

May 2020

Nurture Generations



Image by Pezibear from Pixabay

What does it mean to be called together spiritually to nurture generations?

Definitions (from Lexico by Oxford)

nurture // VERB

1. care for and encourage the growth or development of.
2. cherish (a hope, belief, or ambition) “ “for a long time she had nurtured the dream of buying a shop”

generation // NOUN

1. all of the people born and living at about the same time, regarded collectively.
2. the average period, generally considered to be about thirty years, during which children are born and grow up, become adults, and begin to have children of their own. a set of members of a family regarded as a single step or stage in descent
3. a single stage in the development of a type of product.
4. the production of something.
5. the propagation of living organisms; procreation.

Called Together to Nurture Generations

If you have ever read the Bible--or tried to, anyway--perhaps you have gotten caught up, lost, confused, or bored of the long lists of names: So-and-so begot so-and-so, who begot so-and-so, who begot so-and-so, and soon I begot bored and got up to make a sandwich.

These generational rosters serve a number of religious and literary purposes. Here is one: the Bible, and in particular the Hebrew scriptures, were largely written or rewritten in the context of geographic displacement. For a community without ties to a land that it counted on as its own, situating stories in the context of people provides an alternative anchoring. The memorization, naming, and honoring of lineages in oral history becomes a ritual that inscribes identity to future generations. Some of you reading this will have this experience directly. All, even the indigenous among us, are descendants of people who have had to, at one point or another under difficult circumstances, decide to leave the land they know and go elsewhere.

You can imagine if given enough time or warning in the preparations to leave, the desire to drink up as much of what had happened there. To list names becomes an expression of gratitude, a sort of shorthand for generations of stories, and a steadfast refusal to forget where we come from.

It feels somewhat strange to be writing this during a time when many of us are both fixed in place and feeling the sting of being separated from loved ones. The question that lingers in the air these days is not so much "Where do we come from?" but "Where do we go from here?" When people have faced this question before, when the response has been filled with vision and courage along with acknowledgements of what we don't yet know, our ancestors found new ways of being alongside these rituals of memory, hope, and resilience. Here at First Unitarian, we prepare our children for a life in which none of us can say what will happen exactly through ritual, through Unitarian Universalist identity, through stories of our religious forebears.

As we tip into Mother's Day and Nurture Generations with talk of ancestors, I want to acknowledge that family trees bear all manner of fruit. Amid this great harvest, for some of us these connections with ancestors are less easy to trace. I am thinking specifically of African-Americans whose ancestors were trafficked and enslaved as part of the chattel slavery that was foundational to the American economy that we wonder so much about right now. I am learning through the Elder Tree (on Saturdays at noon!) just how many in this community were adopted or have adopted children or have had children who have been adopted by others or grew up in foster care, and I am thinking of you, too. Even as we do our spiritual work to connect with our roots and sow seeds for the future, I believe that courage and strength have a way of finding us--and that those come from stories and teachers and mentors from many spheres just as well as biological lineages.

Finally, our monthly theme of Nurture Generations is most decidedly future-oriented, calling us to live today in a way that ushers our descendants into the most vibrant, life-sustaining, beautiful and just world that we can prepare for them, but just as we set the table for those to come, the table was set for us. This listing of names offers a way into the Haudenosaunee principle of Seventh Generation thinking in which “In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.” This relationship with our descendants is a powerful lens for decision-making that can lead us to live differently and grow in right relationship now with each other and the planet. I have also seen this concept swept up in mainstream white American culture and new age spirituality recently in a way that reinforces a stereotype of indigenous people as all-knowing sages. The Sioux theologian Vine Deloria Jr. (who is not Haudenosaunee) calls those of us who are new to Seventh Generation thinking to practice this by thinking not of some distant strangers two hundred years in the future but instead to live to build the best world possible for the actual young people around us.

We will not solve everything, fix everything, do everything, but I begin this month of nurturing generations by thinking of the ongoing Rochester City School District budget crisis. I begin this month by thinking of the powerful ancestors who came before us and the young people who will follow. With this cloud of witnesses, how are we called in community to nurture generations?

