the vase — a different one than they had brought.

Čapek was a visionary minister with a church ahead of its time, a BOLD church, a church thinking beyond its doors, beyond what it thought possible. It was a church that was willing to take risks; to make tough decisions; to bear disappointment; and to build a new way... first by building a church, and that church could build up the world.

That is our church. That was Čapek's church

For this, the Gestapo arrested him in 1942. The Nazis accused Čapek of listening to foreign broadcasts, and sent him to the Dachau concentration camp.

Even in starvation and torture, he held a flower ceremony with his fellow prisoners, finding whatever flowers they could among the weeds of the camp. They testified to a beauty larger than themselves, and a love that would outlive them. The Nazis killed Norbert Čapek. But his spirit, courage, and commitment live on, today. Those qualities have passed, now, to us, to make them real.

His wife Mája brought the flower ceremony to the Unitarian Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1940.

What we are going to honor on June 8th, is not a historical reenactment of something over and done, but an affirmation of our continuity with the generations of struggle for ever-widening liberty. This flower ceremony, lovely though it is, isn't a diversion from ugly reality, but a gentle fierceness which proclaims that in the midst of sinister days there is always the light of beauty.

We are here not to recall something that happened, but to remember something that is happening: to re-member — to put it back together again — and in that remembering, may we put ourselves back together again, each as a part of the body of this community: out of many, one.

- If you have experienced a flower service before, what did it feel like? If you haven't, what do you hope for from a ritual like this?
- What does renewal mean to you?
- Is there a story that you hold that helps renew your spirit? What is that story?

Garden Prayer

~ David M. Horst (UUA WorshipWeb)

Early in the morning, before the children are awake and while the grass is still dewy, I like to walk in my garden. It's "my" garden only because it shares the same small plot of land my family and I inhabit. The garden does not really belong to me; I belong to it—at least for the short time I'm here. Today I'm still in my slippers and have my first cup of coffee in hand.

Much of what grows had been planted two or three homeowners ago, some I've planted since our arrival; but, if they belong to anyone or anything, the plants and flowering trees I come to see and smell — viburnum, dogwood, magnolia, and crab apple— belong to the sun and rain and soil. These living things are a beauty not of my making, though surely made of my desire.

At the moment, the rose bushes are in full burst of red and perfume. The hydrangeas are sure to open their moppy heads as soon as the sun falls upon them. The weedy looking globe thistles are turning lovely blue and spiky. The foxglove, however, rules the garden. Its central stalk is five-feet high and heavy with pink, scoop-shaped blossoms with charming freckles inside. I am awed by the abundance.

I'd intended to walk the garden simply to observe and wonder. Ah, but there's a weed that must be pulled, a stray stem that needs to be pruned, a blossom drooping and fading that should be snipped. So I set down my coffee cup on the back porch, grab a small pail, and go to work. I end up with muddy hands, wet slippers, and a pail full of weeds and trimmings. Why can't I simply observe and wonder? Won't the beauty of my small garden world survive without me?

I step back to the porch to retrieve my coffee, now cold, stamp the dew off my slippers, and take one look back at the garden before I return into the house. The garden is no more beautiful now than when I first arrived. My weed pulling, pruning, and snipping haven't really improved the garden nor made that much of a difference as far as I know.

It's like prayer: The words I speak don't really change anything, but I know they change me.

- What brings you joy, play, balance, centering, peace, relaxation, recreation, renewal?
- Where do you turn when you feel in need of renewal?
- Do you have a ritual or a practice that helps you feel renewed?

Excerpt from *The Summer of Yes: An Ex-Nun's Story*

~ Karen Leahy, Member of CUUC

One day in the fall of my 10th year as a nun, I woke up with the clear understanding that I had to leave the convent. It wasn't a painful decision at all, more an epiphany—all the pieces of a puzzle I hadn't even been consciously working on coming together into a clear pattern, into this crystal certainty. I suddenly knew I had done all the growing I could do inside these walls and that, if I didn't go, my spirit would start to shrivel. I couldn't let that happen. I wanted more of the freedom and self-determination I had felt that summer. I had applied for a government teacher's grant in the arts in southern California, was accepted, and got permission to go. I flew from Cleveland—my first plane ride—and stayed with my sister. I hadn't realized before going to the workshop how empty I felt. Ten years of convent training at "denying myself" that was part of striving for perfection had gone too deep in me. At the workshop, I woke up. The arts—painting, music—gave me a way to prove to myself for that brief summer, "Yes, someone is here!"

That morning in October, everything was clear. I wanted access to the larger world, a more human life. Those seemed crucial life-and-death matters. I wanted to find my own voice, to follow my own agenda for my life and not what others thought I should do. I knew in my bones I had to do this. I was being called out of the convent to a life where my spirit could flourish.

