



DISCUSSION GUIDE | 2018-2019

UUA Common Read:

Justice on Earth

*People of Faith Working at the Intersections
of Race, Class, and the Environment*

Book edited by Manish Mishra-Marzetti and Jennifer Nordstrom
Discussion Guide by Gail Forsyth-Vail and Susan Lawrence

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Introduction

The Common Read Selection Committee has chosen *Justice on Earth: People of Faith Working at the Intersections of Race, Class, and the Environment*, edited by Manish Mishra-Marzetti and Jennifer Nordstrom, as the 2018-2019 UUA Common Read.

At a time when racial justice, environmental justice, and economic justice are seen as issues competing for time, attention, and resources, *Justice on Earth* explores the ways in which the three are intertwined. Those people and communities on the margins are invariably most affected by climate disaster, environmentally unsound policies and business decisions, and environmental toxins. The book asks us to recognize that our faith calls us to long-haul work for justice for our human kin, for the Earth, and for all life. It invites us to look at our current challenges through a variety of different perspectives, offers tools to equip us for sustained engagement, and proposes multiple pathways for follow-up action.

The book offers twelve essays, selected and introduced by the editors, by some key thinkers and activists in Unitarian Universalism today. Essays explore the environmental justice movement's history, theology, and philosophy. Authors make connections to our Unitarian Universalist faith and spiritual practices. The essays also provide thoughtful guidance for forming effective partnerships to work at the intersection of environmental, racial, and economic justice, with real life examples of Unitarian Universalist congregations who have done just that.

Calling for a deeper understanding of our seventh UU Principle, this Common Read invites and challenges us to think in a whole new way about congregational and personal commitment to protecting the environment. It asks us to understand human beings as part of, not separate from, the environment and one another.

This guide provides the opportunity for Unitarian Universalist congregations and groups to engage with insights offered in the essays. There are two different plans, one for a single session and one for three sessions. Both plans offer suggestions for follow-up action. The full three sessions will, of course, give participants opportunities to engage more deeply and broadly with the book.

Using this Guide

The discussion guide is flexible. Adapt it to congregational, cluster, or district programming for adults of all ages and life stages, gatherings of advocacy or identity-based UU groups, campus groups or young adult groups, youth groups, or cross-generational groups of adults and youth.

Two formats are offered:

- A single 90-minute session
- A series of three 90-minute sessions

Any session can be offered in two parts to accommodate a 45-minute Sunday forum format; this may work especially well for groups using the single session. And, any session can be expanded by lengthening the time for conversation, discussion, and sharing or to explore recommended resources, such as video clips or websites.

While the guide asks facilitators to write questions on newsprint, the UUA website offers questions on [PowerPoint slides](#) for groups that have access to a computer and projector.

Single-Session Version

Goals

- Invite responses to *Justice on Earth*.
- Explore religious reasons for individual Unitarian Universalists and our faith movement to work at the intersections of race, class, and environmental justice issues.
- Challenge participants to act from their Unitarian Universalist values, beginning or deepening partnerships and learning to follow the lead of those whose communities bear the brunt of environmental injustice.

Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Paper and pens or pencils
- Optional: Timepiece with seconds, and a chime

Preparation

- Set out the chalice.
- Write this covenant on newsprint, and set aside:
 - We each promise to:
 - speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
 - listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others.
 - actively resist making assumptions about one another.
 - be mindful of “taking space and making space” to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak and to listen.
 - expect and accept non-closure.
 - respect the confidentiality of personal information and stories shared here.
- Write on newsprint and set aside:

- What religious or spiritual practices are now, or have been, meaningful in your life that connect you to the living earth? How do they connect you to other people?
- Optional: Write on newsprint and set aside the first and seventh [UU Principles](#): (1) The inherent worth and dignity of every person; (7) Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Note: The Principles appear in the front matter of *Singing the Living Tradition* and *Singing the Journey*.
- Optional: Prepare a handout or an email of the resources suggested in the What's Next/Closing section.

Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Say, "Our chalice lighting words are from Jennifer Nordstrom's concluding reflection, pages 154-155." Then, read:

I hold a vision of Beloved Community beyond the horizon of my knowing. In this community of human and nonhuman beings, we live in integrity with each other and the Earth. We work together to nourish and sustain life. We eat well, but do not take more than we need from each other or the Earth. We have diverse, flourishing cultures that cooperate with respect, and learn from one another without prejudice or hierarchy. We live free from violence or coercion. We celebrate every day and appreciate the joys of living. We laugh. While we help one another die well, we do not help death come before its time. We use our minds to the benefit of life, not death. We create music and art. We tell stories. We live in tune with the rhythms of the earth: the seasons, day and night. We live in tune with each other. We live in tune with the rhythms of our own hearts.

I don't know how to get there, but I know the first few moves in that direction.

Say, "The book, and our discussion here, will explore some of those "first few moves in that direction."

Light the chalice.

