Opening Words
“Our Common Life Is Enriched” by the Religious Institute

We are grateful for the gift of our lives and the gift of other people in our lives.

Each of us is created with dignity and worth.

We are called to love one another and to do nothing to others that we would find hateful to ourselves.

We honor the many ways that people live and love.

Our common life is enriched when queer, transgender, bisexual, lesbian, and gay people can come out—sharing the gifts of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

True justice flourishes when all people can live and flourish.

We suffer when LGBTQ people are oppressed, excluded, or shamed by religious people who overlook the fundamental call to love one another.

Love does not exclude. We are all worthy.

May we work to build a world where all people are celebrated and loved.

We celebrate sexual and gender diversity as a blessing that enriches us all.

Wisdom Story “Small Kindnesses” by Danusha Laméris
I’ve been thinking about the way, when you walk
down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs
to let you by. Or how strangers still say “bless you”
when someone sneezes, a leftover
from the Bubonic plague. “Don’t die,” we are saying.
And sometimes, when you spill lemons
from your grocery bag, someone else will help you
pick them up. Mostly, we don’t want to harm each other.
We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot,
and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile
at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress
to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder,
and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass.
We have so little of each other, now. So far
from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange.
What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these
fleeting temples we make together when we say, “Here,
have my seat,” “Go ahead — you first,” “I like your hat.”
Introduction of the Discernment Team

Spring of 2018

**Current Team:** Karen Foust, Chair Gary Chapin, Debbie Mattson, Erin Ballew, Catherine Emery, Claire Curole

… Answered the call to discern, shepherd, and shape the future of ministry at Unitarian Universalist Community Church.

Leadership intentional searched for members who represent a cross section of new and long-standing members of diverse ages, gender, sexual orientation, and theology; seasoned leaders, developing leaders, and recent seminarians; new to UU and transplanted UU’s has been widely successful. Together you represent the depth and breadth of skills sets and attributes we believed were important for this work. We sought out people who are agile, adaptive, creative, and visionary; people who carry authority and share deep integrity, members and friends who are deeply committed to this faith community; and finally, people who hold either institutional memory and fresh perspectives.

**The Charge:** The UUCC Discernment team will listen to the heartbeat of the congregation and the whispers in the wind to discern 1) where we are called to share our unique gifts in this time and place, and 2) how we shall live sustainably into the future shared ministry.

**How did we get Here?** By Gary Chapin

The Discernment Team has been meeting for something like a year and, though we’ve written newsletter articles and had many conversations there are still puzzled looks when we talk about what we are doing. The gist of it is that we were tasked to discern (synonyms: perceive, recognize, distinguish, detect, make out) the essence of our church community and express that in some way. We were not tasked with “writing a mission and vision.” Rather we were tasked with looking through the conversations our church has had over the past five years -- we looked through the notes and chart paper of all those times we got you together to answer questions and express your desires and fears for our church -- and discerning the expressed vision to be found there. We didn’t write it. We found it. Now we’re trying it on, playing with it, seeing what comes. “Living the Grace of Love”

**TESTIMONIES**

**Erin Ballew**

Take what you learn here with you out into the world. Similar language is often included at the end of Sunday Worship. My pride in being a Unitarian Universalist comes from how what I learn here changes who I am out there. I strive every day to Live the Grace of Love.

Recently I had the opportunity to put living the grace of love into action. I serve on the Board of Trustees for a local community organization and I recently took on the role of Membership Committee Chair. As a newer Board member, I was unaware that tension had been growing around how membership dues are paid. One Board member in particular had not paid their membership dues in over two years. They believe that their significant non-monetary contributions to the organization equate to a value much higher than the cost of membership and want their hard work recognized. Others believe that despite the donation of professional services, no one should be exempt from paying the membership fee.
This came to an unexpected and explosive head when direct confrontation over the issue erupted during our monthly meeting. People started to argue and take sides. As someone with a compassionate heart, I found the situation extremely difficult to navigate. The room was full of animosity, but also full of friends and neighbors. As Chair of the Membership Committee, I felt pressure to comment, but I was petrified. I could not speak. I felt sick.