With love and in faith,
Rev. Shari Halliday-Quan, Lead Minister
First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY

THIS IS A DRAFT TO BE COMPLETED WITH ADDITIONAL RESOURCES BY 5/3/20

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Select one of the exercises below to practice, and come prepared to discuss the experience and your thoughts and feelings about it with your group.

OPTION A: Florilegium (from the Latin “flor” meaning flower and “legere” meaning to gather) is both a type of spiritual practice and the name of a botanical literary classic. As a spiritual practice, it takes its name from the wandering through a text as if on a walk and collecting little bits that stand out, as if making a bouquet of wildflowers. It helps us connect parts of the text with each other along with parts of our own lives with the hope that arranging things together might yield new beauty. Practice florilegium with any 1-3 pages of a book or article. If you don’t have something handy, here’s the beginning of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*:

https://www.bookbrowse.com/excerpts/index.cfm/book_number/1908/beloved

Step 1: As you read, look for 5 or so pieces of text that jump out at you. Words, phrases, even whole sentences but not paragraphs. Collect them on post it notes, as recordings on your phone, on another sheet of paper, or in another way that gathers them up out of the main body of text.

Step 2: Now that you’ve gathered up your flowers of text, take a look at them: what do they have in common? Do they speak to each other, or have a similar style, point of view, or symbolism?

Step 3: What stories or connections from your own life do these textflowers spark? Think of 2-3. These connections are flowers too.

Step 4: Looking at the flowers together, is there a theme or a question that emerges for you? What meaning or wisdom might there be for you given the commonalities or contrasts that emerge from the arrangement? Perhaps it speaks to this moment or a longstanding topic in your own life or in the collective life of a broader community. Be gentle with yourself and know that flower arrangements can be rearranged and that their beauty is, at least in part, dependent on our ability to let them go when their time has passed.

OPTION B: Write a note or a letter (or a song) to a person in a future generation who is a member of our congregation. Before you begin, take some time to flesh out imagining a particular person: write down at least five particular things about this person (Maybe a name, an age, a family, a vocation, interests, racial/ethnic identity, gender, so many things to choose from! Where do they live? How do they get to church? What do they like about church? What brought them here? Don’t get caught up too much in the particulars--just some things about a person you imagine to be a part of our shared future.) In this note, share what you most want them to know about our time and our church. Share one or two ways you are helping to steward the community that you pass to them.

OPTION C: Seek out at least one person from church who is of a different generation than you are. Other people in your Soul Matters group, coffee hour after church, our Facebook groups, or our noontime connection hours might be a good way to find someone you don't yet know. Set up a time for an hour to talk by phone, Zoom, or otherwise. (If one of the people is under the age of 18, this must be arranged through their parents or guardians.) Interview each other using the following questions:

- What was your spiritual or religious upbringing? How did that compare to other people that you knew?
- What are the 3-5 most important historical events in your life that many in your generation would share? Pick one; how did that event shape you?
- Who is someone who has influenced your spiritual, religious, ethical, or philosophical life?
- What does it mean for you, personally, to “nurture generations?”

After the interview, jot down notes about what surprised you in your interview partner's sharing and what differed from your own experience. Having heard one person's perspective, what have you learned about this other generation? What new questions do you have the next time you speak to this person? If they are open to a follow up conversation in the future, consider extending the conversation.

OPTION D: Participate in the Drawdown Challenge that many in our congregation are involved in. The challenge runs 6 weeks, ending on May 31, and aims to educate and empower our congregation to take action to mitigate climate change. In teams of 5-10 people, with friends from church, your Soul Matters group, or family spread across the country, [Learn more here](#) and join in on the action, or head straight to www.drawdown.ecochallenge.org to create or join a team (search "ECO UU 2020"). Try to complete an action for your team at least once a day. Each day that you do, reflect on what it would take to make that step a regular part of your life: What was challenging about it? What made it possible or easier to do?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions aren't "homework" that need to be covered entirely. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The questions often lead not to answers, but more questions