Introductions and Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)

Invite each person to introduce themselves briefly and share what brought them to this discussion. Post the covenant points you have written on newsprint. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on the newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement. If this group will have future meetings, keep this newsprint for next time.

First Impressions (10 minutes)

Ask, “What stays with you after reading *Justice on Earth?*” Invite participants to share an initial response to the book. Ask them to speak one at a time, without interruption; say that it is fine to pass.

Reflection and Sharing: Facing Our Theological and Cultural Heritage (20 minutes)

Share this quote from Paula Cole Jones’ essay about the history of the environmental justice movement, from page 13:

It has long been understood that unpopular environmental decisions often follow the “path of least resistance,” but we should expand that assertion to include the path of structured or institutional discrimination. To say that the decisions follow the path of least resistance takes the focus off of the systemic nature of oppression; specifically, who gets to make decisions. There are many examples of communities of color and low-income communities that are at risk due to pollution from the placement of industrial sites, environmental waste disposal, resource retrieval or use, and air and water pollution. These communities often bear the negative historical impact of racial and ethnic segregation, income inequality, and limited access to resources and policy makers.

Say:

In her essay, Sheri Prud’homme points out that environmental injustice and oppression have theological roots in the idea from dominant culture Christianity that “has placed humans on the apex of a pyramid of life, privileging some humans over others as well as all humans (especially US citizens) over the rest of life in the planet’s ecosystem.” She explores ecotheology, which reimagines the idea of God: Each

living thing is an expression of and participant in God, and all beings are in relationship with one another.

Engage participants in a discussion, asking:

- How have the theological and philosophical ideas that undergird our economic system and our dominant US culture led to the environmental crisis the world faces today?

Allow 10 minutes for this part of the discussion. Then, ask participants to reflect quietly as you ask:

- Have you, day-to-day, witnessed people behaving as though the well being of some humans is more important than the well being of others?
- Have you, in your day-to-day living, acted as though the well being of some is more important than the well-being of others?
- What theological and philosophical ideas have you been carrying? How have they influenced your attitudes and choices?

Invite any who choose to share insights from their reflection.

Optional Break for 90-minute Session, or Skip to Closing for a 45-Minute Session

If your session is planned for 90 minutes, you may wish to offer a break. Be mindful that any break will extend the session that many minutes.

If this meeting is planned to last 45 minutes only and the group will regather at a later date to complete the discussion, skip to the Closing now. When you regather, repeat the chalice-lighting, repost and reaffirm the group's covenant agreement, and summarize the previous meeting (this one), before you resume the discussion. You may use the Closing a second time to conclude the second 45-minute session.

Discussion and Sharing: Grounded in Our Faith (15 minutes)

Note that *Justice on Earth* highlights instances where injustice toward people with less money, less power, and more political vulnerability is inherent in misuse of our Earth. Share these examples: contaminated water in West Virginia poisons drinking water relied on by the state's poorest, most powerless communities; hazardous landfills unwanted elsewhere

threaten to contaminate groundwater in the poorest, majority black, rural North Carolina communities; coal export waste products irreparably damage the ecology of the Lummi people in the Pacific Northwest, cutting off natural resources and interrupting a sacred way of life. Say that by making our fight about people, communities, and relationships—not just about air, oceans, and non-human life—the authors show us a deeper, prophetic approach to environmental activism.

Say that the book explores how a UU faith can shape an environmental justice sensibility, in two ways. First, how can our faith shape our understanding of how race, class, and environmental issues intersect? Second, how can our faith shape our commitment, as Unitarian Universalists, to environmental causes? Invite participants to recall from the book ways our faith might ground our environmental justice work. You might offer these examples:

We can come to know the world as paradise when our hearts and souls are reborn through the arduous and tender task of living rightly with one another and the earth.

—Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Saving Paradise*, quoted by Sheri Prud'homme, “Ecotheology,” page 32

...the intertwined devastation of the Earth and dehumanizing living conditions for the most vulnerable people, often women, children, and peoples of color, are morally and aesthetically ugly. Both justice and beauty are violated when what is inherently valuable is devalued, defaced, or destroyed.

—Alison Downie, “A Spirituality of Openness,” quoted by Prud'homme, page 33

...our theology tells us to choose faith and hope and deep, abiding love over fear—to act from the knowledge that we will save what is of great worth and sacredness to us. Let us refuse to be made immobile by fear and despair, instead choosing one more faithful action in every moment.

—Adam Robersmith, “Cherishing Our World,” page 54

Faith-rooted solidarity is not transactional. It might be described as universal relational because its adherents say, “I know that my well-being is totally and irrevocably tied up with yours. My liberation is dependent on yours.”

—Pam Sparr, “Transforming Unitarian Universalist Culture,” page 84

Say:

Let's examine how our Unitarian Universalism grounds and inspires us as justice-makers. It will be different for each of us, because UUs hold such rich diversity of religious belief and expression in UUism.

Post and read aloud: "What religious or spiritual practices are now, or have been, meaningful in your life that connect you to the living earth? How do they connect you to other people?"