Something I learned in this sanctuary is the importance of taking time to reflect. I used to be very reactionary. Now I try to be more intentional. I refrained from participating in the argument and I scheduled a committee meeting two weeks out, allowing everyone time to sit with the issue. Because the discussion extended beyond the Committee, I invited all the Board members to attend. However, it was made clear to me that only active Board members were allowed. Meaning the deserting voice, and in my view the most important voice, would be excluded from the very discussion that they inspired.

It is better to listen than to speak. And that means understanding all voices. And so I tried to be open minded. I met with the individual whose membership had lapsed and I gathered opinions from members unable to attend the meeting. I took all thoughts and ideas with me to share with the group and helped those who were present to have a respectful and productive discussion. I was honest about my discomfort and the group responded with earnestness. We settled on bringing a recommendation to the next Board meeting for a vote which expands our current membership categories, encourages volunteerism, and better honors the efforts of our members. With a loving heart, I found the strength to navigate a difficult situation and come to an amicable solution.

In my life, this is one way I live the Grace of Love. I work to listen with an open heart and overcome divisive rhetoric. I strive to acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of others and I recognize that we all ultimately want to make things better, but making things better takes all of us. This power in unity is something I learned here, to celebrate our differences and harness them to create better systems in our world.

What I learn here changes who I am out there. Being a UU is so much more than who I am inside these walls. And Living the Grace of Love is so much more than who I am inside these walls. For me, Living the Grace of Love means using loving speech and loving action in all areas of my life in order to better our world and advance love everywhere.

**Debbie Mattson**

I come to church to be reminded of the power of love and to be inspired to daily live the grace of love. I do try, sometimes with success and other times with failure. For you today, I am going to describe a particular failure because I learned from it more about living the grace of love and self-forgiveness.

The situation occurred in the back-drop of my own frenzy. Like many of you, I am provoked by the injustices we experience on a daily basis—unwanted sexual touches, cruel words to describe the most vulnerable, attitudes about the natural world and international relations that threaten our existence.

My fear turns to frenzy. Every day is marked with more activity to resist all the injustices. Sometimes it means showing up in the streets with signs of protest, other times I am pleading with my congressional delegates, and when I lack opportunity to engage, I write another check to the organizations that will, with a prayer, keep destructive power in check. This frantic need propels me into action day after day. I hold myself accountable by making lists at the end of each day, lists of how I resisted the political power to destroy.

Besides trying to assert political influence, I pledge to myself to exemplify civility within my own community—hold doors open for others, welcome people with a smile, listen without judgment.
My community includes daily visits to the local Y to swim, lift weights, and practice yoga. It was in the women’s locker room where I became aware that my intended path of righting wrongs was not so easy. It was when, with bravado, I confronted a young teenage girl.

The locker room was crowded with women and girls in various degrees of undress. It was humid from hot showers and the mirrors were obscured by steam. The teen was in front of the mirror using her finger to trace vulgar words in the steam describing women's anatomy. I asked her to erase it. Her response: “No. I didn’t write it.” To which I said: “That’s OK. I’d like you to erase it anyway.” I thought I was clever in my choice of words as I gave her a way out; I considered myself non-threatening and non-blaming. I was surprised by her single word answer: “No.” But I was committed—the words will be erased. The power struggle continued as I left the room to acquire more power, a staff member. We marched in together, ready to right the wrong. The words had been erased. The staff person asks the teen her name. The reply: “It is none of your business and I am going to call the cops on you!” Finally, I realize my frenzy has not created civility, instead it created hostility—the very condition that threatens civility.

I was baffled by my own lack of influence and stunned by my awkward attempts towards civility. The intention was so clear and the path so murky.

Thomas Merton aptly describes me: “To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence. More than that, it is cooperation in violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his work for peace. It destroys his own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of his own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.

It was weeks later that I realized all I needed to do was erase the words myself, a simple act of civility, no hero needed.

I am heartened by another quote of Thomas Merton’s: The thing to do when you have made a mistake is not to give up doing what you were doing and start something altogether new, but to start over again with the thing you began badly and try, for the love of God, to do it well.

**Living the Grace of Love Claire Curole**

How do I "live the grace of love”?

I live it one day at a time, by showing up and being present in the moment. It’s easy to do otherwise, to get pulled away by distractions; but showing up is a good start. Sometimes the most important thing a person can do is just be there, ready for whatever comes. Living the grace of love means keeping commitments and being honest about limits; saying yes as often as possible and saying no when necessary.

