



Guest at Your Table 2020-21

Sample Worship Service

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For many of us, our relationship with home has intensified this year. The pandemic has given many of us new appreciation for, and concerns about, the places we call home and the centrality of these places in our lives. This year during Guest at Your Table, we invite you to witness stories of our partners around the world as they tell you about home. Our partners in Central America are working to make sure no one is forced to flee their home due to violence or economic devastation. Our partners in Alaska, Louisiana, and the Pacific are fighting for their homes and ancestral lands against the ravages of extractive industries and climate change. And our partners in Burma, Bangladesh, and beyond are working tirelessly to support the rights of the Rohingya ethnic minority of Burma after facing government backed genocide in their homeland.

▶ Suggested Hymns and Responsive Readings

from *Singing the Journey*

- Hymns:
- #1018 Come and Go with Me
 - #1021 Lean on Me
 - #1064 Blue Boat Home

from *Singing the Living Tradition*

- Hymns:
- #159 This Is My Song
 - #155 Circle ‘Round for Freedom
 - #317 We Are Not Our Own

Responsive Readings:

- #550 We Belong to the Earth
- #560 Commitment
- #587 We Were Never Meant to Survive



▶ Chalice Lighting

“Welcoming the Stranger” by Tracy Bleakney and Theresa I. Soto (Original version in English by Tracy Bleakney, traducción en español por Theresa Soto)

A child journeys far from home
Fearful and brave,
in need of safe harbor.
Guided by this chalice, may we seek to understand
the causes of flight.
Like the comfort of a candle flickering in a window
of darkness,
Let us welcome this child into our home with
warmth, nourishment, and love.
Would we not want the same for our own child,
lost and alone in a strange land?

Un niño viaja lejos de su casa
Temeroso y valiente
Careciendo de un puerto de asilo
Guiados por este cáliz, tratemos de comprender
las causas de huir
Como el consuelo de una vela encendida
en una ventana oscura
Demos bienvenida a este niño, a nuestra casa
con simpatía, alimento, y cariño
¿No quisieramos lo mismo por nuestro propio niño
perdido y solo en tierra extranjera?

▶ Suggested Reading

We Refugees by Benjamin Zephaniah

I come from a musical place
Where they shoot me for my song
And my brother has been tortured
By my brother in my land.

I come from a beautiful place
Where they hate my shade of skin
They don't like the way I pray
And they ban free poetry.

I come from a beautiful place
Where girls cannot go to school
There you are told what to believe
And even young boys must grow
beards.
I come from a great old forest
I think it is now a field
And the people I once knew
Are not there now.

We can all be refugees
Nobody is safe,
All it takes is a mad leader
Or no rain to bring forth food,
We can all be refugees
We can all be told to go,
We can be hated by someone
For being someone.

I come from a beautiful place
Where the valley floods each year
And each year the hurricane tells us
That we must keep moving on.

I come from an ancient place
All my family were born there
And I would like to go there
But I really want to live.

I come from a sunny, sandy place
Where tourists go to darken skin
And dealers like to sell guns there
I just can't tell you what's the price.

I am told I have no country now
I am told I am a lie
I am told that modern history books
May forget my name.

We can all be refugees
Sometimes it only takes a day,
Sometimes it only takes a handshake
Or a paper that is signed.
We all came from refugees
Nobody simply just appeared,
Nobody's here without a struggle,
And why should we live in fear
Of the weather or the troubles?
We all came here from somewhere.



“The Meaning of Home” - *Sermon by Rev. Laura Randall*

There is a large water stain on the bathroom ceiling, peeling wallpaper in the bedroom, and the kitchen linoleum witnessed the Nixon administration. My home is filled with creaks, clutter, and too much dog hair and, oh, do I love it. I know my family and I are among the most privileged in the world right now. I have work and the ability to do that work from home. I have running water, electricity, and space for a few raised vegetable beds outside. In some ways, my physical world has gotten so very small in these last months. Seeing the same rooms and the same patch of earth so consistently, unceasingly, is a new experience for me. The urge to go somewhere... anywhere... is strong. And yet I have never had more appreciation for the space my family and I call home. These unremarkable walls keep us warm and hold all the gratitude and anxiety these times have created in us. With all the uncertainty and upheaval surrounding us now, I have never been more aware of the importance of home. The importance of a place of shelter, stability, and belonging.

