

Sample Worship Service



Guest at
Your Table
2016-17

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Guest at Your Table Theme

Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War, the Ken Burns PBS documentary about UUSC's founders, is timely, given the unprecedented number of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing violence and political crisis today.

This year's Guest at Your Table theme is **Defying Hate**, and the program focuses on UUSC's work to protect human rights in the face of hate, Islamophobia, and other forms of bigotry.

I. Chalice Lighting for the Sharp Family

Waitstill and Martha Sharp, a Unitarian minister and his wife, responded to the escalating aggression of Nazi Germany by traveling to Europe and putting their own lives at risk—at a time before many Americans realized the situation was so desperate. The Sharps left their young children behind before Germany invaded Czechoslovakia—3 years before the United States became involved in the war. They contacted the U.S. government with updates and urged them to accept more refugees—at a time when many Americans felt we should not open our doors at all. They practiced great generosity and courage.

This light represents what the Sharps, just two people, were able to accomplish—and what all of us can accomplish together.

II. Sermon – “Who is our neighbor? How do we welcome the stranger?”

Adapted from a sermon by Rev. Joan Javier Duvall, Minister in Montpelier, VT

A familiar biblical story to many of us is the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this age-old teaching tale from the Gospel of Luke, a man is traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he is attacked by robbers. He is beaten, stripped of his clothes, and left on the side of the road.

First, a priest comes across him. The priest crosses to the other side of the road and keeps going. A Levite then comes across him and does the same. These were supposed to be especially religious and pious men in the Jewish community, so the story takes a twist when a Samaritan, someone an ordinary Jewish person would have regarded with contempt, stops and helps the man, bandaging his wounds and taking him to a nearby inn where he can recover.

With his simple action, the Samaritan defies hate in that moment.

Just like the parable of the Good Samaritan, the story of the Alamours, a family who relocated to Southern California from Syria and described feeling “alone” in the United States, challenges us to reflect on who our neighbors are. Who do we consider to be “one of us”? How do we extend a welcome

to those who are different from ourselves? Many religious traditions teach us to love our neighbors, though this is often easier said than done.

The Alamours fled their home city of Daraa, Syria, after the government responded to protests against Bashar al-Assad with tanks, helicopters, and troops. They escaped to Jordan just before their home was destroyed by the civil war. In Jordan, they were safe, but they couldn't work or gain legal status. After three years in limbo, they were resettled by the United States to southern California, but they still face isolation in a new country and are haunted by the violence and fear that caused them to flee their beloved home.

Engaging with the story of the Alamour family, we must grapple with the reality of trauma and exclusion faced by many people who are displaced. One of our central religious tasks is to put ourselves in others' shoes to try to understand the particular suffering they might be facing. The Alamours carry with them the trauma of leaving behind all that is familiar and witnessing violence and terrorism in what was once their safe home. In addition to being in a new and unfamiliar land, they now face a society where many regard them as suspect and their religion as reprehensible.

One way we can defy hate is by engaging in the embodied care of people we don't know or who are unfamiliar to us. Our faith teaches us that we are called to action in the here and now. We do not wait for salvation to come in the hereafter. Instead, we can embody love today by caring for and offering hospitality to the stranger. Through our acts of care and generosity, we begin to forge relationships that resist the forces that alienate and instead invite us into mutual understanding and support.

We can also defy hate by taking responsibility for the culture we live in and resisting those voices that speak from a place of hate and fear instead of acceptance and love. Speaking out against hate, especially in this politically charged atmosphere, is an important action. Our words matter, and we can choose whether they will be used as weapons to tear people down or as tools to build Beloved Community.

To defy hate is to promote an expansive notion of inclusion and welcome with our actions and with our words. It is to extend the universal love that is in us and surrounds us to all we encounter, especially those who live on the margins of society. We can speak out, both in our public and private lives, against hateful rhetoric that maligns Muslims, recent immigrants, and refugees. We can fill the nooks and crannies of public and private discourse with words of welcome and inclusion, saying with conviction that there is room for all, that there is no one way to worship, and that our differences are not to be feared but embraced.

The Reverend Joan Javier-Duval began her ministry at the Unitarian Church of Montpelier (UCM) in August 2015. She was born and raised in Chicago, Ill., the daughter of immigrants from the Philippines. She is a 2003 graduate of Swarthmore College and earned her Master of Divinity degree in 2012 from Yale Divinity School.

