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**Affirmation I:**  
**Love Is the Doctrine of Our Church**  
**Association Sunday**  
Sunday, October 12, 2008, 11:00 a.m.

**Music for Gathering**

*Dianne Saichek, piano*

**\*Singing** # 1014 Standing on the Side of Love

**Welcome and Announcements**

*Bruce Halen, Worship Associate*

**New-Member Ingathering**

**Lighting the Chalice**

*Ligher: Vineet Mudupalli, Reader: Emma Bowman*

**Call to Worship**

*Rev. Nancy Palmer Jones*

Today we launch a yearlong series of worship services about the Affirmation that we say together every Sunday. This is the Affirmation that our congregation *chose*, adapting words written by the *Universalist* minister L. Griswold Williams back in the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> *Some* other Unitarian Universalist congregations say this affirmation—changing a word here or there to suit them, just like we did—but other congregations use completely different words or no unison opening words at all. That is the glory of being a Unitarian Universalist. “We do not have to think alike to love alike,” as one of our prophets said.

So what *are* these words that some of us say by heart—these words that you can find in your order of service? What do they *mean*? What does it mean to say that we *covenant*—we promise—to each other to live by them? If we look at them closely, will we discover how they turn traditional religious language inside-out, creating something new and vital and uniquely our own? If we speak them mindfully, will they teach us how to live, how to be the people we are longing to be? “Love is the doctrine of this church,” our Affirmation begins, and that is where we will begin today.

But before we say these words together, let us pause. At about this time, all across the country, many of our sister Unitarian Universalist congregations are doing exactly what we have just done: they are lighting a

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<sup>1</sup> Singing the Living Tradition, # 471. See also Jacqui James, ed., *Between the Lines: Sources for Singing the Living Tradition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Skinner House, 1998), # 471.

chalice. Today is Association Sunday—a day when we open our hearts to feel our connection to the wider community of Unitarian Universalists—over a hundred thousand of us—participating in this second annual Association Sunday, with its theme, “Growing in Spirit.” Today is a day when we stop to appreciate how much *better we are together*.

So let’s just pause for a moment and look at that flame. Picture that flame dancing in small rooms, and in 1950s-style cinderblock church buildings, and in large ornate sanctuaries that are hundreds of years old, all across the country—lighting the faces of Unitarian Universalists like us.<sup>2</sup>

Our prophets died for the freedom of faith;  
 we are here in their spirit.  
 We are here to practice and sustain our living tradition;  
 to light a chalice,  
 claiming for justice  
 the heat and power of fire.  
 In our free faith,  
 we are here,  
 seeking freedom from despair,  
 the freedom to be loved as ourselves,  
 and the freedom to grow beyond imagination,  
 we are here.  
 Gathered in the name of all that we find holy,  
 let us give thanks for the gift of gathering here.<sup>3</sup>

Would you please rise as you are willing and able to join me in reciting the Affirmation of this church, printed in your order of service, uniting Spanish speakers and English speakers in one shared covenant?

**\*AFFIRMATION / AFIRMACION**

Love is the doctrine of this church,  
 The quest of truth is its sacrament,  
 And service is its prayer.  
 To dwell together in peace  
 To seek the truth in freedom  
 To serve humankind in fellowship

*El amor es la doctrina de esta iglesia,  
 La búsqueda de la verdad es su sacramento,  
 Y el servicio es su oración.  
 Habitar juntos en paz  
 Buscar la verdad con libertad  
 Y servir a la humanidad juntos*

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Judith Quarles, in “Chalice Lightings,” worship resources for Association Sunday 2008, available at [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org).

<sup>3</sup> Heather K. Janules, in “Opening Words,” worship resources for Association Sunday 2008, available at [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org).

To the end that all souls may grow  
 Into harmony with the divine,  
 This do we covenant with one another.