1. How much do you think you are "of your generation"? In what ways are you like those in your same age cohort, and in what ways are you different?
2. Besides peer groups based on the year you were born, what other "generations" are you a part of? *Perhaps you joined First Unitarian around the same time as others in a cohort or perhaps you were among the first class of computer science graduates or you were laid off along with a lot of other people or suddenly all your friends started cooking lentils at the same time.*
3. What developments or possibilities are you nurturing in your own life?
4. What does nurture mean to you? Who nurtures? Do you? Why or why not? How does nurturing relate to spiritual connections?
5. Who in your life nurtured you? Who nurtured your spiritual life, your ethical values, and your community? What was possible because of that nurturing that otherwise wouldn't be?
6. What societal developments are being birthed right now? What would it take to nurture those developments?
7. How important is intergenerational connection to you? Where and how do you foster those connections?
8. What messages would your great-grandparents have for people three generations beyond you? What would you say to those seven generations back?
9. How would you like to be remembered by following generations? What do you need to remember about them in order to live well now?

GROWING OUR SOULS

These questions are the same each month and invite us to connect this work of spiritual deepening with community transformation.

1. How will our discussion today cause you to be different in the world?
2. Within our church community, where can you help to make changes related to this topic?
3. How does this discussion relate to other activities in which you are engaged at church (i.e., parenting, religious education, social justice, worship, music)?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING

Like the cosmic dust following after a great Perseid meteor, we are the living remnants of time and all that has come to pass in its wake—briefly shining lights on the way to eternity. We are only visible to the naked eye for an instant. Take this moment to shine like the star dust you are. May the light of our time on earth shine to bless the world and each other. Shine. Shine. Shine.

--[Mary Edes](#)

For five thousand years, or more,
more than fifteen thousand generations,
human beings have been invoking spiritual power.

My predecessors, and yours,
have gathered together
to make sense of their lives
and their place in the cosmos.

And they have spoken aloud,
and invited what they conceived as sacred and powerful to be with them.
They called upon the spirits of air and earth, fire and water.
They called the bear and deer.
They asked for the raven to protect them.
They pleaded for the heroes of old to slay the monsters of their fears.
They sang songs they learned from their grandparents, and moved in the appointed ways, or in ways that were new, but felt like the right thing to do.
And they imputed power to these spirits, and to the memories of those heroes.
They called them gods.
And they were invoked.
Vishnu and Kali,
Elohim, Odin, and a hundred million others.

Every group of people,
everywhere:
they gathered to make sense of their lives and to make sense of their place in the cosmos, and
they called these spirits to be present to them.
And so do we.

....

We invoke that power,
which is, we know, always around, always with us, but which we sometimes forget about.
We forget that we are part of the whole of creation.

We forget that we are stardust.
We forget that we are capable of miracles, first among them, that we can love.
We forget these things,
so we invoke the power of existence
so that we can remember.
So we can lift our eyes and open our ears to the true and beautiful.
For five thousand years, or more,
we have done this.
In many tongues, in many ways,
we have done this.
--Rev. Matthew Johnson

QUOTATIONS

"For nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out." --James Baldwin, *Nothing Personal*

FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

Spirit of Life Hymn #123 in *Singing the Living Tradition* by Carolyn McDade

Spirit of Life, come unto me.
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close; wings set me free;
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

Breaths Hymn #1001 in *Singing the Journey* <https://youtu.be/YwLgxyVjwk4>
Poem by Birago Diop; Music by Ysaye Maria Barnwell

...Those who have died have never, never left
The dead have a pact with the living
They are in the woman's breast
They are in the wailing child
They are with us in our homes
They are with us in this crowd
The dead have a pact with the living...

Prayer For All the Mothers by Rev. [Lindasusan Ulrich](#)

For all the mothers and mother figures
The grandmothers, aunts, and extended family members who mother
The soon-to-be mothers, the wish-they-were mothers, the never-wanted-to-be mothers, the "it's complicated" mothers
The birth mothers, foster mothers, adoptive mothers, stepmothers
The "used to be Dad" mothers and "more than one Mom" mothers
The single mothers, separated mothers, stay-at-home mothers, unhoused mothers
The grieving mothers, those who grieve their mothers, and those whose grief is complex
For all the communities that mother
And for all who depend on the Great Mother
You are held — and beloved.