Ask participants to pair up or to reflect on their own with paper and pen if they prefer. Tell them they will have six minutes for reflection (three minutes each, if they are working with a partner). Say that they will be invited to share afterward with the larger group but that, of course, anyone may pass.

Sound a chime to begin the time of reflection. Let pairs know when three minutes have passed so they can switch speakers. After six minutes, regather the group. Invite anyone who wishes to share.

Discussion: A Moral Imperative (20 minutes)

For the following discussion, you may wish to post the first and seventh UU Principles.

Read these words, adapted from Pam Sparr's essay, "Transforming Unitarian Universalist Culture," in *Justice on Earth* (page 83).

Many of our congregations have led the way in their communities by purchasing renewable energy, replacing lightbulbs, weatherizing buildings, and installing solar panels. These are important steps to demonstrate how to reduce carbon emissions, but...they do not require us to change our relationships of privilege and power to other people. They do not require us to change our economic or political system. They hint at but do not directly speak the language of morality.

Lead the discussion with these questions:

- How might introducing a Unitarian Universalist "language of morality" change how we perceive environmental causes? How can we address environmental causes as Unitarian Universalists?
- *Justice on Earth* suggests that, through a UU lens, we must see: There is no environmental justice without justice for people and communities of color and

economic poverty, in our country and globally, who are most vulnerable to effects of climate change and environmental abuse. When we let our faith guide us, how are we more sharply accountable to those people most harmed by environmental damage?

- What might be a UU language of morality that can broaden and strengthen our advocacy for environmental justice?

What's Next/Closing (15 minutes)

Remind the group that the essays make clear that for Unitarian Universalists to embrace accountability for intersectional “justice on earth,” we must also embrace collective action.

Say:

Many UU faith congregations and groups are distanced from communities who bear the brunt of environmental injustice. We will need new relationships and partnerships to better understand and follow the lead of those already engaged in this work. Likely partner organizations for your group or congregation are ones already working on racial and economic justice issues—not necessarily on environmental issues—locally or regionally.

Invite the group to begin a conversation about actions to take individually or together.

Share the following opportunities with the group. If you have compiled these as a handout, distribute it now.

- Explore the new [UUA Green Sanctuary](#) program. If your congregation or group has not recently become accredited or renewed your accreditation, note that the Green Sanctuary program has defined a new path that includes partnership work for environmental justice. From the Green Sanctuary page: *Given the increasingly urgent need for courageous action to fight climate change and the environmental and human injustices that it causes (climate justice), we now require a new level of congregational engagement. We envision Green Sanctuary congregations that are infused with a spirit and passion to join others in life- and planet-saving work. We recognize that our work must be intersectional, as described by the worldwide Sustainable Development Goals that start with the elimination of poverty, and for which climate action is an integral part.*

- Visit the website of [UU Ministry for Earth](#), whose mission is “to empower and resource you for faith-grounded and accountable action for climate and environmental justice.” Check out the [Environmental Justice Practitioners Network \(EJPN\)](#), a community of Unitarian Universalists focused on learning about—and taking action at—the intersections of racial, class, and ecological justice. Consider gathering a team from your congregation to attend EJPN monthly webinars and participate in opportunities for connecting and reflecting with other activists. View [recorded webinars](#) spotlighting the work of activists working at the intersections of environmental, racial, and economic justice. Among the webinars are (1) a conversation with UUA co-moderator Elandria Williams, who is training director at PeoplesHub, an interactive online training school that supports people and groups where they live; and (2) a presentation from Kandi Mossett (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara – North Dakota), lead organizer with Indigenous Environmental Network and Indigenous Rising, about the long history of injustice that led to the Dakota Access Pipeline project, oil drilling on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, and several others. Gather a group to view the webinars and learn together.
- Learn about the environmental justice demands of [The Poor People’s Campaign](#). This national campaign for moral revival states: “We have a fundamental right to clean water, air, and a healthy environment and public resources to monitor, penalize, and reverse the polluting impacts of fossil fuel industries.” Learn more about this work by reading [“A Leader in the War on Poverty Opens a New Front: Pollution”](#) (*New York Times*, August 24, 2018). Find out how you can get involved.

A group of seven or fewer participants can discuss next steps together, including further learning, coalition and partnership building, and action. If the group is larger, you may wish to form two or more groups for discussion of next steps; invite each group to record their ideas and questions.

As you share ideas, assess the desire of the group to continue. Collect email addresses. If appropriate, invite individual participants to commit to specific actions and timelines.

To close, share these words from UUA co-moderator Elandria Williams, adapted from an April 26, 2018 webinar, and urge people to take the time to watch the entire webinar:

We are at a “Which side are you on?” ...moment, where we have to [decide]... “Are we radical revolutionaries wanting transformation?” or are we people who just think the Earth should be a nice happy place? We are at that moment. And because we’re at that moment, we’ve got to be ready to... stand with communities how they see fit, and moving in the direction they want to go, and we’re ready to go alongside because we believe in it and believe in them.