Before responding to her call to ministry, Rev. Joan followed a call to public service as a community and political organizer and nonprofit leader. Joan organized young voters in New Mexico, fought for workers' rights in Boston, Mass., and trained progressive political leaders in Washington, DC. She also volunteered her time serving the Asian-American community as an advocate for women's rights and immigrant and worker justice. In these contexts and through her ministerial training, Rev. Joan developed her passion and dedication to social and economic justice, anti-racism and anti-oppression, and creating Beloved Community.

This may require courage at times, when the voices of hatred are so loud and so violent. Yet, the Alamo's story beckons us to respond decisively. We must remember that the work of defying hate is not ours to take up alone. In community, we strengthen one another and find the resolve to continue. We co-create with one another and with the spirit of life a world more just, more compassionate, and more loving.

III. Moment for All Ages

Carly Cronon, Associate for Congregational Giving Programs, UUSC

Not too long ago, there were laws about where people could go to school, which buses they could take, and whom they could marry, all based on the color of their skin. Not too long ago, we went to war with other countries, and people in charge made posters with words and pictures that made the “other side” seem evil because of the way they looked.

I think today we're doing better than that. You wouldn't be able to draw a picture making fun of someone's skin color or religion and paste it on your classroom wall—your teacher wouldn't allow it. But we still have a long way to go. Today, what you look like and where you're from still affect the jobs you can get, who gets forgiven when they break the law, what is considered a crime, who's able to feel safe when they walk around outside, and more.

Haiti and the Dominican Republic are two countries on an island south of Florida (*show Hispaniola on a map*). Recently, people in the Dominican Republic have been having trouble with jobs and money. The government has been blaming those problems on people living in the Dominican Republic whose families are from Haiti—like if you live in the United States but your grandparents are from Italy. These people, including kids, are blamed, and then many of them are forced to leave their homes and go to Haiti. Usually, they are picked out because they have a darker skin color.

Does anyone know where their relatives are from? Where are your parents' parents' from? Have you ever been there? (*Wait for answers. If none of the kids know, briefly share where your relatives are from.*) How would you feel if you were sent back to that place? (*Or describe how you would feel.*)

Maybe you would feel happy and excited at first, since it's fun to visit other countries, but you would probably feel scared if you were sent alone, or didn't know the local language, and if you weren't allowed to come back home. This is what's happening to many kids in the Dominican Republic.

And that's why Unitarian Universalists have been helping kids who are sent from the Dominican Republic to Haiti. Many of them have never been to Haiti before and don't know anyone there. Those kids are not responsible for the problems with jobs and money in the Dominican Republic, and they shouldn't be treated like that because of the color of their skin.

Thanks for listening.

Carly helps connect UUSC with congregations throughout the United States, particularly through the Guest at Your Table and Justice Sunday programs. For questions or suggestions about these programs, email Carly at ccronon@uusuc.org!

A lifelong UU, Carly received her bachelor's degree in English, creative writing, and education from Colby College.

IV. Offertory Announcement

Donations to Guest at Your Table support the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's (UUSC) work to protect human rights and defy hate from the ground up, while also applying pressure on those in power at the top—as UUSC founders Martha and Waitstill Sharp did during their missions to rescue Jews and dissidents from Nazi Germany.

UUSC partners with grassroots organizations in over 25 countries around the world, including the Arab American Civic Council, which provides refugees resettling to Southern California—like the Alamours—with the resources they need to build a new life in an unfamiliar country.

V. Chalice Extinguishing

Here is a quote from Martha Sharp in 1939 about her successful journey to smuggle intellectuals on the Gestapo's list of “enemies of the state” to safety:

“At the final border crossing the customs officers came aboard to check my list against their documents then I heard my name called. Two of the journalists in my party were standing on the platform with their luggage, trembling with fear. The officials had ordered them off the train and were going to send them back to Germany because their names did not appear on the list. Quickly I turned away and added the men's names to my list, I turned back and said, ‘these men are in my party.’ Shaking his head he okayed their passports, and we all climbed aboard the train once again.”¹

The flash of fear Martha must have experienced in this moment is, I think, familiar to all of us. We extinguish this flame to represent our commitment to—as Martha did—step beyond our fears of the hatred and violence in our world, and support people in need, both far from us and close to home.

V. Suggested Hymns and Readings

Hymns

131 Love will Guide Us
221 Light One Candle
292 If I Can Stop One Heart from Breaking

Readings

580 The Task of the Religious Community
597 Love Versus Hate
698 “Take courage, friends”

1. <http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/defying-the-nazis-the-sharps-war/sharps-journey/>