



# Guest at Your Table 2017-18

## Sample Worship Service



SMALL CHANGE IS BIG CHANGE

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### Guest at Your Table Theme

*UUSC partners with over 75 grassroots organizations on the front lines of critical human rights issues. Most of our partners have small staff sizes, and many are just getting started – but all make a big difference. This year’s theme – Small Change Is Big Change – celebrates the bravery, innovation, and reach of UUSC’s grassroots partners. With your support, UUSC and our partners are not only responding to extraordinary challenges of today, we are also addressing root causes of injustice and building capacity to respond to future challenges.*

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is a 77-year-old human rights organization that advances human rights in three core areas: Rights at Risk, Environmental Justice & Climate Action, and Economic Justice. Powered by grassroots collaboration, UUSC partners with innovative, locally-led organizations around the U.S. and the globe to support communities responding to natural disaster, humanitarian crisis, and climate change displacement, and those working to build sustainable livelihoods.

### I. Opening Words

*A poem by Marshall Islands writer Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, written to her daughter, and read at the Opening Ceremony of the UN Climate Summit in 2014:*

dear matafele peinam,  
they say you, your daughter  
and your granddaughter, too  
will wander rootless  
with only a passport to call home

dear matafele peinam,  
don't cry  
mommy promises you [...]  
no one's drowning, baby  
no one's moving  
no one's losing  
their homeland  
no one's gonna become  
a climate change refugee

*or should i say  
no one else  
to the carteret islanders of papua new guinea  
and to the taro islanders of the solomon islands  
i take this moment  
to apologize to you  
we are drawing the line here  
  
because baby we are going to fight  
your mommy daddy  
bubu jimma your country and president too  
we will all fight*

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### II. Guest at Your Table Sermon: “Small Change is Big Change”

Written by By Joshua Leach, Associate for Programs, Research and Advocacy, UUSC

On July 13, 2017, UUSC staff members gathered in front of the Burlington, Massachusetts field office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). UUSC was invited there by Massachusetts Jobs with Justice to support an undocumented local resident and father of two, Francisco Rodriguez, as he prepared for his ICE appointment. This was the meeting that would determine whether he would be allowed to stay in this country, where his children were born and where he had worked for ten years, or whether he would be detained and deported. When the moment came for him to enter the field office, these and other supporters began singing songs of solidarity and faith. “Courage, my friend,” went one, “You do not walk alone.”

Francisco did not come back through the door he had entered. Within the hour, he had been taken into a black van and driven out of the back side of the office to a detention center, as his supporters tried and failed to block the exit. As of September 15, he had not yet been released. During these more than two months in detention, his wife gave birth to their third child, meaning that he was not able to be with his family when his son came into the world.

Political rhetoric and media narratives have stigmatized families like Francisco’s as “dangerous”; in reality, Francisco came to the U.S. to escape danger. The Northern triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, Francisco’s home country, suffer from rates of violence comparable to active war zones. Indeed, Francisco left El Salvador after witnessing the murder of his coworker.

Francisco Rodriguez is only one among thousands who have escaped violence and are now facing an escalating assault on immigrant and refugee communities. The U.S. administration’s “travel ban” is notorious. Less well known – and less checked by the judicial system – is what recently happened to the Central American families who were imprisoned in Berks detention facility for as long as 18 months without ever receiving a proper asylum screening, before being deported last spring to the hands of their persecutors; or the hundreds of Central American parents whom Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested this summer on so-called “human trafficking” charges. Their only “crime” had been to do what any loving parents would in their position – they hired people to bring their children to safety. Many of these children would have fallen victims to gangs, sex traffickers, and corrupt state actors if their parents had not paid someone to bring them across the border.

Unfortunately, these realities – seeking refuge and being sent back into danger, being seen as a danger rather than in danger, being criminalized and denied basic support – can be seen throughout history and around the world.