Then, invite participants to share a closing word or phrase about what they are taking away from their reading and discussion.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

Three-Session Version

Goals

- Invite responses to *Justice on Earth*.
- Explore religious reasons for individual Unitarian Universalists and our faith movement to work at the intersections of race, class, and environmental justice issues.
- Challenge participants to act from their Unitarian Universalist values, beginning or deepening partnerships and learning to follow the lead of those who bear the brunt of environmental injustice.

Session 1: The Nature of the Problem

Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Notepad for facilitator notes and pen or pencil
- Optional: Computer with Internet access and a large monitor

Preparation

- Set out the chalice.
- Write this covenant on newsprint, and set aside:
 - We each promise to:
 - speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
 - listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others.
 - actively resist making assumptions about one another.
 - be mindful of “taking space and making space” to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak and to listen.
 - expect and accept non-closure.
 - respect the confidentiality of personal information and stories shared here.
- Write on newsprint, and set aside:
 - What has “nature” meant in your life?
 - What have been your experiences with the natural world?
 - Has your relationship with nature been a solitary or communal experience?
 - What are any poems, music, visual art pieces, photographs, or religious texts about nature that are meaningful to you? Do those texts or creative expressions separate humanity from nature, or include human beings in nature?

Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Say, “Our chalice lighting words were written by Shane Bernardo, a long-life Detroit resident active within the grassroots food justice movement in Detroit. He was quoted in the book, *Emergent Strategy*, by adrienne maree brown.” Then read:

I’ve found that our immediate environments are mirrors for the spiritual turmoil inside of us that we inherited from our forebears. By reclaiming our relationship with the Earth, we can then start healing ourselves and our communities from the inside out and from the bottom up.

Light the chalice.

Introductions and Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)

Invite each person to introduce themselves briefly and share what brought them to this discussion. Post the covenant points you have written on newsprint and propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on the newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement.

If this group will meet again, keep this newsprint for next time.

First Impressions (10 minutes)

Offer participants two or three minutes to reflect on what stays with them after reading *Justice on Earth*, and then ask them to briefly share an initial response to the book. Ask participants to share one at a time, without interruption; say that it is fine to pass. Jot down participants’ initial responses so that you can return to them in a later session.

Sharing: Our Relationship to Nature (30 minutes)

Share this reading from the essay by Sofia Betancourt, from page 41 of the book:

Human dignity and worth were not the primary environmental concerns of thinkers like Emerson and Thoreau, who were much more interested in what could be gained from an isolated communion with the natural world. Their abolitionist efforts, which are easily relatable to our first Principle, were not part of their connection to a wilderness that allows us to distance ourselves from the ugliness of everyday society in order to access a deeper truth. Consequently, we have inherited a theological vision of environmental

engagement that is too often situated in a natural imaginary, a pristine landscape untrammled and unpopulated by human beings save perhaps with one theologian or one person of faith actively communing with a sublime part of nature...

Unitarian Universalists are engaged with the work of environmental justice that seeks to repair environmental devastation while at the same time addressing gross injustices within the human family. Yet, the majority of us who live in the United States are also steeped in an environmental culture shaped by thinkers like Emerson and Thoreau.

Invite participants to reflect on these words and to consider how their own story of connection to nature has unfolded. Invite them to take a couple of minutes to reflect in silence, and then to share, as they so moved, a personal story that highlights the evolution of their own experiences with the natural world and their perceptions of what “nature” means. Post the questions you have written, telling participants that the questions may be helpful (or not) as they find their story to share.

Then, invite people to share as they are moved, without interruption or cross talk, simply hearing one another. Ask participants to limit their shared story to two or three minutes so everyone has a change to share.

Optional Break

You may wish to offer a break. Be mindful that a break will extend the 90-minute session.

Discussion: Facing Our Theological and Cultural Heritage (15 minutes)

Share this quote from Paula Cole Jones’ essay about the history of the environmental justice movement, from page 13:

It has long been understood that unpopular environmental decisions often follow the “path of least resistance,” but we should expand that assertion to include the path of structured or institutional discrimination. To say that the decisions follow the path of least resistance takes the focus off of the systemic nature of oppression; specifically, who gets to make decisions. There are many examples of communities of color and low-income communities that are at risk due to pollution from the placement of industrial sites, environmental waste disposal, resource retrieval or use, and air and water pollution. These communities often bear the negative historical impact of racial and

ethnic segregation, income inequality, and limited access to resources and policy makers.

Say:

In her essay, Sheri Prud'homme points out that environmental injustice and oppression has its theological roots in the idea from dominant culture Christianity that "has placed humans on the apex of a pyramid of life, privileging some humans over others as well as all humans (especially US citizens) over the rest of life in the planet's ecosystem." She explores ecotheology, which reimagines the idea of God: each living thing is an expression of and participant in God, and all beings are in relationship with one another.

Engage participants in a discussion, asking:

- How have the theological and philosophical ideas that undergird our economic system and dominant US culture resulted in the environmental crisis the world faces today?