*Con el fin de que todas las almas  
 Puedan crecer en armonía con lo divino;  
 Esto es lo que pactamos unos con otros.*

*[Invite children, youth, young at heart who are able to labyrinth for a special song and ritual about love]*

**Song and Ritual for All Ages** Magic Penny Bruce Halen and Rev. Nancy

*Chorus: Love is something if you give it away, give it away, give it away, love is something if you give it away, you end up having more.*

*v. 1: It's just like a magic penny: hold it tight and you won't have any. Lend it, spend it, and you'll have so many, they'll roll all over the floor.*

*Repeat until the giving is complete—end with chorus!*

**Rev. Nancy:**

First of all, does everyone have a penny? You were all supposed to get one as you came in the door, but maybe we missed some folks.

*(hand out pennies to those who don't have one)*

Now I want you to take a good look at your penny. Look at the side that has the face on it. Can you read what the tiny little words say there—or is your penny too old? (Or are our eyes too old?!)

“In God we trust”—“liberty”—and there’s a date. What’s the date on yours?

And on the other side, it says the motto of the United States in Latin: “E pluribus unum”—“out of many, one.” We come here from all these different places, and we’re all very different, but we join together to be one. It’s a very Unitarian Universalist motto!

Now, we don’t think of a penny as being worth very much—but this is your magic penny! Does it look magic to you?

There is a song about a “Magic Penny” that **Bruce** is going to teach us (for you in the seats, the words are in your order of service):

*[Bruce sings the song:]*

*Love is something if you give it away, give it away, give it away, love is something if you give it away, you end up having more.*

*It's just like a magic penny: hold it tight and you won't have any. Lend it, spend it, and you'll have so many, they'll roll all over the floor.*

*Love is something if you give it away, give it away, give it away, love is something if you give it away, you end up having more.*

Let's try it together! [*We all sing the song once through.*]

Now, here's how we can make our penny into a magic penny: I invite you to hold your penny right now, and *pour* your love into it. Imagine that this penny can hold all the love in your heart. In a moment, I'm going to invite you to find someone to give your penny to—someone who's sitting out here in the chairs, not on the labyrinth. That person won't give *you* their own penny in return! No, they will give *their* penny to someone *else*. So for a little while, you may not have a penny at all, because you've given yours away and you haven't received one yet. But don't worry—just enjoy giving your penny away with all that love in it, and I promise we won't stop the giving until *everyone* has a penny—a *different* penny than the one they started with—a penny filled with the love of the person who gave it to you.

Now, squeeze your penny one more time, pouring into it all the love you can.

And now would you please give your penny away, while we sing the song over and over?

[*afterward*]

Does everyone have a penny? [*If not, "Uh-oh."*] Does anyone have *two* pennies? If you do, you need to give one away to someone who doesn't have one. [*If somehow the pennies have multiplied, comment on the magic, the miracle of it.*]

So: I invite you to hold onto your magic penny, and remember: Love really is something that if you give it away, you end up having so much more.

### **Singing the Children and Youth to Class**

*Go now in peace, go now in peace, may the Spirit of Love surround you everywhere, everywhere you may go. Vayan en paz, vayan en paz, pueda el Amor rodearlos siempre, por doquier, por doquier, que vayan.*

**Reading**      To Be a Whole and Holy Person, by Peter Luton      *Bruce Halen*

Our whole lives are gifts received, unwarranted and not of our making alone. I cannot take full credit for my life anymore than I caused my own birth. I am blessed and fortunate in large part because scores of people contributed to my growing up, to the formation of my values and character, to building the free society in which I live and the institutions which support my efforts to grow my soul and create peace. I am indebted to my family who love me and ancestors I never knew. I cannot claim as mine and mine alone any of the gifts that enrich my life. And the flow of love—for that's what it is—this flow of life energy into me does not end with me. I am called by Life Itself,

to pass along to others the blessings and the gifts I have received. I will not be the stagnant pool at the end of the stream, a swamp, stale and so turned in on itself and independent of the rest of creation that I produce nothing sweet or soothing or true or kind. As the saying goes: Recycle, Reuse, Re-gift.

But I did not always think this way—even though I was raised a Unitarian Universalist. One December Saturday when I was 11 or 12, as my Mom was packing up the Christmas box to send to my aunt’s family, she decided that the gift we were sending to my cousin Billy was insufficient. She came and asked what toy or toys I had that I’d be willing to part with.