Not all of us have this experience of home. For some of us, home is, or was, anything but stable and welcoming. Home can be dangerous. And I know there are some of us who work essential jobs who have had to leave their homes to keep their families safe from this virus. There are also those of us for whom that kind of separation isn't an option and, therefore, whole families are bearing the risk of exposure. Some of us never feel safe in our homes, knowing that at any moment, state agents could burst through the door to arrest us, or kill us. And then there are the many of us who find ourselves in the liminal place of no permanent home at all.

Home is complicated. It is a place and it is a longing. It is a physical structure and it is a community of people. It is an anchor and an imagined ideal. Home is a fundamental necessity and an evolving act of creativity. Home is the foundation upon which we build our lives and the outcome of countless generative acts of love and repair.

The work of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, or UUSC, is fundamentally about home in so many ways.

This has been true since our founding 80 years ago when the Unitarian Service Committee partnered with Jewish refugees and political dissidents in Europe in an effort to get as many people fleeing the Nazi regime as possible to safety.

Today, our work focuses on climate-forced displacement, crisis response, and migrant justice. While these initiatives may seem unrelated at first glance, they are, at their core, all about home. The right to security within our homes, the right to restore our homes when they are ravaged by natural or human-made disaster, and the right to seek new homes elsewhere.

The four UUSC partners highlighted in this year's Guest at Your Table program each share stories that are primarily about the homes they are fighting for. Be that the villages they are trying to salvage from the effects of climate change, the communities they are trying to hold together as they navigate disaster and persecution, or the necessity of finding a new place to call home away from



unremitting violence and economic devastation.

Chief Shirell Parfait-Dardar, Chief of the Grand Caillou/Dulac Band of the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe of southern Louisiana has been advocating for her community for as long as she can remember. She has seen the land her tribe calls home drastically change in her lifetime as rising sea levels and salt water infiltration have claimed homes and destroyed the farmland her tribe depends on for sustenance.

Recently, Chief Shirell joined with other First Nations and Indigenous people facing similar climate-forced displacement, taking their fight all the way to the United Nations. Chief Shirell explains, “We have joined together with our Alaskan relatives to bring awareness to the damages caused by greed and selfishness, with a complete disregard for Mother Earth and all living beings. We are showing the world that you do not have to just sit by and watch our planet, our health and lifeways be destroyed.”

Thousands of miles away, Mark Stege, climate researcher with UUSC partner organization Jo-Jikum, is working on similar climate issues facing communities in the Marshall Islands.

As an Indigenous scientist, Mark is committed to involving his community in the climate crisis research that affects them most, so that the full picture of what they are facing can be understood and planned for. “Collaboration is key to handle complexity, and so I’ve been motivated to develop the tools for collaboration by sharing and adapting both western and Indigenous knowledge to promote innovation and identity,” says Mark.

Just as UUSC partners with those fighting to save their homes, we also partner with those who have been forced to find a new home elsewhere.

Since 2017, Over 700,000 Rohingya Muslims from the Rakhine state in Burma have been forced to flee their homes into neighboring countries due to the genocide perpetrated by the Burmese military.

Suja Karimuddin was compelled to escape his home as a teenager after being detained and tortured by Burmese state officials. Suja struggles with the longing to return to his homeland but has found strength within the Rohingya diaspora community, knowing that even in the depths of loss, they can be a bit of home for one another.

“We try to build that sense of community wherever we are, wherever we live,” Suja says. Towards that end, Suja co-founded the Elom Empowerment Community Center, now a UUSC partner organization. Elom Empowerment is a Rohingya-led community center based in Malaysia that conducts youth capacity building trainings and facilitates food distribution for Rohingya refugees in and around Kuala Lumpur. According to Suja, the goal of Elom Empowerment is “to provide a safe space for [Rohingya] refugees to come and breathe... A space where they can come and feel free.”

