



UUSC Justice Sunday

2025 SAMPLE WORSHIP SERVICE

An annual spring program of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, UUSC Justice Sunday is a day of learning, commitment, and support for human rights. This year's service highlights UUSC's legacy of defiance in the face of authoritarian threats to human rights and the ways in which our global partners advance justice and possibility in the midst of similar threats today.

DEFIANCE AND DETERMINATION: 85 YEARS OF UUSC

Suggested Chalice Lighting: *Hope and Defiance*, by Rev. Laura Randall

The flaming chalice has been a symbol of hope and defiance, in our faith and beyond it, since the Unitarian Service Committee began using the image in 1940

as a beacon to those seeking safety, dignity, and justice.

As we light this chalice today, may its signal continue to call to

all who seek a more just and loving world and to connect us to all who are working to make it so.

Hymns and Responsive Readings

Suggested Hymns, from *Singing the Journey*:

#1018 Come and Go With Me
#1024 When the Spirit Says Do
#1028 The Fire of Commitment

Suggested Hymns, from *Singing the Living Tradition*:

#108 My Life Flows on in Endless Song
#131 Love Will Guide Us
#170 We Are a Gentle, Angry People
#298 Wake, Now, My Senses

Responsive Readings, from *Singing the Living Tradition*:

#579 The Limits of Tyrants
#584 A Network of Mutuality
#646 The Larger Circle

Story for All Ages

[The Origins of the Flaming Chalice Animated Video](#) (2 minutes, 25 seconds) **Video Transcript**

The flaming chalice is perhaps the most recognized symbol of Unitarian Universalism. At the beginning of every worship service, no matter where they are, Unitarian Universalists light a chalice.

But it wasn't always so.

Today, you will find the flaming chalice in many forms, shapes and sizes. You can find it on buildings, on clothing, on jewelry, and in many other places in and outside of Unitarian Universalist congregations.

But where did the image of the flaming chalice begin?

In Europe in the late 1930s, the Nazis were becoming bolder in their

discrimination and violence against Jewish people, gay people, Roma people, people with disabilities, and others. In 1939, a Unitarian minister and his wife, Martha and Waitstill Sharp, traveled to Prague on behalf of American Unitarians to see how they could help people who were being targeted by the Nazis.

Martha and Waitstill helped people in danger get food and clothing, and reach safety. They worked secretly, forging documents, even wearing disguises. This was the beginning of the Unitarian Service Committee, now the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

Many people trying to escape the Nazis didn't have the papers they needed to travel to safer countries. So, the Unitarian

Service Committee decided to create their own documents, and asked Austrian artist Hans Deutsch, himself a refugee, to create a seal for the papers to make them look official. Hans created the flaming chalice, which was printed at the top of the documents issued by the Unitarian Service Committee to help people travel to safety. The flaming chalice, so important to Unitarian Universalists today, was founded on a brave and creative commitment to human rights.

Today, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee continues to support people targeted because of who they are, or forced to flee their homes. And around the world, the flaming chalice continues to be a symbol of community, compassion, and justice.



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Suggested Meditation: ***A Prayer for When Everything*** ***Crumbles to Dust, by Rev. AJ Van Tinee***

Great Mystery which Grounds and Surrounds us,
Small spark of Life and Possibility
that lives within us even when all else is crumbling to dust...
Be with us in our confusion, fear, and even despair.
Lead us to navigate them as slowly as possible,
Resisting the impulse to soothe, to blame, to seek things
that feel better than the hurt and the heaviness
But which ultimately leave us isolated, or complacent,
or too suspicious of each other.
Let us not flee from our grief,
but allow our hearts to be broken open again and again,
Grieving for all that has already been lost
And all that is threatened now.
Spirit of Life and Love and Regeneration,
Help us to feel the wisdom in our bodies.
Even with so much going so wrong,
our hearts beat with gratitude for blessings:
For beauty and joy stubbornly breaking through;
For the compassionate companionship of Community
Which welcomes all that we bring with us in these times
and doesn't ask us to be smaller than we really are;
For solidarity and mutual aid;
For the trees and the wind and the stars—
Their cosmic witness soothing our animal souls,
Reminding us of the deep impermanence—
And the deep interconnectedness—
of all things.
Spirit of Transformation,
May our hearts break open and stretch out
to join with the hearts of others
who yearn for a freer world.
Each heart, a building block of a better society.
Each life lived for hope and resistance, a prayer for a nobler
world.
Amen, and Blessed Be.

Suggested Meditation: ***What is Hope?, by Rubem Alves,*** **BRAZILIAN LIBERATION THEOLOGIAN AND POET**

It is a presentiment that imagination is more real
and reality less real
than it looks.