- Is there a time when you said yes to something unexpected?
- Have you ever been renewed by vulnerability?
- Is there an ending in your life that led to an expected/unexpected renewal?

This Is How We Juneteenth

~ Chelsea Sanders,

<https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2021/06/10512518/how-to-celebrate-juneteenth-this-year>

For many Black people, Juneteenth used to be one of those things we would try to explain to other people, without really being able to explain it. Like Homecoming and Freaknik, you just have to be there. It's family BBQs with play cousins at the park, Uncle's grilling sandals, and Auntie's two steps you "don't know nothing about." In the weeks leading up to America's "freedom" on July 4th, this one is ours.

But by now, most Americans (should) know what Juneteenth is. Amid the flurry of racial justice conversations, the Blackest holiday ever burst into the national conversation last year and stood out as a specific, albeit too simplistic, way to support our community's ever-relentless cry for freedom.

Historically, June 19th marks the day Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger read "General Order No. 3" to enslaved Black Americans in Galveston, Texas, officially freeing them — months after the Confederate army's surrender and two full years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth aka Freedom Day, aka Jubilee Day, aka Cel-Liberation Day, aka Second Independence Day, or Emancipation Day is an annual celebration of that liberated energy — a day to commune in full-teeth-smile joy, swig strawberry sodas, and exist for no one else to watch, police, copy, or co-opt. It's a time to defy confusion, delay, misinformation, terror, and violence as our ancestors did. To live a day as we should all of our days: free.

And while Juneteenth has been circled on the summer calendar for Black people since its inception, its recent addition to the national calendar has been swift and full force. Scores of brands — from Nike to Peleton to Apple Music — have rolled out honorific campaigns in honor of Emancipation Day. Just this week, President Biden signed it into law making it a federal holiday. A nice gesture at best, though if lawmakers have now decided to be on the

right side of Black history, we'd prefer that Ohio legislators more fully investigate the killing of 16-year-old Ma'Khia Bryant at the hands of Columbus police; that Georgia's Board of Education's overturn its recent decision to ban Critical Race Theory from all state school curriculums; and that state governments across the country turn their attention to the numerous reparations bills currently being considered in congresses.

This ongoing two-step, for and against Black liberation in this country, is even older than Juneteenth. Part of the No. 3 General Order that proclaimed the abolition of slavery encouraged newly freed enslaved folks to "remain quietly at their present homes" — with their former enslavers. A system that frees you but then tells you to remain with your captors cannot be a just one, and the double consciousness of our delayed liberation persists to this day.

That dichotomy is bred into the existence of the holiday itself. By all accounts, Juneteenth wasn't meant to be a celebration, and saw varied, if inconsistent, support to become a national holiday before 2020. Our grandparents' grandparents had to make do with leftover freedoms — the chitlins of servitude — but the fullness of our joyful feast won't be denied this year.

Juneteenth is a reminder of that same ancestral ingenuity that runs through our veins today, because celebrating this year means loving on ourselves and each other, out loud, and in the fullest way possible.

This Juneteenth, we're celebrating our liberation in all its forms because our political, cultural, and personal freedoms are inextricably linked. When we talk of freedom this Jubilee Day, we must talk about it as a practice in our daily lives. Just as we speak on autonomy and abolition on the national stage, we must also speak on owning our stories in the classroom, claiming our credit at work, and protecting our bodies, voices, and choices when we walk out of our front door.

- How can celebration be a form of renewal?
- What role does understanding our past have in helping us chart a new future?

On a Holy Night in 1969

~ Rev. Otto O'Connor

In 1969,
In an Inn, also known as a
bar,
Called the Stonewall Inn,
A basement—

which had no running
running water,
Nor safe fire exits—
Queer people, of many
colors and kinds,

Danced together,
For it was the only place
Where they were allowed to
dance,

At least, permitted to, by
the mafia who ran the Inn.

In those days,
It was common for the
police to frequent this Inn,
No to join in the dance, the
underground celebration,
But to send the dancers
home and make arrests.
When they would arrive,
The lights would go on,
The people would be lined
up,
And then
All those in drag,
All those who were trans,
All those without proper
identification:
They were arrested and
taken into custody.

But on this holy night,
That early morning of June
28,
The people said “not
tonight.”
As they called to them to
line up,
The transwomen refused to
go.
And as they police began to
beat and arrest them,
And as the people spilled
out from the bar on to the
street,
Christopher St,
A crowd grew to watch.

And then,
As transwomen, lesbians,
and gay men were getting
arrested,
A yell came from the crowd:
“Gay Power.”
And as a transwoman was
shoved,
She shoved back and the
crowd began throwing
bottles at the wagon,
And suddenly it erupted.
For once the people didn’t
line up;
For once the people said
“no more; we’ve had
enough.”
It was almost as if, that
night,
being pulled out of the
darkness of the
underground at Stonewall
Inn
One too many times,
They said, “I’m ready to be
seen.”
On this holy night, when the
power of the oppressed
rippled through the streets
of New York,
When queer people said, No
more
Our world would never be
the same.