Many Central American migrants are seeking a place they can feel free as well. Residents



of Central American countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua are still contending with the aftermath of intense civil wars, some of which lasted decades, which targeted the Indigenous people in these lands, along with poor farmers. To this day, extractive mining and drilling industries, drought exacerbated by climate change, and deadly domestic and state sponsored violence force people from their homes and across borders. Women, LGBTQI+ people, and Indigenous people are especially at risk for these factors that lead to building a new home elsewhere.

Adela Ramírez, a human rights advocate with UUSC's partner in Guatemala, Asociación Pop No'j, says, "The majority of people here live in conditions that are not good and poverty prevents them from fully living their lives....People cross the border in search of new opportunities for their families. That is why we always say that migrating is an act of love."

"Migration is an act of love." And this act of love is being met by increasing cruelty and xenophobia by the United States. Decades of draconian and deadly U.S. immigration policies are culminating in crowded detention centers which provide ideal breeding grounds for COVID-19, a near complete destruction of the asylum system, the destruction of a humanitarian aid station in the Arizona desert by border patrol agents, the dismantling of due process in deportation proceedings, and, still, the continuation of family separation. Not only are these actions cowardly, hard-hearted, and small-minded, they also fundamentally deny a truth that could not be clearer: we are all connected.

Those of us privileged enough to currently have safe and relatively stable homes are reflecting on the centrality such places have in our lives, especially now. Does the possibility of losing this home seem as distant as it once did? Can we imagine the results of climate change making our homes uninhabitable in the near future? Or what about government policies making it impossible to stay? This is already the reality for some of us. And for others of us, these potentialities no longer seem improbable.

This is a lot to take in. The question now is, can we channel this uncertainty, this fear, into empathy and commitment? Can we approach these challenges with a spirit of collaboration and determination? Can we recognize our interdependence enough to realize that our homes, our health, and our lives are all inextricably connected?

We can. And we must.

Remember poet Benjamin Zephaniah's words:

"We can all be refugees

Sometimes it only takes a day,

Sometimes it only takes a handshake

Or a paper that is signed.

We all came from refugees

Nobody simply just appeared,



Nobody's here without a struggle,
And why should we live in fear
Of the weather or the troubles?
We all came here from somewhere.”

Nobody just simply appeared. We all came here from somewhere. This earth is our home. Some of us live on the same patch of land our ancestors have called home for millennia. Others of us have called this land home for a few generations, if that. Some of us long for a distant home we remember from our youth and others have always lived in the town we call home.

Regardless of the miles between us, this earth is our home. The distress of our planet and the turmoil of our societies, these are the circumstances we find ourselves in, regardless of what we wish were true instead. Our relationships to our homes have dramatically intensified this year. Do we have the courage to turn that intensity into compassion? Can we feel, not just know, but feel the primacy of the value that everyone, everywhere, has the right to self-determination and safety in their homes?

Some essential part of everyone longs for a sense of peace, a sense of belonging, a sense of rightness that can be described in no way other than “home.” At UUSC, we will continue to honor that longing and fight for the right of all people to claim, create, and be home.

I want to lift up Chief Shirell, Mark, Suja, and Adela, once again. I want to acknowledge both the loss and the resilience in their stories. What home means is changing and evolving for many of us. With courage, imagination, and determination, the home we help co-create with all of earth's people will be one of more kindness, more gratitude, and more justice.

About Rev. Randall

As Associate Director of Development for Congregation Relations at UUSC, Rev. Laura Randall facilitates partnerships to strengthen the impact of UUSC and the social justice reach of UU communities. Through preaching, teaching, relationship building, and fundraising, Laura connects the work of UUSC to Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Prior to joining UUSC, Laura's denominational work included serving as the Legacy Campaign Director for the Wake Now Our Vision Collaborative Campaign, and as the Legacy Gifts Manager for the Unitarian Universalist Association. Laura's ministry has also included hospice chaplaincy and Alzheimer's education and advocacy. Laura holds a master's degree in divinity from Harvard Divinity School and a bachelor's degree in English and communication studies from Alfred University.