



Guest at Your Table 2025-26

Sample Worship Materials

► Theme: Planting Seeds of Justice

While human rights and international aid are under attack, it's easy to feel like change is impossible. UUSC's partners, however, know first-hand that justice doesn't just appear overnight. The movement for collective liberation requires ongoing, diligent tending and long-haul commitment. This year, grassroots leaders share how they're planting seeds for a more just future, no matter the circumstances. You will meet:

- Innovative migration justice leaders housing LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers in Philadelphia;
- A Honduran community of water defenders carrying on the legacy of the late Juan López;
- Political prisoner Ruth López fighting for government accountability and human rights in El Salvador; and
- Haitian activist, Katia Bonté fighting for the rights of people in migration.



At UUSC, we believe that the transformational solutions we need come from communities most directly impacted by injustice. Join us for this year's **Guest at Your Table** program to learn what UUSC partners are doing to address immediate injustices – as well as the collective liberation they envision for the future. The seeds of justice that we and our global partners are planting and nurturing together offer us all hope.

Suggested Hymns and Readings

From *Singing the Journey*

Hymns:

- #1017 Building a New Way
- #1028 The Fire of Commitment
- #1051 We Are...

From *Singing the Living Tradition*

Hymns:

- #59 Almond Trees, Renewed in Bloom
- #105 From Age to Age
- #108 My Life Flows On in Endless Song
- #155 Circle 'Round for Freedom

Responsive Readings:

- #557 A Common Destiny
- #567 To Be of Use
- #568 Connections Are Made Slowly
- #587 We Were Never Meant to Survive



Chalice Lighting

"Who We Are Called to Be"

by Pat Uribe-Lichty, [Worship Web](#)

Our chalice is a reminder
that in hard times,
our ancestors in faith
acted with courage
to bring hope and safety,
to bring life itself
to threatened people.
We light it today (or tonight, etc.)
as a reminder of who
we are called to be
in a world still dangerous
and despairing.
With courage,
and faith,
We bring ourselves
to the work before us.

Reading

"Desert Flowers"

by Rev. Manish Mishra-Marzetti

Improbably,
the wind-blown seed found its way here,
to a long, beautiful stretch of land,
but one that was hot, dry, and arid.
A spark of life
resting
in an unprepared desert.



Quenching, life-giving sustenance,
the rain,
comes and goes,
even if infrequently,
sometimes only
a few drops at a time,
and the seed begins to take root:
possibility brought alive.

But, what life is this
Amidst the harshness?
Pocket mice, rattlesnakes, camel spiders.
Danger and inhospitality
lurking everywhere.
One chance encounter,
gone wrong,
could bring death to the seedling.

And yet somehow
the intrinsic
invitation
to thrive,
to flourish and grow,
finds a way,
even when it is a struggle.

Poking gently up from
the cracked,
parched desert earth,
a beautiful pink,
five petaled
phacelia blooms
spectacularly.
Improbably.



We are those
wind-blown seeds;
the universe's longing for life,
for thriving,
for beauty—
even when it is
against the odds.

— From [*Seeds of a New Way: Nurturing Authentic and Diverse Religious Leadership*](#), edited by Manish Mishra-Marzetti and Nancy McDonald Ladd, Skinner House Books, 2024.

Reflections

Planting Seeds of Justice Reflection

by Rev. Sara LaWall

I have never had a green thumb. I am embarrassed to admit that many a plant and garden have not thrived under my care. I deeply envy friends who have lush green plants everywhere and thriving backyard gardens. I marvel at how they find the time and energy (let alone the skill) to tend to everything—I always feel like I am barely keeping my head above water tending to the most critical calls in my life and ministry.

One spring, a friend and I went to a flowering plant sale at a local high school. She buys the same flowering petunia baskets to hang in her backyard every year. So this year I was resolved to try plant care again and do better and I bought one too. I watered it daily and for some weeks it looked amazing. Then, it slowly began to fade and wilt. The flowers were droopy and dying. I called my friend with my plant emergency begging her to come over and diagnose my problem; to help me revive the one plant I desperately wanted to keep alive.

