

A letter from Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, UUA President

Dear First Unitarian Church of Rochester,

What is giving you comfort, courage, and compassion these days? How are you caring for your well-being and resilience?

Two weeks ago, it became clear to me that my normal spiritual practices were not cutting it. I felt so worn down. I had a longing for more time to be present to the emotional realities all around me. I realized I was compartmentalizing my grief and fear – putting it away in order to stay focused on tasks at hand. While this strategy works in the short term, I've learned if I don't make time to return to the pain I set aside, it finds its way in – generally as exhaustion, short-temperedness, forgetfulness, even depression.



This week marked 50 days that my family and I have been sheltering-in-place with the exception of infrequent trips to the grocery store and walking the dog. The adrenaline of the urgent transitions of the beginning of the pandemic is giving way to the grief over the loss of loved ones, the pain of distance, the fear of what is to come, the anger at the mismanagement of the crisis at the highest levels, and a weariness that comes with understanding we will have to live with social distance and virtual community for a long time.

Remember that you are enough and that rest and joy are essential for resiliency.

If you are weary, prickly, exhausted, angry – you are not alone. This is a time when care and compassion are primary – and that includes offering it to ourselves. As leaders, we too need extra compassion and care. We too need time to do things to nurture and replenish our spirits – even if that means time to do nothing at all. As Maya Angelou writes:

We need joy as we need air.

We need love as we need water.

We need each other as we need the earth we share.

It's easy to feel anxious and overwhelmed at this time. Remember that you are enough and that rest and joy are essential for resiliency. They are a source of our creativity and compassion. And just as others are in need of compassion, so are you. As staff and lay leaders of communities, making time to tend to your own well-being is necessary so that you have the capacity to be compassionate and caring to others, particularly as others are weary and quick to criticism and sharpness.

Recognizing this need in my own heart, mind and body, I've lengthened my time for morning meditation to make more space to feel and to be attentive to all that is in my heart. I've pulled out poems that make me smile and remember the beauty and joy in life. And I've started listening to more music and singing aloud to my favorites. I'm also trying to teach our dog to dance. It's not going well, but it is getting me to dance!

In these difficult and painful times, we need joy. Joy is life-saving. Joy helps nurture our resilience. Above all, I pray you are making time to care for your well-being because you are a good gift. You are valuable, needed and loved. Taking care of yourself matters.

Yours in love and care,

Susan

Care for Self Resources

Spiritual Care Resources

- [**"Pandemic" \(video\)**](#), a poem by the Rev. Lynn Ungar
- [**"We Cannot Escape One Another,"**](#) an exquisite reflection by the Rev. Manish Mishra-Marzetti from the UUA's [**Braver/Wiser**](#) weekly messages of courage and compassion.
- Get [**Yes to Life**](#) by Viktor E. Frankl, a series of lectures on meaning and resilience delivered after Frankl was liberated from Nazi concentration camps.
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Mental Health Resources

- Mayo Clinic Q&A Podcast: [**Managing stress and anxiety during COVID-19 pandemic**](#)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness's [**COVID-19 Resource and Information Guide \(PDF\)**](#)
- Crisis Text Line: [**Text HOME to 741741**](#)