Then ask:

- How would a revisioning of God or the holy, drawing from the ideas of ecotheology, challenge or change the decisions we make as individuals and as communities?

Discussion: Embracing an Intersectional Approach (15 minutes)

Say:

Several of the authors in *Justice on Earth* point to both the first and seventh Principles as key theological and ethical commitment for Unitarian Universalists. They call us to lift up and embrace both "the inherent worth and dignity of every person" and "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." Calling us to an intersectional approach to environmental justice work, book co-editor Jennifer Nordstrom, citing the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, asks us to uncover and challenge patterns of power as they manifest in environmental injustices and to connect "the environment to the various communities of people that live in it."

Lead a discussion, asking:

- How would embracing an intersectional approach to environmental justice change the way in which you and your congregation affirm and promote Unitarian Universalist values?
- What might you say to those who perceive environmental justice work to be in competition for congregational time and attention with racial and economic justice work?

Closing (5 minutes)

Introduce the closing reading, saying,

In his essay, Adam Robersmith pushed back against doomsday rhetoric about our current environmental crisis, turning instead to the theology of Universalist forebear Hosea Ballou. Applying Ballou's lens, he asks whether environmental sin is pleasurable.

Share Robersmith's words, from page 51:

Are we somehow freer by disrespecting the Earth on which we live? Is this sin fun? Is it somehow enjoyable to avoid wind and solar technologies? Is environmental sin—ecological degradation—a pleasure?

Moreover, is it a pleasure to destroy the homelands and livelihoods of others through the effects of environmental sin? To poison food-bearing lands and waters through pollution, and then decide that these actions are harmless because the people they affect are African or Inuit or South Asian or poor or far away? No. It becomes impossible to see it that way when you look at the effects on the Earth and its peoples from the perspective of harming things and people that are precious and beloved, full of worth and dignity, and essentially good.

Remind the group that this is the first of three meetings. Confirm the day, date, time, and place to reconvene for Session 2. Make sure to set aside the covenant that the participants affirmed so you can post and quickly review it at the start of the next meeting.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

Session 2: Finding Our Religious Ground

Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Covenant from Session 1
- Optional: Timepiece with seconds, and a chime

Preparation

- Post the covenant from Session 1.
- Set out the chalice.
- Write on newsprint and post:
We light this chalice to celebrate Unitarian Universalism.
This is the church of the open mind.
This is the church of the helping hands.
This is the church of the loving heart.
Together we care for our earth and work for friendship and peace in our world.
- Write on newsprint, and set aside:
 - What religious or spiritual practices are now, or have been, meaningful in your life that connect you to the living earth? How do they connect you to other people?
- Write on newsprint, and set aside:
 - How might introducing a Unitarian Universalist “language of morality” change how we perceive environmental causes? How can we address environmental causes as Unitarian Universalists?
 - *Justice on Earth* suggests that, through a UU lens, we must see: There is no environmental justice without justice for people and communities of color

and economic poverty, in our country and globally, who are most vulnerable to effects of climate change and environmental abuse. When we let our faith guide us, how are we more sharply accountable to those people most harmed by environmental damage?

- What might be a UU language of morality that can broaden and strengthen our advocacy for environmental justice?
- Optional: Write on newsprint and set aside the first and seventh [UU Principles](#): (1) The inherent worth and dignity of every person, and (7) Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Note: The Principles appear in the front matter of *Singing the Living Tradition* and *Singing the Journey*.

Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Invite everyone to help open the session with a version of a chalice-lighting often used in Unitarian Universalist children’s worship. Indicate the posted words and demonstrate the gestures that go with each spoken line. Then, lead the group to say the words in unison.

We light this chalice to celebrate Unitarian Universalism.	<i>When saying "Unitarian," cup your right hand in a U shape. When saying "Universalism," cup your left hand in a U shape.</i>
This is the church of the open mind.	<i>Touch your hands to your head, then open them outward.</i>
This is the church of the helping hands.	<i>Hold your hands out in front of you, palms up.</i>
This is the church of the loving heart.	<i>Cross your hands flat over your heart.</i>
Together we care for our earth and work for friendship and peace in our world.	

Check-In (10 minutes)

Invite participants to re-introduce themselves and, if they wish, briefly describe an intersection of environmental, racial, and economic justice issues that they have experienced or learned about since the group last met.

Review the covenant from Session 1.

Reflection and Sharing (25 minutes)

Say that today's opening words were chosen for the simplicity with which they express an aspect of UU faith. Explain:

We believe we are called to use our open mind, serving hands, and loving heart to care for the earth and pursue justice. Within our movement people hold many different theologies and many different ideas about what it means to be “religious,” yet, implicit in our faith is deed over creed, the need for action to bring our faith to life.