When she arrived she looked at it and said, "Are you deadheading your flowers?"

"Deadheading? What even IS that?"

"You know, you pinch off the dead flowers from their stem. It helps make room for new flowers to grow."



I was dumbfounded. And amazed. I followed her instructions and managed to bring the flowers back to life. They weren't as lush and vibrant as hers, but they made it through the season.

Today I have a flowering basket, some herbs, and even a few houseplants. I am still nervous that I will inevitably screw it up, but I have the confidence to try.

What does it take to have the confidence to try?

Sometimes all it takes is just a little spark. A nudge in the right direction. Like help figuring out you need to deadhead dried blossoms to make room for new growth (there is some serious life and movement building advice in that statement alone). Sometimes it takes an infusion of love and support. People who believe in your mission and give you the space to innovate, to plant seeds and tend to the work and care of the community you serve.

UUSC's **Guest at Your Table** program does just that. They infuse activists, movement builders and community organizations with love and organizational support to boost their confidence helping them grow and thrive. Often, UUSC is the "first funder" of their partners. As an international funder, this helps fledgling organizations find their footing, gain some notoriety in the world of NGOs and open up pathways to more funding. UUSC offers networking opportunities to global convenings and brings partners to the United Nations, covering the often insurmountable costs of travel and accommodations. And UUSC upholds its commitment to decolonization, regularly assessing its own systems and processes. They've committed to Participatory Action Research which centers leaders from within the most impacted communities upholding the adage: "Nothing about us without us."

In this current climate when wave upon wave of attacks on freedom, bodily autonomy, marginalized identities, our dying planet and the very foundations of democracy overwhelm us daily, it is hard to hold on to hope and know how to respond. I know I sometimes get stuck in thinking I am not doing enough and what little I am doing is just a drop in the bucket compared to the level of threat. The impatient gardener in me wants to see immediate results. But as I have learned through the slow and steady tending of my little community of plants, if I don't do the small things, the daily tending, the watering and feeding and pruning...my plants will never grow or thrive. Every small thing matters.



With Guest at your Table I can practice slow and steady, patient gardening. Placing that little box in the center of my kitchen counter to receive a few coins (or sometimes dollars) every day reminds me to keep doing the small things. And it becomes a powerful, physical reminder to my family and my kids that the small things matter.

My plants have also taught me the value inherent in the act of *tending*. I am not just doing the tasks the plants require. I am doing them with care and heart because I want my beautiful plants to thrive and flourish. Because they bring me a small bit of delight and beauty and that fuels my care. And don't we all need that kind of care? In the midst of pain and injustice, we all still need tending.

UUSC seeks out global change makers doing some of the most innovative and impactful grassroots justice work in the heart of their communities. From housing and supporting LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in Philadelphia to Honduran water defenders, actively protecting their water resources from threats like mining and pollution. Their partners are also experts at tending. Rooted in the ethic of community care, these partners are tending to the small corners of their communities, planting seeds of justice they know may take a while to grow into their fullness. They are the gardeners of our world, nurturing justice and compassion for our collective flourishing.

Planting Seeds of Justice Reflection **by Noemi Uribe**

When I think about the concept of planting justice, I'm reminded of a Mexican proverb that states, "They thought they could bury us, but they didn't know we were seeds." Growing up, I didn't fully grasp the meaning of this proverb, but as I've matured, I've come to understand its significance in my life.

I am the child of former undocumented immigrants and a queer non-binary person who was raised in a conservative Christian fundamentalist household. My parents held very traditional views. I know what it feels like to be rejected by society, religious leaders, and even my own family. From hiding my parents' legal status to avoid our separation, to enduring conversion therapy, and having my family limit contact with my nieces out of fear that I would influence



them to be queer, each attempt to suppress me only grounded me deeper in the support of friends, chosen family, and mentors. This support has allowed me to grow stronger than ever.