It is a hunch that the overwhelming brutality of facts
that oppress and repress
is not the last word.

It is a suspicion that reality is more complex
than realism wants us to believe
and that the frontiers of the possible are not determined
by the limits of the actual
and that in a miraculous and unexpected way
life is preparing the creative events
which will open the way to freedom and resurrection . . .

The two, suffering and hope, live from each other.
Suffering without hope produces resentment and despair,
hope without suffering creates illusions, naiveté, and
drunkenness . . .

Let us plant dates
even though those who plant them will never eat them.
We must live by the love of what we will never see.
This is the secret discipline.

It is a refusal to let the creative act be dissolved
in immediate sense experience
and a stubborn commitment to the future of our grandchildren.

Such disciplined love is what has given
prophets, revolutionaries and saints
the courage to die for the future they envisaged.
They make their own bodies the seed of their highest hope.

Suggested Video Reflection

[Profile of UUSC Founder, Martha Sharp \(3 minutes, 43 seconds\)](#)



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Suggested Sermon: *Defiance and Determination*, by Rev. Laura Randall

Since its founding 85 years ago, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee has been resisting fascism and advancing human rights. In the last eight and a half decades, UUSC has changed to meet the needs of the current moment, but these values and the leadership of our global partners has always been paramount. Now, as we face a new era of crisis, we are called to ground ourselves in common cause with our grassroots partners and in the legacy of our religious ancestors.

In the wake of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, many of UUSC's international partners reached out to UUSC staff, offering concern, solidarity, and perspective. So many of UUSC's partners work for justice in the context of authoritarian regimes and state violence. They know what it takes to engage in effective resistance and to prioritize adaptability, resilience, and commitment to deeply held values above all. They know how to survive, and even thrive, through community care, mutuality, and persistent hope.

In February of this year, UUSC partners in Central America shared their reflections on what the current U.S. administration means for their communities and for the world:

"Crises also presents opportunities, and we must accept this," they said. "In the face of adversity, we must seek solutions. Sacrifices will have to be made, of course, but this is not the first time we have faced difficult situations and are able to overcome them. We have a history of centuries-old resistance. We must rely on our knowledge, experience, and abilities to overcome them. We must be able to resist, adapt, and seek other ways of working, which requires us to

develop a lot of creativity, based on our own strengths. Our strength is in the communities. We must develop solidarity and siblinghood, not competition between us. We must support each other. We cannot cope if we are separated, we must create and strengthen alliances and work together. Let us recover the wisdom of the Earth, the wisdom of women, the wisdom of Indigenous Peoples and ancestors, the wisdom of science and the wisdom of different spiritualities."

Friends, let us keep this shared wisdom before us as we look for solutions in global solidarity and mutual care instead of the American exceptionalism and individualism that has plagued our culture for so long.

Let us also keep the legacy of our religious ancestors before us. The history of Unitarian Universalism is filled with stories of people disobeying bad laws to help those in need, often at great personal risk, and doing so because their values of love, inclusion, and hope were central to how they lived their lives.

The founding of UUSC to resist fascism seems particularly apt right now. It seems like a good time to retell the story of our most beloved symbol as Unitarian Universalists, the chalice.

It is the chalice itself that most strongly calls us to the work of resisting oppressive systems, promoting human rights for all people, and caring for the precious earth we share.

Our chalice, as sacred as it is to us, wasn't always the symbol of the Unitarian and Universalist faiths. In 1940, Reverend Dr. Charles Rhind-Joy was sent by the newly

created Unitarian Service Committee to Lisbon, Portugal which was the only open port in Europe at that time and, therefore, saw many refugees that were fleeing the Nazi regime.

Many of the refugees had to flee without any of the identification papers that were required to cross borders, so Joy decided to start making identification papers issued by the USC itself. This was uncharted water, but instead of focusing on the risks that he and the organization might be taking by doing this, Joy focused on saving the lives of those fleeing fascism.

He also decided that these papers needed a seal to look as official as other travel papers, and so he asked Hans Deutch, an Austrian refugee and artist working in Lisbon, to create one and the result was the basis of the flaming chalice as we know it now. While this was happening, Waitstill and Martha Sharp were also sent to Europe by the USC - they not only falsified documents to get people out, but also laundered money when necessary. UUSC's founders lived by the principle that good people disobey bad laws.

Since its inception, the thing that binds us all as Unitarian Universalists together - the chalice - was founded on our commitment to human rights and to fighting fascism. This commitment is calling us to this goal today as well, as we partner with grassroots organizations around the world and here in the United States to resist oppressive systems and advance human rights for all people.