Note that *Justice on Earth* highlights instances where injustice toward people with less money, less power, and more political vulnerability is inherent in misuse of our Earth. Share these examples: contaminated water in West Virginia poisons drinking water relied on by the state's poorest, most powerless communities; hazardous landfills unwanted elsewhere threaten to contaminate groundwater in the poorest, majority black, rural North Carolina communities; coal export waste products irreparably damage the ecology of the Lummi people in the Pacific Northwest, cutting off natural resources and interrupting a sacred way of life. Say that by making our fight about people, communities, and relationships—not just about air, oceans, and non-human life—the authors show us a deeper, prophetic approach to environmental activism.

Say that the book explores how a UU faith can shape an environmental justice sensibility, in two ways. First, how can our faith shape our understanding of how race, class, and environmental issues intersect? Second, how can our faith shape our commitment, as Unitarian Universalists, to environmental causes? Invite participants to recall from the book ways our faith might ground our environmental justice work. You might offer these examples:

We can come to know the world as paradise when our hearts and souls are reborn through the arduous and tender task of living rightly with one another and the earth.

—Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Saving Paradise*, quoted by Sheri Prud'homme, “Ecotheology,” page 32

...the intertwined devastation of the Earth and dehumanizing living conditions for the most vulnerable people, often women, children, and peoples of color, are morally and aesthetically ugly. Both justice and beauty are violated when what is inherently valuable is devalued,

defaced, or destroyed.

—Alison Downie, “A Spirituality of Openness,” quoted by Prud’homme, page 33

...our theology tells us to choose faith and hope and deep, abiding love over fear—to act from the knowledge that we will save what is of great worth and sacredness to us. Let us refuse to be made immobile by fear and despair, instead choosing one more faithful action in every moment.

—Adam Robersmith, “Cherishing Our World,” page 54

Faith-rooted solidarity is not transactional. It might be described as universal relational because its adherents say, “I know that my well-being is totally and irrevocably tied up with yours. My liberation is dependent on yours.”

—Pam Sparr, “Transforming Unitarian Universalist Culture,” page 84

Say:

Let’s examine how our Unitarian Universalism grounds and inspires us as justice-makers. It will be different for each of us, because UUs hold such rich diversity of religious belief and expression in UUism.

Post and read aloud: “What religious or spiritual practices are now, or have been, meaningful in your life that connect you to the living earth? How do they connect you to other people?”

Ask participants to pair up or to reflect on their own with paper and pen if they prefer. Tell them they will have six minutes for reflection (three minutes each, if they are working with a partner). Say that they will be invited to share afterward with the larger group but that, of course, anyone may pass.

Sound a chime to begin the time of reflection. Let pairs know when three minutes have passed so they can switch speakers. After six minutes, regather the group. Invite anyone who wishes to briefly share.

Now, say, “Think about a religious or spiritual practice that came to mind for you. How does it show your beliefs? What concept does it represent of the universe, of God, of a paradise on earth or somewhere else?”

Invite participants to return to their partner (or turn to pen and paper) to consider this question.

Sound a chime to begin, and again at two minutes so pairs can switch speakers. After four minutes, regather the group. Invite volunteers to comment.

Optional Break

You may wish to offer a break. Be mindful that any break will extend the 90-minute session.

Guided Meditation (15 minutes)

Ask participants what they noticed about how spiritual practices were highlighted in the book. Point out that essays by Kathleen McTigue speak explicitly about spiritual practice. Essays by Adam Robersmith, Peggy Clarke, and others seem to suggest a religious or spiritual nourishment, as well as expression, can come from the actions we take for environmental justice.

Say:

Kathleen McTigue takes us to our internal life waters of spirit, suggesting the value of spiritual practice to build our religious qualities, such as “awareness, patience, and compassion.” She explains:

... [Three] essential threads weave through all spiritual practices: intention, attention, and repetition. Intention is the deliberate engagement of our will, in a practice that nurtures a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves. Attention means we exist only in the present moment... Repetition allows our centering activity to form part of the rhythm of our day.

— Kathleen McTigue, “Drawing on the Deep Waters,” page 68

Invite the group to enter the contemplative spiritual practice as described by McTigue and explore it as a way to find spiritual ground for action for justice.

Invite everyone to sit comfortably with their feet placed on the floor. Invite them to close their eyes or gaze softly on one, chosen spot.

Read slowly, pausing as indicated:

Feel your feet connect to earth, to ground, to depth of earth. How solid it feels! But you needn't stay put. When you connect to earth, you are connected to every living thing.

[Pause.]

Follow your feet and explore, skimming across the planet's top layer. You'll stumble on roots, then, thrust up to visit trees whose leaves co-create the air we breathe.

[Pause.]

Move to riverbeds and feel the flow wash over you. Are salmon flashing or turtles drifting over your back? Who lives on the riverbank? What people are there? What are they doing?

[Pause.]

Is the river water safe for drinking? Clean for irrigation? Or is something wrong with it? Is the water making people sick? Travel against the flow to find out who is upstream. Has someone got a factory there, dumping waste that hurts the people who depend on the river?

[Pause.]

Let the river carry you away, now drift down, down, through the Earth's hot center, and surface someplace else on Earth. What is around you? Who lives here?

[Pause.]

