

WHAT WE CARRY

The Harvest Season, September-October 2026

A collaboration of First Universalist Church of Rochester,
Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua, and First Unitarian Church of Rochester.
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Six of Swords Tarot Card Description

“The image in the Six of Swords shows a woman and a child in a boat being rowed in the water to a land that is on the other side. We can gather from the images that the woman and the child are leaving something behind, as their backs are faced towards us. The woman's head is covered with a cloak - perhaps she is fleeing something, and must go without others knowing her true identity. We can assume that because of this, she is undergoing great loss or sadness. The symbolism within the Six of Swords is that of loss or change, as well as moving towards a future that looks more promising than the one that we left behind.”

From Labyrinthos

[Six-of-Swords Tarot card meaning](#)

This Harvest Season invites us to reflect on what we carry as individuals, congregations and in our local communities. What shall we continue to carry and what shall we let go? What are we as Unitarian Universalists carrying from our traditions, what is evolving and what is being left behind.

Dear Ones,

Are you open to transformation? I think I am. Growing up in the 1950s, I lived in a binary world. I thought we made progress when ‘chairman’ was replaced with ‘chair’ or ‘chairperson’. In the past 30 years or so, the world has been transitioning to non-binary. For me, that’s a work in progress as I embrace the complexities of the non-binary. In figuring out what to jettison and what to pack for the next phase of our journey, we will be working on the Unitarian Universalist (UU) Love at the Center value of Transformation. [Love at the Center and Values](#)

As individuals we may carry emotional baggage from childhood or other experiences that hold us back. Perhaps we learned to fear the stranger or anyone different from ourselves. A few months ago, the Coming-of-Age class (8th-9th graders) led the worship service at First Unitarian. One of the teens, Imani Kitwana, provided insight into this very thing.

“Think of all that you fear in the world, we’re human we fear so much. But imagine all that you could learn from even the smallest of those things. When you think of all you don’t know it’s often daunting. Remind yourself that these are things you could understand. Though you can’t necessarily erase fear you can pair it with curiosity, which can make the world seem fascinating in even the darkest of places.”

In 2020 the UUA chartered a commission to update Article II of the Bylaws that addresses UU theology. Following a multiyear process involving many congregations and online forums, the revision was adopted at the UUA General Assembly in 2024. Not everyone was aware of the process. Thus, the resulting UU values expressed as Love at the Center, surrounded by Justice, Interdependence, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism and Generosity were surprising to many. I heard from fellow congregants that they felt a sense of loss of the 8 principles. Perhaps there were elements that no longer served us or that needed a fresh expression. We gained LOVE at the Center and a covenant to action with each of the values.

There are also practical things that we carry as individuals and as congregations. The beloved stuffed animals that have been squirreled away in a box for years. As congregations, we may hang on to traditions that were meaningful at one time and no longer serve us. In the 2026-27 UUA common read, *Love at the Center*, edited by Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt, President of the UUA, one of the essays highlights UU Enlightenment values in the 1900s of Individualism and Exceptionalism and illustrates how those values no longer serve us well. Rev. Susan Frederick Gray wrote “The Power of We” in the UUA magazine UU World in 2019, focusing on community as an antidote to individualism. You may wish to explore this further in Exercise B.

This season offers a chance to explore personal and congregational baggage that is weighing us down and finding opportunities to try different approaches.

Let’s explore what we’re carrying, how we’re carrying it, and figure out what’s holding us back. Let’s try something new. Let’s be curious!

Anne J. Perry, Member
First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY

GRATITUDE

Much thanks to the Harvest Season's packet-team leads, Anne Perry and Jamy Patterson, the three-church worship team brainstorm, and numerous contributions from the entire packet team. We hope you find inspiration to explore what "What We Carry" means for you and your community. We appreciate your feedback – email us at packetteam@rochesterunitarian.org.

READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING

Banned Book Chalice Lighting

By Rev. Julie Conrady

Note: October 4-10, 2026, is banned book week.

We light this chalice remembering the freedoms long established in our nation:
freedom of speech
freedom of the press
freedom from the establishment of religion.
We light this chalice honoring those who exemplify protecting those freedoms:
librarians
booksellers
teachers
authors
journalists.



We light this chalice, so that by its light we may read *all* the books:
books with archaic language
books with offensive material
books which affirm the diversity of the human race
books which normalize our varied sexualities
books which share multidimensional perspectives of history.
May we bask in the glow of its light this morning as we illuminate, brighten, and radiate because of the books we have read and the books we have yet to read.

Chalice for The Earth

By Frances Koziar, Canadian author.



We light this chalice for the Earth,
Of which we all are part;
We pledge to care for what it needs
And hold it in our heart.

May this act of lighting our chalice this morning remind us that we are stronger together, in all the complexities and the disagreements of relationship, *because* we are different, and *because* we are one.

READINGS FOR CHALICE EXTINGUISHING

Love Is Our Center (Extinguishing)

By Eric Hepburn, Community Lay Minister.