We use the words "partner" and "partnership" a great deal at UUSC because our grassroots partners, small groups of leaders and visionaries who



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Suggested Sermon, *continued.*

are directly impacted by oppression and human rights violations, are at the center of our work.

Because we believe that communities bearing the brunt of climate forced displacement, criminalization, and humanitarian crisis are also the communities that hold the solutions. This belief is at the core of everything we do at UUSC, this belief in the inherent worth and power of every person. This is why we engage in partnerships, not transactions.

85 years ago, in the face of rising Nazi repression, Unitarians imagined a different world, a different response from the U.S. isolationism that was the status quo of the day. They knew there were people who cared about human rights across the country and around the world. They asked themselves how they could be in community with those who shared their vision. And, perhaps most importantly, they asked themselves what they were willing to risk to live their values in the world. By wrestling with these questions together, they chose to form and support the Unitarian Service Committee.

For 85 years our Unitarian Universalist Service Committee has been working in partnership with those most directly impacted by injustice to imagine a different world, a beloved community where every person's rights are honored and protected. We joined with migrant workers in Texas in the 1940s as they fought against exploitation. We launched desegregation projects in Georgia and Florida in 1960. In 1978, UUSC sponsored the first Congressional fact-finding mission to El Salvador as violence there escalated. In the 1980s we sent emergency funds to ease the Ethiopian famine long before the

story reached mainstream U.S. news. We sent emergency medical equipment to Rwanda in the 1990s and then launched the Drumbeat for Darfur campaign in the 2000s to help end the genocide in Sudan. In 2010, we went to Haiti to assist with immediate relief after the earthquake and continue to have strong partnerships with Haitian organizations today as they work for long-term recovery and a true democracy led by the Haitian people.

Now, UUSC works with organizations in Central America, Mexico, and the United States on the forefront of migrant justice as we seek security for people who wish to remain in their home countries, safety for those traveling along the migrant trail, and justice once people reach the United States. We partner with First and Indigenous communities in the South Pacific, Louisiana, and Alaska who are on the front lines of the climate change crisis as their homes and way of life are threatened by rising sea levels and rising temperatures. We are working with Rohingya Muslims and other ethnic minorities in Burma, also known as Myanmar, as they seek both justice and survival following the military coup in 2021. We partner with organizations in Ukraine and Eastern Europe who are working to serve Black, queer, and Roma refugees, who are often disregarded by larger aid agencies. And we work to find security and welcome for trans, Two Spirit, and gender expansive people in the United States who are forced to flee their homes due to increasing legislative and social violence.

Sometimes – more than sometimes lately – things can feel hopeless, like the world is moving farther and farther away from our values, from all the progress

we have tried to make, as people with a lot of power and little morality try to make cruelty and greed the center of our collective institutions and our society. At the time of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's founding, when it was officially known as the Unitarian Service Committee, the world gave few signs of moving in a better direction. The work of USC began in 1939, when Hitler's Germany was dragging all of Europe into war and laying the groundwork for the Holocaust. Thousands of refugees were already displaced from their homes and forced to flee religious and political persecution as the Nazis took power. When Martha and Waitstill Sharp opened the first office of the USC in Prague, they met an embattled Unitarian community at the Unitaria church that had to preach their opposition to the Nazis in double meanings. During the German occupation of the city, the Nazi secret police began monitoring every sermon given at the Unitarian congregation, listening for subtle messages of dissent. A few years later, they found what they were looking for. In 1941, the minister of the Unitaria congregation, Norbert Capek, famous to us as the originator of the Flower Communion ritual, was arrested and deported to the concentration camp at Dachau, where he was killed with poison gas the following Fall. Capek had been personally named by Hitler on a list of 10,000 "politically suspect" persons, slated for murder.

Capek wasn't the only figure associated with the founding of USC to make the ultimate sacrifice for human rights. USC's early work in Prague involved helping refugees apply for visas and process the other paperwork they would need to seek safety abroad. Similar to UUSC's current



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model of partnering with directly impacted communities, many of the Service Committee's first employees were Jewish refugees, working to protect the rights of their community. At the time, Jewish people in Prague were already facing persecution under the Nazi occupation, and all the warning signs of the coming genocide were already in place. They therefore knew the risks they took by staying in the city to help others. Nevertheless, historian Elizabeth Subak writes, they "delayed their own emigration efforts to help other refugees." Ultimately, "none...were able to emigrate or avoid deportation" to concentration camps.