Call from the Past, Present, and Future by Rev. [Tania Márquez](#)

Call from the Past

From the heights of the Andes, the jungle, and the desert, from the depth of the sea, from a time that was, from a time that stretches beyond our memory, we are called. Our histories stretch back to the first people, the first steps, the collision of worlds, to abrupt beginnings, all wanderers of this land. We have inherited the unfinished labor of our ancestors, of those that came before us. We are called to continue the work...

Llamado del presente

Las voces de nuestra gente nos llaman ahora, el mundo alberga sus alegrías y tristezas. Escuchamos el clamor de nuestra gente exigiendo justicia. En ese llamado reconocemos las voces de quienes deambulan en el desierto, los cruzadores de fronteras, los navegantes, los buscadores de justicia, los soñadores y los esperanzados. Tejemos nuestra historia con la historia de nuestros antepasados, aquí y ahora, estamos en el centro de responder a ese llamado que llega de todos los rincones de esta tierra...del sur, del norte, del este y oeste. Estamos llamados a sostener la labor...

Call from the Future

The voices of those who will be, call us; a reminder of who we need to be. In the weaving of our story to the web of life, we must remember that we must not cut the strings, for there are others coming after us. Others with tender hearts and strong wills, with creative determination; those who will live in the house of tomorrow. Their vision escapes us. Yet, we are called to prepare the road, to leave behind possibility, and foundations upon which they'll build a better tomorrow. We are called to create new opportunities...

Llamado del pasado

De las alturas de los Andes, la selva y el desierto, de las profundidades del mar, de un tiempo que fue, de un tiempo que va más allá de nuestra memoria, somos llamados. Nuestras historias llegan hasta los primeros pueblos, los primeros pasos, el choque de mundos, a comienzos abruptos, todos somos nómadas de esta tierra. Hemos heredado el trabajo inconcluso de nuestros antepasados, de los que vinieron antes que nosotros. Somos llamados a continuar la labor...

Call from the Present

The voices of our people call us now; the world harbors their joys and their sorrows. We hear the cries of our people demanding justice. In that call we recognize the voices of those who wander in the desert, the border-crossers, the navigators, the justice-seekers, the dreamers, and the hopeful. We weave our story to the story of our ancestors, right here, right now, we are in the midst of responding to the call that comes from all the corners of this land...from the south, the north, the east, and the west. We are called to sustain the work...

Llamado del futuro

Las voces de los que serán nos llaman... un recordatorio de quiénes debemos ser. En el tejer de nuestra historia a la red de la vida, debemos recordar no recortar los hilos pues habrá otros que vienen después. Otros con corazones generosos y fuertes voluntades, con determinación creativa; los que vivirán en la casa del mañana. Su visión se nos escapa. Aún así, somos llamados a preparar el camino, a dejar posibilidad como legado, y cimientos sobre los cuales construirán un mejor mañana. Somos llamados a crear oportunidades...

POETRY EXCERPTS

To respect copyright laws and support artists, we provide links to the full work from which an excerpt is taken.

["Generation To Generation"](#)

by Antoine de Saint-Exupery

....

Love, like a carefully loaded ship,
crosses the gulf between the generations.

Therefore, we do not neglect the ceremonies
of our passage: when we wed, when we die,
and when we are blessed with a child;
When we depart and when we return;
When we plant and when we harvest.
Let us bring up our children. It is not
the place of some official to hand to them
their heritage.

If others impart to our children our knowledge
and ideals, they will lose all of us that is
wordless and full of wonder

....

FROM SACRED TEXTS

Chapter 54 of the Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu translated by Stephen Mitchell

Whoever is planted in the Tao
will not be rooted up.

Whoever embraces the Tao
will not slip away.

Her name will be held in honor
from generation to generation.

Let the Tao be present in your life
and you will become genuine.
Let it be present in your family
and your family will flourish.
Let it be present in your country
and your country will be an example
to all countries in the world.
Let it be present in the universe

and the universe will sing.

How do I know this is true?
By looking inside myself.