We extinguish this flame to remind us:
Love is the center.
As we explore and rest, engage and heal:
Love is our center.
When only ashes remain:
Love endures.



Connected Points of Brightness

By Irene Glasse, American teacher of witchcraft, mediation and magic.



As we extinguish our chalice, may we remember
The flame of life in all things,
The bright center of our planet,
The star that lights our world,
And the way those points of brightness connect
Within us, and within all things.
May we carry the light;
May we share it freely;
May we find it everywhere.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

These spiritual exercises are an opportunity to experience the theme, to come at it from a different angle than just thinking or talking about it. Pick one or two that speak to you, or perhaps that are out of your usual comfort zone and make time to complete them.

Exercise A. Letting Go

Go to your most “cluttered” space – a physical space, a digital space, or an internal space. What are you holding onto? Does it serve you now or in the future? Why? Take the time to reflect on letting go of anything you find there? Is there something missing that should be embraced?

Exercise B. From the iChurch to the Beloved Community - Love as a Transformative Force

In an Winter 2012 issue of UU World, Rev. Frederic Muir wrote the feature article, “The End of iChurch: To build Beloved Community, Unitarian Universalism needs a new narrative.” In this article and in an essay in the UUA common read for 2026-27, *Love at the Center*, Muir points to UU commitment to Enlightenment values of individualism, exceptionalism, and allergy to authority and power as holding us back from growth. He says, “Reorienting ourselves will be

hard but profoundly rewarding. I call this change moving from iChurch to Beloved Community.” “We cannot do both covenant and individualism; individuality, yes, but not individualism.” About UU exceptionalism, he says, it “is a barrier to sharing Unitarian Universalism’s good news.” Regarding UU anxiety about authority, Muir states, it “makes it hard for us to welcome and listen to a diversity of interests and passions without being distracted and immobilized.” These values, that Muir says are holding us back, shaped our early 20th century UU ancestors to promote, for example, eugenics and imperialism. [Muir iChurch](#), [Muir UU Ties to Imperialism](#)

Previous UUA president, Susan Frederick-Gray, wrote in the spring 2019 UU World, “The Power of We”. She says, “We don’t create any real positive impact alone. Community gives us strength. Love gives us courage. Remembering we are not alone—remembering the people, the family, the community, the ancestors we belong to—gives us resiliency and power to keep on loving, keep on acting, keep on working for the values and commitments we hold dear.” [Susan Frederick-Gray The Power of We](#)

Read the articles at the links. If you have the opportunity, please read *Love at the Center* (buy from InSpirit Bookstore or borrow from folks at church) to learn more about the meaning of LOVE in UU theology. What did you learn about our theological history and our current values expression? What would you leave behind? What would you ‘pack in’ as more important to moving forward? Share what you have learned with family, friends or your congregations’ soul matters or chalice circles. What will you do to move from the iChurch to the Beloved Community?

Exercise C. Inventorying Time

Make an inventory of how you use your time, perhaps over a week or a month. Are there any activities that are no longer important to you that you would give up for “more time?” Are there activities that you seem to never have time for and that your values call you to? What could you give up to make room for those? [NPR article on time audit](#)

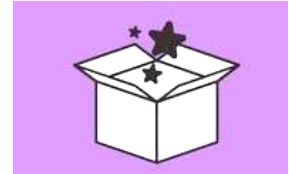
Exercise D. Story: The Biggest House in the World

Arrange some time with a child you know or with a friend and watch this story being read on YouTube: [The Biggest House in the World](#)

Why did snail want such a big, beautiful, complicated house? What did snail learn about being able to move freely without all that weight? If you were going to go camping with a group of 4 or 5 people and had to carry everything on your backs, what would you need for a few days in the wilderness without access to outside support? Make a list and then discuss whether you have thought of everything, whether there are some things you really don’t need. Are there things you only need one of versus things each person needs? Do you think you could carry it all? Would there be a way to cooperate among your group so that each person carries an amount that is reasonable for them? Would the list be different if you were bicycle camping or car camping? If possible, go camping and try this out.

REFLECTION 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. If someone gave you a box that contained everything you have lost in your life, what's the first thing you'd search for?
2. What are the values, perspectives, lessons, mantras that you carry with you? Are they a joy or a burden?
3. What do groups of people, your local community or societies carry? How is this different than or similar to what an individual person carries?
4. What would be easier to carry with help from others? What would we ultimately have to carry alone?
5. What transformations are you open to? Or, not open to?
6. What does your congregation carry? What helps serve your congregational mission? What might be revisited or let go of?



Photo Credit: Dave Baldwin 'Unneeded things from First Unitarian Church Kitchen' 8/1/2026

RESOURCES

FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

***Singing the Living Tradition* Hymn #33: “Sovereign & Transforming Grace”**

Sovereign and transforming Grace,
we invoke your quickening power;
reign the spirit of this place,
bless the purpose of this hour.
...

To the anxious soul impart hope,
all other hopes above;
stir the dull and hardened heart
with a longing and a love.

