

Dear UU Wellspring Participant,

A warm welcome to you as a participant of Love at the Center: UU Values and Covenants. This transformational program will explore the enduring love that is at the core of Unitarian Universalism. You will explore the related values and covenants through the lens of abiding love, building community, acting in faith, rooting in growth, and transforming in love.

The Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt has given us permission to share the following quote, which was captured at an open forum at General Assembly 2023 when she was sharing her own long-term experience with spiritual direction: “It is time for all of us to take care of one another.”

Generally sessions are paired, so you can expect a focus on two values in the first session and the related covenant statements in the second session. Each value session will focus on questions that explore ourselves and Unitarian Universalism through deep questioning and listening. Putting our beliefs in action in our covenantal faith will be explored through experiences and storytelling that will illuminate how we want to be as faithful people.

Together, our group will learn to hold each other with love, trust, curiosity and generosity as we explore Unitarian Universalist values and covenants. As we grow our spiritual lives and explore our covenantal faith, we will be “taking care of one another” and ourselves. Holding each other in love seeks to inspire us to bring love out in the world.



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Love as a Value:

Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values.

Love as a Covenant:

We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love.

UUA Article II, passed June 2024

Why We are Gathering

Love at the Center: UU Values and Covenants will provide a sacred container to deepen our spiritual lives through explorations, reflections, experiences and storytelling. You will have opportunities to engage with resources that will open your heart, mind, and soul to your inner wisdom and the sharing in each session will open you to the wisdom of the group. This sacred opportunity to be with each other will include exploring spiritual deepening through daily spiritual practices and regular spiritual companionship, which will be explained and discussed in our sessions.

How We Will Gather

The 11-session “Love at the Center: UU Values and Covenants” originally grew out of the work of the Article II Study Commission. It has grown to encompass resources and reflections that will allow each of us to nurture our values and share our experiences and stories to explore and strengthen our faith.

The facilitator(s) for your program are/is **[names]**. We will be meeting on **[day, date, time]** on **[Zoom/in person add your location or Zoom link.]**. Please arrive a few minutes in advance so that you can settle in before we begin together as a group.

CARES

UU Wellspring builds community to deepen and encourage engagement by engaging at an inner truth level, which some, like Parker Palmer, refer to as the *soul* level. What a gift! We’ll be checking in each session and sharing what is most meaningful in our lives. We will be using the acronym CARES to focus our sessions.

CARES stands for:

- **Community:** Center and Connect
- **Agreements:** Covenant

- **Reflections:** Questioning
- **Experiences:** Activities
- **Storytelling:** Sharing

Community: Center and Connect

The **Community section** will begin with a chalice lighting reading and a silent or music meditation. This is followed by an invitation to respond to a check-in prompt related to the session. You can also share what you are carrying in your heart, how your spiritual practice is going or insights from spiritual companionship.

UU Wellspring groups build community in a way that goes deeper than social events and covenant groups and encourages engagement that deepens worship experiences and justice work in your community. One way that we do this is to follow Parker Palmer's advice of "No fixing, no advising, no setting each other straight." [Take two and a half minutes to listen to Palmer describe this.](#)

Agreements: Covenant

The **Agreements** will start in the second session to allow our group to gather with time to read the chapter on creating inclusive covenants in *Beyond Welcome: Creating Communities of Love*.

The resources and explorations in Love at the Center will often focus on systemic issues and possibilities for change within a specific community of identity, such as LGBTQI, BIPOC, age group, ability, or religion. Also included in the covenant sessions will be resources and activities based on the global collective, allowing us to broaden our impact.

The covenanting session will also reserve space for sharing spiritual practices that lift up the value and covenant under consideration.

Reflections: Questioning

The **Reflections** questions will include questions that will deepen our connections to:

- Values: Deep Connections to Ourselves and Unitarian Universalism
- Covenant: Learning to Lead with Love

Responding to reflection questions continues the deep listening used during the check in. We will engage in deep listening in every session to allow our inner truths time and space to show themselves.

Experiences: Activities

Experiences include reflections on the suggested opportunities and activities, either within the group or as part of the session. These experiences will focus on how we are being called to live into various communities, ranging in focus from our own families to the global collective.

Storytelling: Sharing

Storytelling allows for creating a shared narrative that builds community and ends with

affirmations. Our goal for storytelling is to connect with one another and share experiences. Stories are usually short anecdotes from our lives that we have found meaningful. You are always allowed to pass until you feel safely held by this group.

For this first session, please bring one brief anecdote about your name and one brief story from your childhood that was meaningful to you and related to your childhood religion or spiritual life. If this isn't an appropriate prompt for you, any anecdote from later in life is welcome. No rehearsal required, just the idea of an anecdote is enough.

Journal

Record your notes however it is most convenient for you: online, your own journal, or the UU Wellspring Love at the Center Journal (available Fall 2024) that includes the values and covenants as well as reflection questions, experiences and activities. This journal is only available through Amazon. Order early as it can take extra delivery time for the print on demand book.

Our Time Together

Our time together begins with building community and exploring how we want to be together, which we call Grounding in Love. Within this block of time we will start with the first two sessions which focus on building our community and exploring how we want to be together. The next two sessions (Sessions 3 and 4) focus on our core value, *Love*, and the related covenant statements. These remaining blocks of time are called Centering in Community, Acting in Faith, Nurturing Growth and Transforming in Love. Here is a [Calendar](#) that shows how the values are paired in the sessions. [Facilitator should replace this link with your customized calendar showing your group's dates.]

Book list:

Please obtain the books listed below. All books are available from the UUA Inspirit Bookstore or online bookstores. Chapters and essays in these books will be used throughout the program.

- *Beyond Welcome: Building Communities of Love*, edited by Linnea Nelson. Skinner House Books. (2022)
- *Faithful Practices: Everyday Ways to Feed Your Spirit* edited by Rev. Erik Wikstrom. Skinner House Books (2018)
 - Read what you can before the first session and continue throughout the first month.
- *Love at the Center: Unitarian Universalist Theologies*, edited by Rev. Dr. Sophía Betancourt, Skinner House Books, Spring 2024.*
 - Note that the paperback will be published Jan 15, 2025. Online books are available now and can be updated with no additional charge in January. Until

then the selections you will need before then are in PDF form as supplied by Skinner House Books.

- *Sacred Nature: Restoring Our Ancient Bond with the Natural World*, by Karen Armstrong (2022).**
- [Optional: UU Wellspring Love at the Center Reflection Journal.](#)

Please Engage with These Activities Before our First Session:

1. Obtain the books listed above.
2. Begin reading *Faithful Practices: Everyday Ways to Feed Your Spirit* by Erik Walker Wikstrom, as time permits.
3. Bring a brief anecdote related to your name and to your early religious or spiritual life.

We look forward to spending this year with you in Love at the Center: UU Values and Covenants to create sacred and transformational opportunities for you and our group.

In Liberating Love,

(Your Facilitators)