

As we enter into this new year, full of possibility, and yet also bringing with it the weight of all that the past year wrought, let us pause and take a moment to look around at the faces here in this room and appreciate the joy and comfort that being together in community brings to us.

2025 was a year like no other. A year where so many of our UU values were blatantly under attack. A year where words like equity and inclusion, became weaponized. A year full of changes.

An unknown author wrote “Change is never painful. Only resistance to change is painful.”

And I can imagine this quote raising some hackles. Because we have to resist these changes, that’s the point right? As a people who believe in justice and equity, you could even say it is our moral imperative to resist.

But, that’s not what that quote is saying. It is reminding us that change happens, in fact, as Heraclitus wrote long ago “The only constant is change”.

Well, that and dishes and laundry.

No, this quote is reminding us that it is in the denial of the truth that change has already happened where we feel that pain. Because what we can’t change is what has already occurred. We have to accept it and move forward within the reality in which we currently live.

In the musical Hadestown they give a toast “To the world we dream about, and the one we live in now.”

This world that we are currently living in, the one we live in now, seems to have less and less in common with the one that I have been dreaming about.

This world where just as the new year has started the government of this country has captured the leader of another nation to extradite them by force to face charges in a country that they are not even citizens of. And, let’s be honest, if this was really about narcotics or human rights abuses, and not politics and oil, this wouldn’t be the only country targeted.

This world in which mass deportation has been publicly celebrated by those who claim to adhere to the Christian faith. A faith whose sacred text is filled with words reminding us to welcome the stranger, the foreigner, the immigrant.

Just one example is in Hebrews 13:2 where it reads:

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

This world of continued attacks on reproductive rights, anti-trans legislation, denial of climate science and draconian cuts to programs that aid the poor and further science and prosperity.

A world that seems intent on lifting up voices of hate and drowning out those of love.

How can we possibly accept these changes? Isn't that even more painful?

But acceptance isn't capitulation. And just because we are acknowledging the truth of what has happened doesn't mean that we can't fight for future change, change that can begin to shift us towards that world that we dream about.

We as UUs are given the task of both embracing and fighting for change.

In college I took a class called Movement for the Opera Singer and as a part of the class we read essays from Anne Bogart's *A Director Prepares* and one of the essays was titled Violence. In it she wrote the words:

“Art is violent. To be decisive is violent. Antonin Artaud defined cruelty as ‘unrelenting decisiveness, diligence, strictness’. To place a chair at a particular angle on the stage destroys every other possible choice, every other option. When an actor achieves a spontaneous, intuitive, or passionate moment in rehearsal, the director utters the fateful words ‘keep it’, eliminating all other potential solutions.”

And, at the time, I was so mad about this essay. I felt like using the word violence to describe making a choice in a theatrical production was belittling the very real violence that people experience in this world every day.

And yet, when we make a choice we can't go back and unmake that moment. When words fall from our lips we can't take them back. When we cast a ballot we can't uncast it, whatever the result ends up being.

We can make different choices in the future, but that choice, that moment, has destroyed all other possibilities.

And this is really what that quote is getting at, “Change is never painful. Only resistance to change is painful.”

Because we can’t fight against something that has already happened. But we can acknowledge and accept it and practice resistance by moving forward.

In many ways we see this play out here in our own UU communities. Changes create tension. A tension between clinging to what was and accepting what is. But within that is also opening ourselves up to the possibility of what can be.

Natalie Maxwell Fenimore wrote

“Shirley Chisholm was asked why she, a Black woman, was running for president: “You don’t have a chance. Why are you doing that?” And she said, “Because I am in love with the America that does not yet exist,” and that’s how Unitarian Universalism is also. I’m in love with the Unitarian Universalism that does not yet exist. But I have to hold both the love for that thing and the love for the reality. It does not yet exist. It will probably not exist in my lifetime. I don’t think it will in that of my children, but I can’t deny my love for it. You know, wanting to be there in that struggle. That’s why I’m fighting.”