“Why?”

“Because we need something else to give your cousin.”

“I need everything I have.”

“Oh come on, Peter,” she said. “Surely there’s something that you don’t use that you could let your cousin have.”

“I don’t want to give him any of my stuff.” (I wasn’t particularly fond of my cousin whom I saw for a day or two every other year.)

My mother told me that I *had* to give him something. I suggested a few broken and shabby items, which I correctly guessed didn’t pass muster. Then my mother began suggesting things. No. No. No. “But you never use it/play with it/read it/look at it!” Didn’t matter. I was holding on to my stuff, even the bad stuff. Eventually she wrestled from me a stuffed animal that had been quietly guarding the back corner of my closet for several years. Looking back, I’m not sure if I learned that generosity is a good thing, or that powerful people will steal your stuff if you’re not careful.

If your religion or your spiritual growth has become more concerned with accumulation than with distribution, it is a sure sign that it has lost its proper goal. In our anxiety to be saved, we can easily devote ourselves to storing up enough grace to buy our way into heaven, or enough coins to pay the ferryman Charon to pull us across the river Styx.

Faith and spirit are not about getting but giving. Among the great spiritual teachers of the world, Jesus was not alone in saying things like you have to lose your soul to gain your soul. He recognized that people easily identify their true selves, their precious beings, with the things they have accumulated. We cannot rely upon the ego, social status and the economic trappings of success, [on] *things*, to keep us happy, whole, and safe. Jesus and [the] Buddha and so many teachers have taught that spiritual growth is all about sharing, generosity, giving of yourself to others—which is a form of compassion. This kind of giving of oneself is worlds apart from self-abnegation in which one ignores and discounts one’s own needs, feelings,

desires, rights, and surrenders her or his soul to another. That's abuse, not compassion, not *love*.

I believe that to be a whole and holy person, each of us must continually be giving away our gifts, re-gifting the blessings we have received, sharing with others our particular gifts and talents. Any religion worthy of my precious life energy is not about salvation and saving—but rather is itself devoted to teaching, modeling, and practicing the disciplines of letting go and growing souls.

**\*Singing**           # 34   Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire

**Sermon**            Love Is the Doctrine of Our Church       *Rev. Nancy Palmer Jones*

“Any religion worthy of my precious life energy is not about salvation and saving—but rather is itself devoted to teaching, modeling, and practicing the disciplines of letting go and growing souls,” Peter Luton says.

The Quaker teacher Parker Palmer tells a wonderful story about learning to let go, from his experience with Outward Bound—which is an outdoor school that helps us to grow our soul by putting us face to face with some pretty extreme challenges in nature. Here's how Parker Palmer tells the story:

One of our instructors backed me up to the edge of a cliff 110 feet above solid ground. He tied a very thin rope to my waist—a rope that looked ill-kempt and seemed to be starting to unravel—and told me to start “rappelling” down that cliff.

“Do what?” I said.

“Just go!” the instructor explained, in typical Outward Bound fashion.

So I went—and immediately slammed into a ledge, some four feet down from the edge of the cliff, with bone-jarring, brain-jarring force.

The instructor looked down at me: “I don't think you've quite got it.”

“Right,” said I, being in no position to disagree. “So what am I supposed to do?”

“The only way to do this,” he said, “is to lean back as far as you can. You have to get your body at right angles to the cliff so that your weight will be on your feet. It's counterintuitive, but it's the only way that works.”

I knew that he was wrong, of course. I knew that the trick was to hug the mountain, to stay as close to the rock face as I could. So I

tried it again, my way—and slammed into the next ledge, another four feet down.

“You still don’t have it,” the instructor said helpfully.

“OK,” I said, “tell me again what I am supposed to do.”

“Lean way back,” he said, “and take the next step.”

In a high squeaky voice, I said, “I don’t want to ...”

“Then,” said the second instructor, “it’s time that you learned the Outward Bound motto.”

“Oh, keen,” I thought, “I’m about to die, and she’s going to give me a motto!”