In Burma (also known as Myanmar), for example, power is divided between an entrenched military regime with a long and bloody history of human rights violations on the one hand; and on the other, a nominally civilian government is unwilling to speak out against the military’s actions for fear of losing its tenuous hold on the state. As a result, persecution is again breaking out against the ethnic Rohingya – a stateless Muslim minority who are denied citizenship in their home country and are confined within Burma’s Rakhine state inside Internally Displaced Persons camps strikingly similar to concentration camps. Whenever violence erupts between government forces and Rohingya militants, it is the Rohingya community as a whole that

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is blamed in the aftermath. International aid and contact with the outside world are routinely denied to a population already on the brink of starving, and countries that could help are instead closing their doors.

In Alaska and the South Pacific, indigenous communities are suffering a different type of displacement as climate change drives them from their homes. This summer, UUSC staff members stood in the islands of the South Pacific, meeting with indigenous communities who were still struggling to convince international agencies of the reality of climate change-induced displacement, even as many of their own people had already been forced to relocate from their ancestral homelands and to plan for irrevocable changes in their way of life.

These injustices can seem disparate and far removed from one another, but they are in fact deeply intertwined. When the Hindu nationalist government of India threatens Rohingya refugees with mass round-ups and deportation, it is mirroring a U.S. administration that creates and justifies nativist and anti-Muslim policies. When the Australian government interdicts Rohingya refugees and tows them to off-shore detention centers on Nauru and Manus Island, it has powerful company in a U.S. government that – over the past two administrations – has funded border police in Mexico and Central America to similarly prevent people from seeking asylum.

When Donald Trump promotes Islamophobic rhetoric, he probably isn't thinking of the Rohingya. But by his actions, he contributes to a world where governments think they can violate the rights of Muslims with impunity – a world where Muslim lives matter less. Likewise, to vote for nativist and xenophobic policies is not necessarily to intend the deportation of Francisco Rodriguez or of the mothers and children in Berks detention center. But these are the reverberations of that choice nonetheless.

Beyond the importance of offering refuge to those in need of protection, regardless of context, the United States has a particular historical responsibility where people like Francisco and the Berks families are concerned. By its actions and policies, the U.S. has actually contributed to the conditions currently leading thousands to flee from Central America. Through support of authoritarian regimes in the 1980s, including regimes responsible for mass killings of indigenous peoples and other grotesque human rights abuses, the U.S. contributed toward the instability and powerful organized crime networks that currently control large portions of Central America.

When we begin to realize the connections between all these injustices, it can seem overwhelming. We may feel as though we are confronted with a complex of evil too big and too powerful to resist – and we may feel too small to do anything about it. The truth, however, is that no one designed this complex. No one person controls it. Largescale, intertwined global injustices are made up of many smaller acts of selfishness, of callousness, and of cruelty that have ripple effects far beyond themselves – often in ways unforeseen by the one who perpetrates them.

The Rohingya refugees of Burma are connected to their refugee siblings in the Americas, and to people displaced by climate change. They are suffering the consequences of mindsets and policies that write off entire groups of at-risk people as “not my problem,” or that stigmatize and persecute whole communities in the name of “fighting terrorism” or “national unity.” Each related piece of rhetoric, policy, or behavior, however small, contributes toward a massive global phenomenon of the world's most vulnerable people *receiving blame, profiling, or a blind eye. It can be daunting to realize the outsized importance that actions can have. But it also points us to the path beyond despair. Small choices of selfishness can yield unanticipated evils, but so too, small sacrifices for other lives and for generations not yet born are larger than themselves.*

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This capacity of small efforts to, all together, build largescale systemic change – this is the heart of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee’s work. This can be seen in UUSC’s partners leveraging small amounts of resources and tiny staff sizes to support asylum-seekers and migrants in U.S. detention, support their legal rights, and push for policy change. It is visible in our partners supporting migration with dignity and community advocacy for people displaced by climate change – in youth building lasting connections between their home islands and the islands to which they are moving. And it is visible to UUSC partners in Burma training a new generation of peacebuilders and change makers – currently young adults barred from formal higher education – who are going to have an impact beyond themselves and in years to come.