In the face of genocide, religious persecution, political assassination, and all the worst atrocities the human imagination has ever devised, it was an act of indescribable courage for these people to hope for a different world. It's a hope born of courage and determination. A hope, as Brazilian theologian and poet Rubem Alves writes that "is a hunch that the overwhelming brutality of facts that oppress and repress is not the last word." We have come as far as we have because justice-seekers throughout time have continued to embody the defiance and the determination to keep reaching toward another imagined possibility. At UUSC, we have joined with audacious, imaginative, regenerative people for the last 85 years and we will continue this vital work, with your support, for the next 85 years. Together, we will continue to go where justice calls, partnering with those most affected by disasters, criminalization, and human rights abuses. So long as people of conscience and moral imagination continue to join with us, we will be here to join in the struggle. To lend our weight to bend the arc of the universe

towards justice. To keep transforming despair into defiance and determination.

To that end we ask that you join us in UUSC's Resistance Network, a rapid mobilization hub that connects people of faith and conscience to urgent advocacy and direct action when democracy, civil liberties, and human rights are under attack.

By joining, you will receive urgent action alerts, key advocacy opportunities, frontline stories of resistance, and new tools to help you organize in your own community. Join today by going to uusc.org/network.

Richard Scobie, UUSC's executive director from 1972 to 1998, wrote this reflection on the 50th anniversary of UUSC, words which still speak to us today. He wrote, "The Service Committee was born in a time of crisis. Now as UUSC enters its second half century, the signs do not indicate that it is a time for us to rest. ... The numbers of refugees that the Service Committee helped to escape from Nazi tyranny were not high; we were a small organization then, as now. But the work had symbolic importance that transcended the concrete assistance; It represented the commitment to justice that characterized Unitarian and Universalist action through the ages. Today, threats to basic human rights persist, not only overseas but here at home as well. The growing divide between rich and poor, the mounting poverty of families and children, the weakening of individual civil liberties, and the dismantling of community services all point to a coming time of struggle. ... It is possible to make a better, more just world. The process of doing so should be joyful, with singing, dancing, and celebration.

UUSC has been, and is, a marvelous vehicle for such a process. Fifty years of history have shown us how to recognize the struggles ahead, and to meet them with hope and courage. As we have been in the past, UUSC will be an active player in our changing world, affirming and sharing a vision of justice for all."

May it be so. Amen and Blessed Be.



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CALL TO ACTION!

We are living in a time of escalating injustice, but also one of powerful resistance. Those in power seek to divide us, weaken our movements, and strip away fundamental rights—but we know that justice is only possible when we build solidarity together. Our faith in human dignity, our belief in collective liberation, and our commitment to justice call us to act.

That's why UUSC is launching the Resistance Network—a mobilization hub designed to take immediate action when civil liberties, democracy, and human rights are at risk. The threats we face are vast, but history shows us that resistance works when we act together.

What is UUSC's RESISTANCE NETWORK?

The UUSC Resistance Network is a rapid mobilization hub that connects people of faith and conscience to urgent advocacy and direct action when democracy, civil liberties, and human rights are under attack. Through our Action Center, we will provide rapid response opportunities, amplify frontline stories of resistance from diverse communities, and share resources to strengthen collective action—ensuring that together, we rise to protect justice.

Building Power for Human Rights

We are mobilizing for bold, collective action to protect human rights and expand freedoms for all:

- Strengthening protections for people in migration through legal advocacy, mutual aid, and sanctuary networks.
- Ensuring rights for trans and gender-diverse people with access to healthcare, legal protections, and safe spaces.
- Expanding civil society's power to organize against authoritarian restrictions.
- Defending international human rights institutions from U.S. government interference and defunding.
- Advancing climate justice by resisting policies that fuel environmental harm and displacement.

Join the Movement today!

Authoritarianism thrives when people feel powerless. The Resistance Network exists to build our collective power—to unite in solidarity, to act boldly, and to advocate for justice.

By joining, you will receive urgent action alerts, key advocacy opportunities, frontline stories of resistance, and new tools to help you organize in your own community. Join today by going to uusc.org/network.

To make a gift in support of the Resistance Network and UUSC's grassroots partners around the world, go to uusc.org/uusc-sunday. Checks can be made out to UUSC. Please put "UUSC Sunday" in the memo line.

Many, many thanks.

Suggested Benediction: *Fitted for This Day*, by Kimberly Quinn Johnson

We are the ones we have been waiting for.*
We are not perfect, but we are perfectly fitted for this day.
We are not without fault,
but we can be honest to face our past as we chart a new future.
We are the ones we have been waiting for.
May we be bold and courageous to chart that new future
May we have faith in a future that is not known
We are the ones we have been waiting for.*

*The words of June Jordan in "Poem for South African Women," which she presented at the U.N. on August 9, 1978.