Hebrew Bible *Chapter/verse citations conform to Christian scripture for ease of use within Christian hegemony*

Christian New Testament

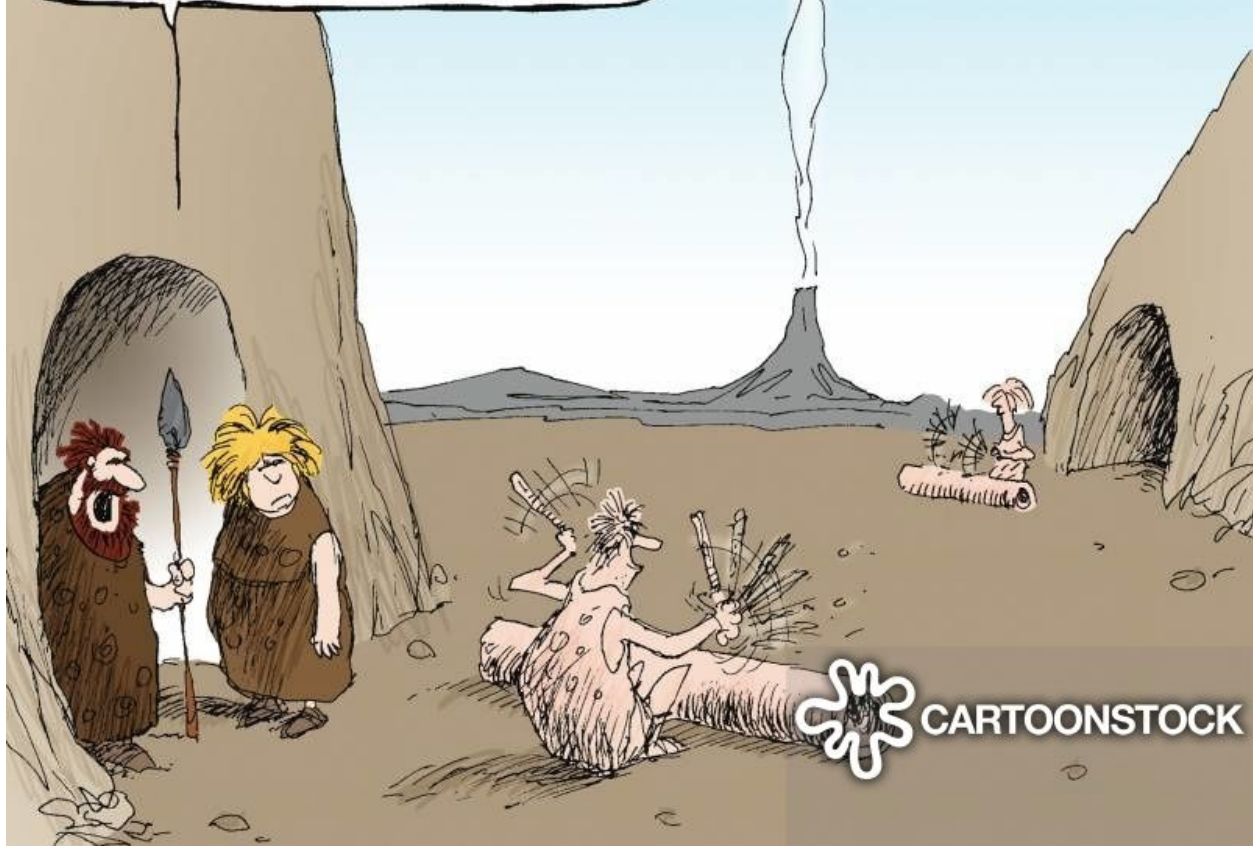
PODCASTS, SONGS, ARTICLES, FILMS, & BOOKS

Title: One sentence description

www.uuworld.org/articles/senior-cohousing In cohousing communities, UU seniors are finding new ways to 'age in place.'

My Generation by The Who
<https://youtu.be/qN5zw04WxCc>

WELL, BACK IN MY DAY,
WE'D JUST WALK OVER
AND TALK TO EACH
OTHER!



Search-ID: wmi101117

ALONG WITH TECHNOLOGY CAME THE
ASCENSION OF CURMUDGEON MAN