How is nature supporting people? Are ugly things happening? Things that damage the Earth, life on it, the lives of people perhaps far from the source of the damage. Visit the ugliness. A waste sewage plant. A floating plastic garbage island. Chemical waste leaching into earth's soil. How are people hurting because of these? Observe. Notice.

[Pause.]

Now come back to yourself, to your feet which are always on the ground.

Do not despair. But do not forget.

What do you need to tell others about the hidden harms to the Earth and we who share it? Will some people already know? Can you help them tell others?

Sound a chime to end the meditation. Ask participants to return to being present with the group. Offer a minute or two for participants to jot any notes from the meditation or to briefly report to the group what they witnessed or felt.

Discussion: A Moral Imperative (25 minutes)

Read these words, adapted from Pam Sparr's essay, "Transforming Unitarian Universalist Culture," in *Justice on Earth* (page 83).

Many of our congregations have led the way in their communities by purchasing renewable energy, replacing lightbulbs, weatherizing buildings, and installing solar panels. These are important steps to demonstrate how to reduce carbon emissions, but...they do not require us to change our relationships of privilege and power to other people. They do not require us to change our economic or political system. They hint at but do not directly speak the language of morality.

Say:

Sparr seems to say that while actions to protect or restore the environment are important, they cannot fulfill a larger challenge to which our Unitarian Universalist faith also guides us. She suggests there is a moral imperative, which we have not fully articulated, that compels us to seek environmental justice through changing our very systems and culture.

For the following discussion, you may wish to post the first and seventh UU Principles. Then, lead a discussion using these questions:

- How might introducing a Unitarian Universalist "language of morality" change how we perceive environmental causes? How can we address environmental causes as Unitarian Universalists?
- *Justice on Earth* suggests that, through a UU lens, we must see: There is no environmental justice without justice for people and communities of color and economic poverty, in our country and globally, who are most vulnerable to effects of climate change and environmental abuse. When we let our faith guide us, how are we more sharply accountable to those people most harmed by environmental damage?
- What might be a UU language of morality that can broaden and strengthen our advocacy for environmental justice?

What's Next/Closing (10 minutes)

Say:

Collectively, the essays urge us to find our spiritual and religious ground for doing this work. What could that look like? Are there contemplative practices we might explore for ourselves? Is there organizing, protest, or communications work we might undertake as intentional religious practice? The essays suggest many ways to help us publicly activate our religious, Unitarian Universalist selves in environmental work. Paula Cole Jones guides us to act from our values; she asks, "What can you do to build relationships, build trust, build partnerships, and make a difference?" What aspects of coming into right relationship with others might be expressed as a religious practice?

Invite participants to share ideas for explicitly religious values that can support an intersectional environmental justice movement and practices or actions they might hope to incorporate into their lives which affirm, celebrate, and promote those values.

Offer these closing words (from page 147) which close the book's final essay, "The Journey of Partnering for Justice," by Deborah J. Cruz with Alex Kapitan:

The Earth does not belong to us. We belong to the Earth.
Whatever befalls the Earth
befalls the sons and daughters of the Earth.
We did not weave the web of life,
we are merely strands in it.
Whatever we do to that web, we do to ourselves.
—attributed to Si'ahl (Seattle), hereditary chief of the Suquamish and Duwamish
Nations in the Pacific Northwest

Remind the group that this is the second of three meetings. Confirm the day, date, time, and place to reconvene for Session 3. Make sure to set aside the covenant that the participants affirmed so you can post and quickly review it at the start of the next meeting.

Thank participants. Extinguish the chalice.

Session 3: Embracing Accountability and Becoming Partners

Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Covenant from Session 1
- Optional: Several copies of *Justice on Earth* for volunteers to take part in opening reading

Preparation

- Post the covenant from Session 1.
- Set out the chalice.
- Write on newsprint, and set aside:
 - What first-hand experiences (or stories heard from others) came to mind as you read the book? Do you now understand some of those experiences and stories differently?
 - If you were to write about the particular problems and issues of a place familiar to you, what would you write about? Where does environmental injustice intersect with human injustice in the story you will tell?
- Optional: Prepare a handout or an email listing the resources suggested in the What's Next section.

Chalice Lighting (10 minutes)

Tell the group you will share opening words from Peggy Clarke's essay, "Eating the Earth" (pages 111-112). Optional: Ask for one or more volunteers to read the passage, then provide text and assign sections to read.

Light the chalice, then read (or have volunteers read):

When I buy bananas in New York, it's so easy to forget all the parts of the food chain that provide me that nineteen-cent banana. But forgetting doesn't absolve me of my accountability. I am accountable to the farm workers who picked those bananas, earning less than a living wage for one of the five major corporations that harvest bananas for US consumption. I'm accountable to the women who drop those bananas into vats of cancer-causing chemicals to slow the ripening. When I buy a banana for nineteen cents, I'm accountable to those women when they get sick from those chemicals and have no health care. I'm accountable to the children they leave behind.