In my time here in this congregation there have been lots of changes, some big and some small.

We have had numerous changes in staffing, structure, and leadership.

We had the year of contemplation and discussion about, and then the adoption of the 8th Principle. And that was, at times, contentious.

We had the shift on the national level in the UUA bylaws from our Principles and Sources to a new set of Values. And this also was challenging in its own way.

Past UUA President Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray said

“We know from these last several years the challenge, the loss, and the creativity and possibility of these transitional times. In liminal times, there’s always a risk that fear and anxiety will dominate and lead people to cling more tightly to what has been.”

In times of stress and anxiety, of fear and uncertainty, it is only natural for us to cling to the familiar. To want to resist changes that we feel like we have any control over, because there is just so much that is outside of our control.

One of the changes that has brought me joy is the increase in children and families in our community. It is beautiful, and it is imperative to the longevity and health of our faith that we attract and retain families and children and youth.

And, it's noisy. I really encourage you if you have challenges with hearing, or are just a person who is easily auditorily distracted, to sit over on this side of the sanctuary.

Often children are chaotic and messy. I have two at home, my house is never clean.

And based on research, because we are a people who believe in science and reason, right, that hasn't changed regardless of principles or values, based on research we have changed the way that we welcome families into our communities.

Current understandings of how religious communities thrive and grow show us that true multigenerational worship and programming is the most effective way to meet that objective.

This is why we welcome the children into the first part of service every week, instead of immediately sending them upstairs. This is why we have one Sunday a month where the children and youth are invited to stay for the entire service and that service is planned knowing that it will be a multigenerational audience.

And, I want to lift up that these can be the most challenging services that we offer. The children are often fidgety and bored, despite best efforts to make these services pedagogically appropriate, to involve the kids in the service and help them engage kinesthetically with opportunities to move or activities or rituals.

On the flip side, many adults have expressed that they feel like the messages aren't intellectual enough. Creating a multigenerational service that is meaningful for everyone in the room can feel daunting, and honestly sometimes impossible.

And it feels extra challenging when people simply don't show up, making the additional work feel pointless and unappreciated.

These changes were made well before my time here, and made because of what the research is telling us, but I know from hearing from congregants that some people still struggle with these changes.

Remember though, it's not the changes themselves but the resistance to those changes that is painful.

And I acknowledge that very real tension that we are all feeling in trying to provide for the needs of a community made up of individuals who are all working together but come here looking for different things.

Even when I am telling a story to the children I am also working to try to make that message meaningful to those of you who have been here since Jack Taylor's time. The story about the potato and the egg and the tea. That was for all of you, not just the kids who were sitting on the stage.

Rev. Douglas in Binghamton, where I am doing my ministerial internship this year, told me that he felt fortunate that when he started his time with that congregation that they already knew that they weren't showing up to hear him blather on (his words not mine, he is a fantastic preacher) but to be together.

We show up here for one another. We show up to celebrate new members. To learn and grow together. To be challenged and changed. We show up because what is offered here is a faith based on the belief in the worth and dignity of every human being and centered in love.

David Richo wrote

"What makes us human beings so uniquely wonderful in this puzzling universe is that we never give up on love.

Against all odds, with no guarantee of being loved in return, out of the hate and hurt so often handed us, in the face of the sadness and suffering history has let us see, we go on loving.

What deep respect we deserve for this capacity of ours to make love out of anything and to let it last."

We never give up on love.

That's what I want to take with me into this new year. That I can accept the changes but I will never give up on love. I will not capitulate to tyranny. I will not stop working on behalf of this community to support changes that serve all of us. I will not give up on you. I will not give up on the world.

Octavia Butler wrote:

“all that you touch you Change
all that you Change Changes you
the only lasting truth is Change
God is Change”

God is change and God is love and may we never give up fighting for both.