

**Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church
Sunday, February 10, 2019**

Thought for Contemplation: If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.
- source unknown although often attributed as an African proverb

Chimes

Chalice Lighting George and Vivian Klein, lighters, Liam Scott Reader

That all might be cherished
 A chalice of love
That all might be healthy
 A chalice of care
That all might know justice
 A chalice of courage
Today and tomorrow and the days ever after.
 Anita Farber-Robertson

Call to Worship. By Henri Nowen

In our world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture and country, from their neighbors, friends and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable space where strangers can ... (lose) their (experience of) strangeness and become our fellow human beings...this is our vocation: to convert the hostis into a hospes, the enemy into a guest and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced.

Hymn *We Give Thanks* #1010

Welcome New Members Ceremony

Introduction: Rev. Anita

Suzanne Ellis, Stephen "Steve" Hansen, Laura Iglesias, Elizabeth "Beth" Miller, Ellen Pizzo, Margaret Rodriguez, Kathryn Stannard,

Welcome to membership in the Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church, a church with a long and proud history, an exciting and inspired future. You have made a significant decision, to move from the outside, as spectators looking in, to stepping inside the circle, claiming this community as your own, sharing its aspirations and its support, and, with us, making what course corrections are needed. You do so as one of us, the community of care and faith, journeying together.

It is our great joy to welcome you, offering you opportunities to learn and lead, to heal and be healed, to do justice and love kindness with us. Welcome.

Congregation: At Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church,
We are a growing community that transforms lives through the power of love.
We celebrate diversity encourage spiritual growth,
And promote social responsibility, as we walk with care on this earth.
We empower our members to share their gifts
To build a world of compassion, equality, and freedom.

Question to Congregation: (Membership Coordinator Laura)

Members of Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church, will you welcome these new members into our congregation? Will you reach out to them in friendship, and be open to their unique gifts and ideas? Will you extend a caring hand to each of them as we journey together in this beloved community?

Congregation:

Yes. We welcome you into our community and look forward to sharing our journey with you. You are part of us, and we are a part of you.

Question to the children of the Congregation: (DRE Bob)

Children of Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church, will you welcome these new children into your classes and into your lives, sharing your times of learning, playing and laughing together, and comforting each other when you are sad?

Children of the Congregation:

Yes. We will welcome you, sharing our classes, learning, playing, laughing together and comforting each other when we are sad.

Question to the New Members: (Rev. A)

Suzanne, Steve, Laura, Beth, Ellen, Margaret, and Kathryn,
It is a joy to welcome each of you into this beloved community. Will you walk with us in times of joy and sorrow, sharing the rewards and responsibilities of membership?

New Members:

Yes. We embrace this community, walking together in times of joy and sorrow, happily accepting the rewards and responsibilities of membership.

President: (Diane)

At A2U2 we light our chalice to center ourselves, marking the beginning of our sacred time. We light candles at important times in our lives to mark our joys and sorrows. Today we invite you to mark this sacred moment by lighting a candle, a symbol of our faith and of your choosing to be a part of us.

Lighting of Candles

Distribution of Gifts and hugs.

Singing out the children- *Come and Go with Me* Children of the church school accompany the new members' children to their classes

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION
CANDLES OF JOY AND SORROW
MEDITATION AND PRAYER

READING *In the Soup* by Robert Walsh read by Elizabeth Oatley

My dictionary says the word *minister* is etymologically related to the minestrone. I am not making this up. They are both derived from a Latin root that means *to serve*.

The image of ministry as minestrone is particularly apt for the ministry church people do all together that makes us such a ministering congregation.

Each bean, each vegetable, each unit of macaroni or pinch of spice gives not only its substance to the soup but also its spirit, its texture and color, its flavor and aroma. Each person offers a unique set of gifts, and if we do our job of organizing well, each gift will be creatively matched with a need-so that the whole becomes a warm, nourishing, life-giving religious community.

All who serve the church and the principles and values we hold dear are ministers. If you are doing part of that work, you are doing ministry, no matter how unlikely it may seem. You are in the soup-the minestrone of ministry!

Anthem Of Love and Understanding

SERMON

Love Ninjas

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

Each time I witness a New Member Sunday, I am moved, almost to tears. It speaks so simply of hope, of aspiration, and of trust. It speaks of our longings to find meaning and a place to which we belong, and it speaks of our willingness to let this place be that place. It was true for each of us, whenever it was that we made that decision to call this church, my faith community.

I found myself thinking of an experience Glennon Doyle Melton shared on her blog. She says she's talking about children, but I think she is talking about humans, about us all, about you and honestly, about me, and what we need to do and be together. She says:

A few weeks ago, I went into my son Chase's class for tutoring. I'd e-mailed Chase's teacher one evening and said, "Chase keeps telling me that this stuff you're sending home is math—but I'm not

sure I believe him. Help, please.” She e-mailed right back and said, “No problem! I can tutor Chase after school anytime.” And I said, “No, not him. Me. He gets it. Help me.”

And that’s how I ended up standing at a chalkboard in an empty fifth-grade classroom while Chase’s teacher sat behind me, using a soothing voice to try to help me understand the “new way we teach long division.” Luckily for me, I didn’t have to unlearn much because I’d never really understood the “old way we taught long division.” It took me a solid hour to complete one problem, but I could tell that Chase’s teacher liked me anyway. ...

Afterward, we sat for a few minutes and talked about teaching children and what a sacred trust and responsibility it is. We agreed that subjects like math and reading are not the most important things that are learned in a classroom. We talked about shaping little hearts to become contributors to a larger community—and we discussed our mutual dream that those communities might be made up of individuals who are kind and brave above all.

And then she told me this.