But then she shouted ten words I hope never to forget, words whose impact and meaning I can still feel: “If you can’t get out of it, get into it!”

I had long believed in the concept of “the word become flesh,” but until that moment, I had not experienced it. My teacher spoke words so compelling that they bypassed my mind, went into my flesh, and animated my legs and feet. No helicopter would come to rescue me; the instructor on the cliff would not pull me up with the rope; there was no parachute in my backpack to float me to the ground. There was no way out of my dilemma except to get into it—so my feet started to move, and in a few minutes I made it safely down.<sup>4</sup>

Now *what*, you may be asking, does this story have to do with *love*, with the statement in our Affirmation that “Love is the doctrine of this church”?

Well, let’s look at that statement, and then we’ll circle back around to Parker Palmer, where he was hanging on a frayed rope off a cliff, and even back to Peter Luton, who was learning to give his gifts away.

“Love is the doctrine of this church.” Isn’t it surprising to hear the word *doctrine* in a Unitarian Universalist church? We are the people of “deeds, not creeds.” We are *proud* that we don’t have *dogma*, those strict teachings about beliefs that almost all of us rebelled against if we got here by fleeing from some other denomination or religion—or even if we got here by assiduously avoiding “religion” for much of our lives. We Unitarian Universalists don’t have to sign on to any *one* theology in order to belong here; we can search for our own truth and learn from the diversity of beliefs among us. That’s the freedom we celebrate, and are grateful for!

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<sup>4</sup> Parker Palmer, “Outward Bound,” in “Readings,” ,” worship resources for Association Sunday 2008, available at [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org).

Still, every Sunday we proclaim that “love is the *doctrine* of this church.” I think that L. Griswold Williams, the author of our Affirmation, used that word *doctrine* very intentionally. He wanted to wake up our minds and hearts: What?! we should be asking every time we say it. *Love* is the doctrine—the central teaching—of this church? Our “doctrine” is not some catechism or creed? Just “Love”?! That’s *it*?

In true Universalist style, Williams is stripping away everything extra until all that is left is love. That’s the core of what we Unitarian Universalists are about; that’s the core of what we’re here in this congregation to learn; that’s the heart of what we’re on this planet to teach. Love.

Oh, is *that* all? Only love—that’s all that’s asked of us! How easy!

*Not!* How often, in trying to *live* this love, do we find ourselves slamming up against obstacles in ourselves and others, like Parker Palmer crashing into those stone ledges, because we too want to cling as close as we can to the face of the cliff, to our “zone of safety.” It’s so counterintuitive to lean out away from our comfort zones, over what seems like empty air—it’s so countercultural to try really to *love* others and ourselves, which means to try really to see and hear and understand others and ourselves. To maintain a sense of connection even when we can’t understand. It means to set boundaries, too—to love is to hold each other and ourselves accountable; it’s to call ourselves to show up. It’s so hard! Surely that’s not the only way we can get some traction if we want to grow our souls, and heal our world!

But, my friends, I think we may just have to face it: If we want to live this central teaching of our faith—that “Love is the doctrine of this church”—we, like Parker Palmer, are going to have to adopt the Outward Bound motto: “If you can’t get out of it, *get into it!*” To be truly alive is to lean out away from the cliff and get into a life of love.

We don’t have to look far for examples. Every time I hear the story of this congregation’s recovery from the catastrophic fire in 1995—the love made tangible that kept this congregation alive and thriving through first the loss and then the painstaking repair of this Home—every time we hear that story, we know we have inherited the gifts of *heroes* who knew to live out their love. We are back in this sanctuary ten years this month—Happy Anniversary, Heroes, and thank you, thank you, to everyone who made it possible.

And now, every week, every time I see you take the risk of starting a conversation with someone you don’t know, I see you living out our doctrine of love. Every time I hear that you have volunteered to drive someone to the doctor, or to bring dinner to someone who is ill, or to be a compassionate

listening ear when someone is going through a hard time—even if you don't quite know or understand that person—I see you teaching the rest of us how to love. Every time you show up to phone-bank for marriage equality or you sign a letter in support of your values, I see you teaching the *world* how to love. And every time we *resist* the urge to judge someone or to gossip about others, no matter how frustrated we may feel or how “different” someone seems from “us,” I see us learning how to love, in community, learning how to keep our promise to each other. “Love is the doctrine of this church.”