Fifty years ago,

It was illegal to be gay, to be
trans, to dance and to love
and to celebrate.
And now, only fifty years
later,
Here we are celebrating at a
church.
Gay and straight together?
Queer and straight
together?
Trans and cis together?
All in this together.

And so as we hear these
stories of life and love and
defiance and celebration,
Let us also remember and
pay tribute to our
movement ancestors,
Many of them transwomen
of color who led the first
rebellion that night.
You see, Pride is a
celebration of that
anniversary:
the anniversary of that riot,
at the Stonewall Inn in New
York city. A holy night.

So Happy Pride.
Welcome to this joyful
celebration,
Bring your whole selves
Your gay
Lesbian
Bisexual
Transgender
Queer selves

Your drag queen	Genderqueer	And let's have a celebration,
Butch and femme	Genderfluid	Because joy is a rebellion,
Cross-dressing	Agender	too.
Nail-painting	Pansexual	And this church is Queer;
Tutu-wearing	QUILT BAG selves	Queer and fabulous.
Selves	And all the other identities	Amen? Amen.
Your	That are and will be	

- How can resistance inspire renewal?

Enoughness

~ DanaLee Simon (UUA WorshipWeb) [thank you, Kathy Williams!]

“There is nothing to prove and nothing to protect. I am who I am and that is enough.” ~ Richard Rohr

My peony didn't bloom this year. She came up nice and green. Tall, too. But there were no buds. Nothing that was going to unfurl into her gorgeous fuchsia flowers — so big and beautiful that they always bend her to the ground.

I was sad, at first. I found myself giving her extra water, encouraging her in my mind. (Come on, come on. Bloom, baby, bloom.) Then a little exasperation snuck in. (Come on, come on! Flowering is the whole point, isn't it!?) Next, compassion. Yes, compassion for a plant. (It's OK if you don't bloom this year. Take a break. I don't think you got enough water last summer. My guess is there is a lot going on at the root level that I can't see, but that you know about.) Finally, love. Shown by long drinks of water beyond what our sprinkling system gives. Offered through a simple honoring of her enoughness in all her green beauty. (I am so happy you are here at all.)

Two years into my cancer diagnosis, my peony is a powerful metaphor, mirroring the places this journey has taken me. Showing me what I have already lived through. Reminding me of my own fallow time that, I am happy to say, feels more and more like a memory than a reality. There was the sadness — and, sometimes, still is: sadness and exasperation about all that cancer took from me. About all the ways I could no longer show up the way I used to show up. Sadness and exasperation about how my outward appearance has changed. About how tired it made me, and how so many things that I never thought of twice now seem like so much work.

Self-compassion was one of the best gifts I gave myself in my journey. Offered right on time to allow me to receive the help and support I needed. Helping me soften and allow a new normal. I know that my own practices of self-compassion allowed me to find compassion for

my peony. And the compassion I found for it has served to renew the self-compassion I offer myself as I continue to go through my own summer growing season. Now, the love flows. To myself. To my peony. And out beyond my own backyard, too, just as it's designed to do.

My peony didn't bloom this year. And she's OK.

Prayer Holy One, thank you for loving us, however we show up. For assuring us that we are enough, just as we are. Amen.

- What does it mean to be enough? Do you feel about your own “enoughness”?
- What external and internal factors influence the amount of time you have or take for renewal?

Releasing

Chalice Extinguishing

Returning to our November Ritual, please make space for those who would like to share and for those who would prefer not to share. This ritual is shared by Erica Hewitt. Invite everyone to complete the sentence. They can write it down or think about it for a moment.

I'm struggling with _____. One thing I hope for is _____.

Then, once everyone is ready, invite folks one by one to share aloud.

I'm struggling with _____. One thing I hope for is _____.

After someone shares, the group all together responds with “We hold the hope for you.”

We Receive Fragments of Holiness

~ Sarah York

We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight. Let us gather them up for the precious gifts that they are, and, renewed by their grace, move boldly into the unknown.

Checkout Question

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

For the Road



Check out our community playlist filled with music celebrating our theme for the month.
Sometimes only music can bring us into our bodies, into our hearts,
so deep we can't help but tap our feet to the beat.

<https://bit.ly/JGMusic-June25>

For the Summer



A compilation of all of our 2024-2025 playlists. The perfect musical companion for your summer journey until we return again in September! <https://bit.ly/JGSummer2025>

*The journey is long. The journey is beautiful.
The journey is hard. Know this, beloved: you never journey alone.*



On the Journey is produced by the Unitarian Universalist congregations of Westchester County, New York, for use in small groups. Each month (ten months a year) explores a different theological or spiritual theme.

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