Every Friday afternoon, she asks her students to take out a piece of paper and write down the names of four children with whom they’d like to sit the following week. The children know that these

requests may or may not be honored. She also asks the students to nominate one student who they believe has been an exceptional classroom citizen that week. All ballots are privately submitted to her.

And every single Friday afternoon, after the students go home, she takes out those slips of paper, places them in front of her, and studies them. She looks for patterns.

Who is not getting requested by anyone else?

Who can't think of anyone to request?

Who never gets noticed enough to be nominated?

Who had a million friends last week and none this week?

You see, Chase's teacher is not looking for a new seating chart or "exceptional citizens." Chase's teacher is looking for lonely children. She's looking for children who are struggling to connect with other children. She's identifying the little ones who are falling through the cracks of the class's social life. She is discovering whose gifts are going unnoticed by their peers. And she's pinning down—right away—who's being bullied and who is doing the bullying.

As a teacher, parent, and lover of all children, I think this is the most brilliant Love Ninja strategy I have ever encountered. It's like taking an X-ray of a classroom to see beneath the surface of things and into the hearts of students. It is like mining for gold—the gold being those children who need a little help, who need adults to step in and teach them how to make friends, how to ask others to play, how to join a group, or how to share their gifts. And it's a bully deterrent because every teacher knows that bullying usually happens outside her eyeshot and that often kids being bullied are too intimidated to share. But, as she said, the truth comes out on those safe, private, little sheets of paper.¹

When we became part of this church, I think we might have intended to be Love Ninjas. We intended to be inclusive, to find a niche for each person, a quiet one for the reflective and an interactive one for the extrovert. Sometimes we do. And sometimes we get so busy with our own stuff, we forget to look around. We ask for help from the same folks we have always asked for help, sometimes choosing the people we are most confident will say yes, or who will do it the “right way,” as though there is only one “right way” to do it,” even though there may

¹ Glennon Doyle Melton *One Teacher's Brilliant Strategy to Stop Future School Shootings—and It's Not About Guns*, from *Momastery.com*

be many others who not only could do the thing that needs doing, but who would love to be asked.

When we became part of this church, I also think we might have intended to be cared for by Love Ninjas, people who would notice us, our gifts and invite us to share, people who would notice us and our needs and offer to help. And sometimes we do. Folks have been loved into beloved community here many times.

And then there may be the person who silently watches us fumble with things, who has a creative alternative, for whom we have not created a space in which to share it or have it seriously heard.

I remember when I was a student in seminary and I watched as the teacher was explaining something to the class, and the class just was not getting it. He tried and tried. And then it was time for break. During the break I went up to him and said, "Jerry, I think there is another way to explain this that might help them to understand," and I shared my idea with him. Ten minutes later class reconvened. Jerry (the professor) said to the class, "Anita has a better way to explain this, so I am going to let her teach this part of the class." To my

astonishment, he handed me his piece of chalk and took a seat in the class. And thus, I learned I loved to teach.

Years later, when I had earned my doctorate, Andover Newton recruited me to teach the core curriculum for their Doctor of Ministry program. I did that for fifteen wonderful, soul-filling years. All because one seminary professor saw in me, something I hadn't seen myself, and offered me the opportunity to try. That is a sign that a school is fulfilling its mission.

What are the signs that we are fulfilling our mission?

In our by-laws we state the purpose of our church. We say:

At Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church, we are growing a community that transforms lives through the power of love. We celebrate diversity, encourage spiritual growth, and promote social responsibility, as we walk with care on this earth.

We empower our members to use their gifts to build a world of compassion, equality, and freedom.²

It's a fancier way of saying we intend to be Love Ninjas. It couldn't be plainer.

we are growing a community that transforms lives through the power of love,

² Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church By-laws, Article II: Purposes

It's a pretty impressive aspiration- maybe a little daunting but we are never going to get there if we do not try. We have to start somewhere. And we do. And we start in the way any good Love Ninja would, by: celebrating diversity, which means creating an environment for each one of us to flower in our own way, in our own time.

And by:

encouraging spiritual growth, which means providing both challenge and support, offering environments in which the truth can be spoken, uncertainties shared, opinions changed. That can happen in worship, in Spiritual Enrichment Groups, in the Knitting Ministry, the Pastoral Care Team, Men's Group, Civil Conversations Project, Building and Grounds Committee, Choir, teaching our children, Worship Committee, just to name a few.

and by:

promoting social responsibility, as we walk with care on this earth, working on projects with our Social Responsibility Committee, projects with our children and youth, learning about permaculture and caring for our grounds.

It's all our ministry together- as Robbie Walsh noted, the minestrone of ministry.

The Purposes articulated in our By-laws are not just window dressing.

We really try to do that here at A2U2, the thing we said we wanted to do:

grow a community that transforms lives through the power of love.

We become Love Ninjas by empowering our members to use their gifts to build a world of compassion, equality, and freedom.

And we know how we are empowered. By trusting us. By believing in our good intentions and our capacity to learn. We know we can and do make mistakes and we go on from there better, wiser persons. We are empowered when we have a beloved community to hold us while we learn and grow.

There are so many ways in which you are living your mission and doing what you intended. The life and vibrancy we can feel when we gather testifies to that. The warm welcome extended to these our seven new members and their families testifies to that, and the welcome we continue to extend to those here as our visitors and friends, all speak to the truth of your aspirations.

We are in the process of learning about ourselves through our church-wide house meetings. We don't have all the answers in yet. We have lots of information to process and we still have one meeting to go. But there is one truth surfacing that is unmistakable. You are committed to living in beloved community. Committed to being there for one

another, sharing the joys and sorrows of your lives. You are keeping
your eyes on the prize, *growing a community that transforms lives
through the power of love.*

Love Ninjas. That's you.
May it be so. Amen and blessed be.

Closing Hymn. Lean on Me #1021
Benediction
Closing music