[Transforming Grace Lyrics](#) [YouTube Version](#)

“Our institutions are the vehicles and vessels, the containers that take our freely chosen shared values and pass them generation to generation.” – Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt, President of UUA.

QUOTATIONS

“Each of us sees in others what we carry in our own hearts”.

— This quote is attributed to different authors; therefore we will use ‘anonymous’

“Just as we have been given hope, we carry that hope; and for as long as we carry that hope, we learn to spread hope; and as we spread hope, lives are inevitably changed, and saved. What beautiful meaning hope gives to life!”

— Kcat Yarza, Filipino writer, artist, and advocate.

“In order to carry a positive action we must develop here a positive vision.”

— Dalai Lama, spiritual leader and head of Tibetan Buddhism.

“They tried to bury us; they didn’t know we were seeds.”

— Dinos Christianopoulos, Greek poet and novelist.

“I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out.”

— Anne Frank, German-born Jewish diarist and holocaust victim.

“Imagination will often carry us to worlds that never were. But without it we go nowhere.”

— Carl Sagan, American astronomer and planetary scientist.

“You carry Mother Earth within you. She is not outside of you. Mother Earth is not just your environment. When you are mindful of the Earth, you are mindful of yourself.”

— Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese monk and peace activist. From *Love Letter to the Earth* (2013)

Fear

Khalil Gibran

It is said that before entering the sea
a river trembles with fear.

She looks back at the path she has traveled,
from the peaks of the mountains,
the long winding road crossing forests and villages.

And in front of her,
she sees an ocean so vast,
that to enter
there seems nothing more than to disappear forever.

But there is no other way.
The river can not go back.

Nobody can go back.
To go back is impossible in existence.

The river needs to take the risk
of entering the ocean
because only then will fear disappear,
because that's where the river will know
it's not about disappearing into the ocean,
but of becoming the ocean.



“You are a light. You are the light. Never let anyone—any person or any force—dampen, dim or diminish your light. Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant. Lean toward the whispers of your own heart, discover the universal truth, and follow its dictates. [...] Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won. Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don't be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice. And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself.”

— John Lewis, [Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America](#)

From “**In Blackwater Woods**”

By Mary Oliver, American poet.

To live in this world
you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it

against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go.

[Mary Oliver - Let it Go](#)

FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

Julían is a Mermaid by Jessica Love, American theater actress and author. [Jessica Love](#)

A child, Julian, encounters some mermaids when riding on a subway with Julian's abuela. Julian imagines being a mermaid. Abuela embraces Julian's transformation, and they go to join a mermaid parade. Julian is a mermaid.

[Julian is a Mermaid](#)

Call Us

by Amanda Gorman, American poet and activist. [Amanda Gorman](#)



Grant us this day
Bruising the make of us.
At times over half of our bodies
Are not our own,
Our persons made vessel
For nonhuman cells.

To them we are
A boat of a being,
Essential.
A country,
A continent,
A planet.
A human
Microbiome is all the writhing forms on
& inside this body
Drafted under our life.
We are not me—
We are we.
Call us
What we carry

Dead Butterfly

By Ellen Bass, American poet and teacher. [Ellen Bass](#)

For months my daughter carried
a dead monarch in a quart mason jar.
To and from school in her backpack,
to her only friend's house. At the dinner
table
it sat like a guest alongside the pot roast.
She took it to bed, propped by her pillow.
Was it the year her brother was born?
Was this her own too-fragile baby
that had lived - so briefly - in its glassed
world?

Or the year she refused to go to her father's
house?
Was this the holding-her-breath girl she
became there?
This plump child in her rolled-down socks
I sometimes wanted to haul back inside me
and carry safe again. What was her fierce
commitment? I never understood.
We just lived with the dead winged thing
as part of her, as part of us,
weightless in its heavy jar.

Ancestral Treasure

— Chelan Harkin, American Poet, From *Susceptible To Light*. [Chelan Harkin Bio](#)

Your ancestors have passed down
their wounds like a growing collection of gems
for your inheritance—
don't resent this.

They weren't ready to be mined and collected,
they weren't ready to be valued.

You have the technology now.
You know how to dig deep.
You know now how not
to fear your worth.

...

Cashing in on this trove
in the sacred chest of your heart
will alchemize all old, shameful stories
into diamonds of laughter and tears.

Cashing in this trove
will transform the heavy bag of sorrows
your ancestors carried
into tokens of priceless light

[Ancestral Treasure](#)



Photo Credit: Molly Strong

"The Bare Necessities"

Song by Bruce Reitherman and Phil Harris

From the movie *The Jungle Book*, Partial Lyrics

"Look for the bare necessities, the simple bare necessities
Forget about your worries and your strife
I mean the bare necessities, old mother nature's recipes
That bring the bare necessities of life

...

When you find out you can live without it
And go along not thinkin' about it
I'll tell you something true
The bare necessities of life will come to you"

[Bare Necessities Song](#)

HUMOR



Telling your suitcase there's no vacation this year can be tough. Emotional baggage is the worst.
Credit: UU Hysterical Society