In addition to this, UUSC witnesses at least one act of love in its work for every act of cold indifference. That love is visible in the people who gathered in front of the Burlington ICE office to sing courage to Francisco. It is visible in the parents who risk criminal charges and deportation as so-called “human traffickers” for the sake of bringing their kids to safety. It is visible in all those millions of people who migrate around the globe each year to send money home to their families and provide a better future. It is visible in the ethnic Burmese who risk death or imprisonment by their own security forces to bring life-saving medical supplies to Rohingya IDP camps.

The struggle for human rights is very often a fight of this sort – a fight not for the present, but for the future, for one’s children and their children. The timeline of human rights is not compressed. The changes we wish to see in the world seldom bear fruit overnight. The earliest abolitionists could not have acted from the outset with any sure or obvious chance of success. When Frederick Douglass died in 1895, he left behind him a country where the collapse of Reconstruction and the rise of Chinese Exclusion Acts had seemingly made a ruin of his efforts to achieve racial equality for Black and Asian people in the U.S. But he did not fight for those things because he expected to win in his lifetime. He fought for lives to come. He fought because, in the fullness of time, our actions have consequences that outlast our individual selves. “[T]rue greatness wears an invisible cloak,” the novelist Samuel Butler once wrote. It means being willing to “live in the lives of those who are yet unborn.” Or, to cite words with which UUs are intimately familiar – the words of Theodore Parker that Martin Luther King Jr. so famously cited: “The Moral Arc of the Universe is long – but I am sure it bends toward justice.”

*Josh Leach supports UUSC’s programs and advocacy through strategic research, analysis, and writing. Working closely with program leaders and UUSC’s researcher, Josh identifies partners, develops program strategy, and engages in research and advocacy initiatives to advance UUSC’s mission and vision.*

### III. Moment for All Ages

Written by Hannah Moy, Associate for Foundations and Donor Communications, UUSC

Can anyone tell me where your favorite place is? Somewhere that makes you feel comfortable, safe, and where you can have fun, such as your house, bedroom, a park, or backyard.

Imagine yourself in this favorite place right now. Imagine all of the things around you, what you would do, and what you would have with you. Think of who is there with you, and how the place makes you feel.

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Now imagine that for some reason out of your control, this favorite place is ruined and not safe for you anymore, so you have to leave permanently. This probably makes you feel sad, scared, and maybe angry because it wasn't your fault that this happened, and you didn't do anything wrong to deserve this. And you may begin to think into the future: Where else could I go? Would I feel as happy in the new place? Would I be able to make new friends?

A version of this is happening right now in an area called the Carteret Islands. Several years ago, people living on the Carteret Islands began noticing sea levels going up and their land falling apart, because of global warming, which is when the earth's atmosphere heats up. Today, the situation has gotten so bad that the people living on the Islands must leave those islands in order to remain safe. And these people feel scared and upset, like you had maybe imagined a few minutes ago, because they have to leave their homes, schools, jobs, and friends. And not only that – for most of the people living on the Islands, it is all they have ever known.

Thankfully, there are people helping and supporting the Carteret Islanders with their move to a new place called Bougainville, in the nearby Solomon Islands. These helpers are making sure that the Carteret Islanders feel welcomed and comfortable in the new place by assisting them in finding homes, jobs, and introducing them to people already living in Bougainville.

This way, even though the Carteret Islanders are being forced to move away from their original homes, they are taking important parts of their lives with them, and being accepted by the community members in their new island.

### IV. Closing Words

Our forces were slight. Our goal  
Lay far in the distance  
It was clearly visible, though I myself  
Was unlikely to reach it.  
So passed my time  
Which had been given to me on earth.

- Bertolt Brecht, "To Those Born Later"

Translation by John Willett, Ralph Manheim &  
Erich Fried.

Say not the struggle naught availeth  
The labour and the wounds are vain,[...]

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,  
Seem here no painful inch to gain,  
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,  
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,  
When daylight comes, comes in the light;  
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly!  
But westward, look, the land is bright!

- Arthur Hugh Clough, Unitarian poet

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