How do I "live the grace of love”?

I live it with a sense of adventure, with curiosity and the willingness to risk making mistakes. It takes some grace, maybe, to go right up to the edge of the unknown and lean in, just to find out what happens next. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but there's always something to learn -- even if it's "Well, -that- wasn't what I expected!” For me, living the grace of love means not holding back just because I don’t know how things are going to turn out. It means "recalculating" like a GPS and trying a different way to get there when things don’t go according to the first plan... or the second...

How do I "live the grace of love”?
I live it - or at least I try to live it - with a heart wide open to connection. Relationship is something you build by being there and making it happen; community is what happens when all the parts come together to form a whole that's beyond what each part can be on its own -- like voices joining in a chorus, or a really good potluck supper. Living the grace of love, for me, means opening my heart to the world over and over again -- even when there are big differences. We don't have to be exactly the same to realize we're all in this together. And we -are- all in it together, in this complex and uncertain world, with one another and with people we don't even know yet.

Now I admit, I'm a little biased.

This thing I call "living the grace of love" is what I do day after day - and night after night - in my work as a professional health care chaplain: to show up where I need to, to be present in the tender moments of folks' lives, and to love them a little way onward toward whatever happens next. For me living the grace of love turned into a call to professional ministry, but it could just as easily have played out in countless other ways. It's not so much about what things we do, but how we do our thing.

How do I live the grace of love?

One day at a time, with an open heart, head first and tail flying in the wind.

Karen Foust
I began coming to the UUCC about 11 years ago at the suggestion of a friend who felt she had found a spiritual home here. I was working in a fairly high stress job that didn't really feed my soul, and felt disconnected from any sense of community. I also had three daughters, two of whom were eager to have answers to some of life's big questions and my responses of "some people believe this" and "others believe that" were wearing a bit thin. They needed some other kind of instruction.

From the very first service I felt welcomed, connected in ways that I hadn't for a very long time. The ritual of holding hands at the end of the service gave me an immediate sense of belonging that I don't even feel with much of my extended family. Suddenly I was physically connected to something much larger that myself, and it felt good.

About 3-4 weeks later, after church one Sunday my daughters were loaded in the back of the car and we headed up the hill, past the cemetery after church. Upon seeing the cemetery they began asking questions about the stones, and what happens to people when they die. I began with my usual "well, some people believe that people are reincarnated – they come back to earth as something else after they die" and some people believe that people go to heaven when they die, and others believe we just go back to the earth. Then came the inevitable question that I had been avoiding and which had been as of yet unasked “What do YOU believe”. In that moment, with the strength of this community behind me, I was able to answer truthfully “I don’t know what I believe”. It was an incredibly liberating and empowering moment for me. I’m not sure that I would have necessarily answered the question any differently had I not begun coming to the UUCC, but with the grace of love from this community, I now knew that it was ok not to know, and that it was perfectly fine to admit that to my kids. Thanks to the vibrant RE Program my children were able to explore different belief systems and think more deeply about their own faith rather than accepting a pre-packaged belief in something that I did not feel comfortable either confirming or denying.

There are many ways in which I live the grace of love; from pursuing my passion of music, back-packing along the Bold Coast in Cutler, traveling with my family, enjoying the company and wisdom of this community. I don’t of course always get it right when interacting with people especially when my opinions don’t mesh, or in mid-winter when my ability to cope with social situations is at its lowest, but
the desire to learn and be open is there, and I am learning how to listen more thoughtfully. I generally tend to keep my thoughts to myself when faced with the passions of people who hold different opinions. I pick up on the subtleties of the unspoken; what is inferred through tone of voice or choice of words and have on occasion just gone along with someone even though if I actually listened more carefully I might not have agreed.