This is how I see our situation today: we are living under a fascist government that is attempting to tear us down, creating an illusion that nothing can be done to change our circumstances. This government is dehumanizing immigrants of color, attacking trans and non-binary individuals by restricting access to gender-affirming care, and promoting Christian nationalism as a solution to the country's problems. Despite all this dehumanization and radicalization, which seeks to bring us down, we must remember that we are like seeds. **Each time we are pushed down, the soil around us—our community, solidarity, and resistance—nurtures us, allowing us to sprout again.**

At UUSC, I have witnessed the resilience of our grassroots partners. When USAID funding ended, we conducted a survey to assess how our partners were managing. Many reported that they had to cut staff and programs to survive, which was heartbreaking to read. However, what stood out to me the most were their responses to our final question: whether they had anything else to share. Almost all our partners expressed gratitude for us checking in and asked how we were doing amidst the chaos. Their solidarity inspired me. It also reminded me that UUSC and our supporters serve as the nurturing soil that sustains our partners in challenging times. When governments and large foundations step back, we remain grounded in our values, moving forward together and refusing to back down.

In the end, the Mexican proverb reminds us of a truth that goes beyond hardship: being buried does not signify the end; rather, it marks a beginning. Like seeds, we grow strongest in the soil of struggle, nourished by community, chosen family, and the unwavering belief that life moves forward even in the most dire conditions. Those forces that seek to bury us—be it government oppression, religious fundamentalism, or systemic abandonment—fail to recognize that every act of repression only plants us deeper into the soil of resistance. Just as UUSC partners continue to rise, supported by the rich soil of solidarity, we too will sprout into something stronger, more rooted, and more abundant. The question is not whether we will grow, but how we will



nurture one another's growth. Therefore, I leave you with this thought: if we are the seeds, together we must also be the soil, tending to each other so that what is planted in struggle may bloom into justice, dignity, and liberation for all.

Planting Seeds of Justice Reflection

by Rev. Jim Foti

It wasn't the right season, or even the right day. The easy joys of spring were past, and summer storms towered on the horizon. And with our lives already too busy, we had decided months earlier not to plant any flowers this year, telling ourselves that it was the realistic choice.

And yet, there they were – pink and purple and bluish petunias, beckoning in bedraggled rows outside the hardware store. A black-and-white placard that had survived some rain blandly announced "seventy-five percent off." Was this sign a sign? Would these abandoned plants be worth trying to rescue? We pondered. We couldn't save all of them. But five minutes and four dollars later, three packs of flowers were ours.

Our flowerpots, stored in the basement, seemed bone-dry, yet had somehow fostered new life in the half-darkness: green strands that some might call weeds had sprouted toward a window. Even more remarkably, a few inches below the crustiness, the soil was soft with moisture from last year's rains.

The pots came up and out into the light, and the flowers were gently placed in their new home. Some of their leaves and blossoms were less than robust, but the colors were still bold. These left-behind plants were now rooted, and we rooted for them.

Was it unrealistic to care for these struggling flowers? Perhaps. **But planting anything is an act of faith. And the outcome is often not as important as the practice – the sacrament of nurturing, the intention, the risk, the hope.**

Often, people of goodwill go ahead and do the uncertain thing because we're grounded in all that we are certain about: that our actions define us; that life is worth trying to protect; that beauty and joy are worth pursuing; and that the right thing is worth doing, even when it may not feel practical.



The flowers, as it turned out, had a fine season and brought us joy every time we saw their deep hues waving in the breeze. They had a resilience of their own, plus there was good fortune beyond anyone's control – warm sun and regular rain – that helped keep them growing and blooming. Our family and friends helped with their care, too, a reminder that we need not act alone when we choose to act on faith.