It's a counterintuitive, countercultural move, isn't it—leaning out into the empty air, risking moving away from our comfort zone, trusting that the rock of something larger than ourselves will hold us, will give us something to brace ourselves on, so that we can take the next step.

What is that something larger? Call it the Love that exists all around us. This may sound sentimental or abstract, but I believe this has to be true: that there is a kind of collective Love-with-a-capital-L that consists of the Love of every person on earth and everyone who has ever existed. And that Love is the ocean on which each of us is a wave. We can depend on that—we can tap into it, we can find it flowing toward us, if we will lean into it.

And then what's important is what Peter Luton says: that “the flow of love, ... this flow of life energy into me does not end with me. I am called by Life Itself, to pass along to others the blessings and the gifts I have received. I will not be the stagnant pool at the end of the stream, a swamp, stale and so turned in on itself and independent of the rest of creation that I produce nothing sweet or soothing or true or kind.”

“I will not be the stagnant pool at the end of the stream, a swamp ... so turned in on itself and independent of the rest of creation that I produce nothing sweet or soothing or true or kind.” What an affirmation! I am so grateful for this faith, Unitarian Universalism, that produces a Peter Luton, or a one of you—this faith that holds and catches me when I am afraid of falling, that reminds me that all of our ancestors, and all of you, have created a great reservoir of Love into which I can tap, as I strive to live out our central teaching: “Love is the doctrine of this church.” It's not easy—I've got to look both deep within *and* outside myself to live up to it—but I surely won't find it by clinging to the wall, to the zone of “safety.”

That's the kind of plunge that we ask of each other—that we *promise* each other—in our Affirmation every Sunday. And I think that *that's* the Love that is the “you,” the “Great Spirit,” in the song that the choir is about to sing, after we spend a few minutes together in silence.

## Silence

**Anthem**            The Lone, Wild Bird

*FUCSJ Choir,  
directed by Dan Zulevic*

**Offering Our Gifts**

*Dianne Saichek, piano*

Today, in Unitarian Universalist congregations across the country, we are taking up a special collection that goes toward “Growing Our Spirit.” Last year on the first annual Association Sunday, 626 congregations, representing 128,000 Unitarian Universalists, raised over 1.4 million dollars. Last year’s theme was “Growing Our Faith,” so the money helped to pay for the big Time magazine ads, which you can see downstairs; it supported districts and congregations in their projects to share our liberal religion with those who hunger for it; and it went toward our Diversity in Ministry Initiative, which supports UU ministers of color and the congregations they serve.

This year, to “Grow Our Spirit,” half of what we raise will go toward theological education programs for laypeople; congregations, districts, and seminaries can apply for grants to create programs that focus on our spiritual and theological growth. Now is the time for us to create that “church as seminary” that Rev. Geoff has been dreaming of! The other half of the money we raise will go toward Excellence in Ministry programs: continuing education programs for ordained ministers, scholarships for promising students preparing for our ministry, and again, the Diversity of Ministry Initiative.

Most of all, by giving in whatever amount we can, we create a real bridge that links all of *us* with all of the Unitarian Universalists around the country. *They* have reached out and helped us—through support as we rebuilt from the fire, through grants from the UUA that we continue to get, and countless resources. Now we get to pour our love back into this great reservoir so that it may flow outward toward others, and return again toward us. It’s like our magic penny: “love is something if you give it away, you end up having more.” You can make your checks out to the Unitarian Universalist Association, or you can put in cash in any amount. Please fill out the envelope in your order of service, and put your gift to the UUA in there. Offerings just in the plate will go, as they always do, to sustain the works and ministries of this congregation.

**\*Singing**            # 1028    The Fire of Commitment

**\*Benediction**

*Rev. Nancy Palmer Jones*

*Thanks to Genie Bernardini for this morning’s chancel decorations!*