With that in mind, several years ago, when my youngest was about 6, we were visiting family on Cape Cod and took a trip in to Provincetown in the evening. It was my first time there and the girls were young enough that much of the culture of Provincetown lightly skimmed over their heads. As we were walking past the shops and ventured in to a neighborhood, two gentlemen came out of a little bed and breakfast, holding hands and chatting. I didn’t take particular note my youngest looked at me and said, “Mommy, did you see those two men! They were holding hands!” Several things went through my head at that moment as I knew she was looking for a reaction, and I didn’t want to get it wrong. She wanted me to poke fun; or at least that’s what it felt like? Was she just reacting to something that she hadn’t really noticed before, and was seeing it through the lense of a 6 year old who doesn’t quite know how to process something that her school friends don’t talk about. Thinking of this community and the joy that loving relationships regardless of gender preference bring to our lives, I couldn’t go along with her tone. I needed to find a way to gently guide it in another direction so I said, “Yes, and they looked really happy didn’t they!” In her somewhat dramatic fashion she said, “Yeah, they did”. No further drama, no further explanation needed. For me, it was one of those moments of clarity that comes from embracing the grace of love. I find great comfort and strength from this community and I am forever grateful for the opportunity to find new ways of thinking about and approaching life’s many situations through the grace of love.

“Living the Grace of Love” - Catherine Hyde Emery
The image I chose to express the phrase “Living the Grace of Love” is of a woman running through the woods. This represents solitude and being in nature, which evoke in me the feelings of gratitude and being alive.

I will start by reading a poem from Meditations Before Kaddish, “The Mourner’s Kaddish” and I will end by reading the same poem again. I believe that life and death are intrinsically connected and without death there is no life.

Mourner’s Kaddish
When I die give what’s left of me away
To children and men that wait to die.
And if you need to cry,
Cry for your brother walking the street beside you.
And when you need me, put your arms around anyone
And give them what you need to give me.

I want to leave you something,
Something better than words or sounds.
Look for me in the people I’ve known or loved,
And if you cannot give me away,
At least let me live in your eyes and not in your mind.

You can love me best by letting hands touch hands,
And by letting go of children that need to be free.
Love doesn’t die, people do.
So, when all that’s left of me is love,
Give me away.
This meditation speaks of how to show and share love in life and references a sense of duty and respect towards the act of living. The statement of “Living the Grace of Love” is an action, a choice, or a decision to live. Embrace the world. Go out into it. It is like the message Rev. Carie often uses at the end of service, “have a good week, and come back next Sunday we will be waiting for you.” Or something like that. This encourages us to go forth into the world and not feel alone; we are here for you.

I have been very fortunate and haven’t felt alone in this life. I felt loved and cared for as a child by many people – I truly felt love from my family, my neighbors, my teachers, and many, many other adults in my young life. I grew up with a community that supported me, encouraged me, wanted what they felt was best for me, and expected me to work hard and do my best. But, “I was not alone in my boat.” This was a phrase that became part of our family language. I was charged with living my life fully, but I am never alone – someone is always in my boat as I paddle through uncharted waters. But, I did not choose to use the image of a boat on the water. That is what gives me the strength to run into the world, seemingly on my own, but with the love, support and encouragement from all that have invested in me. This is living – the action word of the statement “Living the Grace of Love.”

The “Grace of Love” is a phrase that expresses the feeling of connectedness, to nature, people and to life. Grace is the width, and depth, and breadth of love, reaching out, and rippling back and forth across the waters of time. As an adult, I feel the “Grace of Love” as the ripples from the people who loved and cared for me when I was a child and I am charged with sending out ripples of my own. That means to be present, to “Live the Grace of Love.” To paraphrase a Methodist edict,

I should do all the good I can,
   In all the ways I can,
   In all the places I can,
   To all the people I can,
   For as long as I can.

I feel that I have been given this gift of life and that I have a charge to share that with the world around me. When I run through nature, I am at peace and I feel the ripples of the love given to me, which motivates me to give that love away to others. I will end by rereading the “Mourner’s Kaddish.”

Where are we Going? by Gary Chapin
It was an extraordinary conversation that led to our encompassing the essence of our church in the five words: Living the grace of love. We’ll be exploring and playing with those words for the next six months. The phrase captures all that we do, all we wish to do, and all we wish to be; and leaves open many pathways to all of those things. It’s a metric by which we can measure success, and a North Star, whose reliability is amplified by all of the many relationships that hold our church together. We came to this via our extraordinary conversation, and now we hope to lead you (the congregation) in your own conversation. For the next six months we will be curating opportunities to examine, question, converse, and conspire with these words. Our base prompt will be this question:

“What does it look like to live the grace of love?”