Community is crucial when planting for the future. Not only does it provide needed support, but it can magnify the impact we want to have in our world. One person can plant a few flowers – something still worth doing – while a congregation or organization can nurture many more. And, in an echo of cycles found throughout the natural world, individuals can inspire communities, and communities can inspire individuals.

These days, in these trying times when we are seeing so much destruction of lives, trust, and institutions, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee remains a strong and inspiring community. Since its earliest days, UUSC has not shied away from long-haul work or long odds similar to what we currently are facing on a daunting scale. From climate justice to resistance networks to long-term partnerships around the globe, UUSC acts with hope in the face of uncertainty while grounded in values of human dignity and justice.

And UUSC truly is a community – of staff, volunteers, members, donors, and on-the-ground partners. A community defined by relationships of mutuality, and one that embodies the writer Rebecca Solnit's encouragement to take action no matter the prospects: "The fact that we cannot save everything does not mean we cannot save anything, and everything we can save is worth saving."

It may seem counterintuitive, but amid big challenges, small really matters. This is particularly true today, when many powerful institutions and leaders are stumbling, complying, or retreating. Right now, your actions on any level make a difference. That one transperson you help resettle in a new, safer location. The immigrant family who knows they're safe with you. The dollars you give to causes that align with your deepest values. And of course, the joy that comes with helping to make positive change is joy worth savoring.



So whether you are immersed in the tasks of meeting this moment, considering your next step, or supporting organizations like UUSC that are continuing to strive for a better world, thank you. Every flower – every good thing – is worth saving. And we are called to plant the seeds of justice that make flourishing possible, and nurture those who are doing the same.

Story for All Ages

Based on the *Planting Seeds of Justice Reflection* by Rev. Sara LaWall

I'm going to share a story with you that comes from my colleague Rev. Sara LaWall. She is the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Boise, Idaho. These are her words:

I have never had a green thumb. I am embarrassed to admit that many a plant and garden have not thrived under my care. I deeply envy friends who have lush green plants everywhere and thriving backyard gardens. I marvel at how they find the time and energy (let alone the skill) to tend to everything—I always feel like I am barely keeping up just tending to the most critical calls in my life and ministry.

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The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC for short) does just that. They infuse activists, movement builders and community organizations (who they call their partners) with love and organizational support to boost their confidence, helping them grow and thrive.

Often, UUSC is the "first funder" for activists or movement builders with a big idea. The UUSC takes the money that we give them through donations, like the ones we make through the **Guest at Your Table** program, and they give it to their partners so they can grow big enough to do what they want to do, get the word out about who they are and what they are doing, and travel to connect with other groups.

These days when it can sometimes feel like so much is going wrong in our country and in other places in the world, it can be hard to know how to respond. I know I sometimes get stuck in thinking I am not doing enough and what little I am doing is just a drop in the bucket compared to size of the problems.

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Worship Service Resources

plants, if I don't do the small things, the daily tending with care and heart, the watering and feeding and pruning...my plants will never grow or thrive. Every small thing matters.

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The UUSC partners are also experts at tending. Rooted in practices of community care, these partners tend to the small corners of their communities, planting seeds of justice they know may take a while to grow into their fullness. They are the gardeners of our world, nurturing justice and compassion for our collective flourishing.

Let us do our part, along with Unitarian Universalists everywhere, to help UUSC partners all over the world keep having the confidence, and the resources, to try.



Benediction

"Plant the Seed"

by Heather Vickery

When we plant a seed, we aren't always there to see it grow.

Plant the seed of justice anyway.

When we water a seed, sometimes we need someone else to water it the next day

Trust in community to nurture these seeds with you.

We have all benefited from seeds that others have planted,

Now it is our turn to plant, to tend, to nurture.

In these hard times, go forth and plant as many seeds for justice as you can, knowing they will grow and bear fruit when the time is just right.

Blessed be and Amen.