I'm accountable to the workers who get those green bananas in boxes and those who drive the trucks. I'm accountable to the children in the neighborhoods those diesel trucks drive through each day on their way to deliver those bananas. I'm accountable for polluted air and the burning of fossil fuels and the carbon that is overheating the Earth.

I'm accountable to the trees that were felled, the habitats lost, the animals who died to clear land to make room for the supermarket where I shop, and for the parking lot hundreds of cars drive into every day to buy those bananas. I'm not responsible for every piece of this system, but as part of the system, as the end goal of the system—which is to sell to the consumer—I am accountable for how food gets to my plate.

Check-In (10 minutes)

Invite participants to re-introduce themselves and, if they wish, briefly describe an intersection of environmental, racial, and economic justice issues that they have experienced or learned about since the group last met.

Review the covenant from Session 1.

Why It's About Race and Class (30 minutes)

Say that, with imagination, we can follow Peggy Clarke into a global scenario into environmental discrimination that is attached to her purchase of a single banana. Other authors make the case with examples of harm much closer to home. Share these words from Manish Mishra-Marzetti's introduction:

As... urban centers became impoverished communities with relatively less political clout, policy decisions were made...that led to poor and non-white communities becoming the

destination for the waste and pollution of more affluent, typically white, communities. Locating power plants, waste facilities, and pollution-generating industries in minority and lower-income settings became the national norm. This further depressed housing prices in those areas, creating a whole new set of...problems: illnesses related to pollutants, troubles with water quality, and a rise in cancer and childhood asthma rates, among others.

... —to be in Detroit, standing on the sidewalk as a garbage truck from Grosse Pointe, an affluent community approximately 15 miles away, pulls in to drop off its trash in an African-American and Latinx neighborhood—left my heart in deep pain...Standing in the parking lot of a public elementary school, the student body of which is 90 percent African American, smelling the fumes from the incinerator situated next door, is enough to bring tears to one's eyes.

Say, “In the book, Mishra-Marzetti and others describe how they came to understand the intersection of environmental injustice with racial and economic injustice. Each describes particular places, people, events, and issues that led them to make those connections.” Say you will guide participants to reflect on their own experiences, and what the particulars are that have helped them to understand how race, class, and the environment are linked.

Post the questions you have written. Read them aloud, slowly. Then invite participants to reflect quietly for two or three minutes. Then, invite participants to share their thoughts as they are moved.

Once everyone who wants to has shared, say, “In our opening reading, Peggy Clark writes about being accountable for how the food gets to her plate.” Ask, “What does the story you told about environmental, racial, and economic injustice have to do with your own day-to-day life? Can you name some of the ways the story you just shared calls you to accountability?”

Optional Break

You may wish to offer a break. Be mindful that any break will extend the 90-minute session.

What's Next (30 minutes)

Remind the group that the essays make clear that for Unitarian Universalists to embrace accountability for intersectional “justice on earth” we must embrace collective action. Say:

Many UU faith congregations and groups are distanced from communities who bear the brunt of environmental injustice and will need new relationships and partnerships to better understand and follow the lead of those already engaged in this work. Mel Hoover and Rose Edington describe how the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Charleston, West Virginia leveraged and expanded existing relationships and partnerships to address a poisoned drinking water crisis in their region. Deborah J. Cruz, with Alex Kapitan, describe how Bellingham Unitarian Congregation developed an accountable partnership with Lummi Nation to support their successful efforts to stop the construction of a coal terminal that threatened Lummi fishing grounds. Likely partner organizations for your group or congregation are ones already working on racial and economic justice issues—not necessarily on environmental issues—locally or regionally.

Say that Paula Cole Jones’s essay, “The Formation of the Environmental Justice Movement,” suggests questions a committed UU group can begin to ask (pages 20-21). Invite participants to grab pen and paper, listen to the questions, and jot any answers that come to mind. Then, read aloud, pausing between questions:

Are environmental decisions in your community fair and equitable? Are they tied to voters’ rights issues in your community? Which communities are at risk? Who is at the table?

[pause]

What organizations have been formed by and for people of color and working class communities to address environmental racism and classism? What cases have been fought in your community? Which ones have been won and which still need attention?

[pause]

How can you partner with people of color in your community? What are the connections between environmental justice and climate justice? Who can you invite to speak with your organization?

[pause]

Say you will allow a little extra time for participants to reflect and write on this next, and final, question. Then say:

What can you do to build relationships, build trust, build partnerships, and make a difference?

After a minute or so, say that you will guide the group into conversation about actions to take individually or together. Share these opportunities with the group. If you have compiled these as a handout, distribute it now.

- Explore the new [UUA Green Sanctuary](#) program. If your congregation or group has not recently become accredited or renewed your accreditation, note that the Green Sanctuary program has defined a new path that includes partnership work for environmental justice. From the Green Sanctuary page: *Given the increasingly urgent need for courageous action to fight climate change and the environmental and human injustices that it causes (climate justice), we now require a new level of congregational engagement. We envision Green Sanctuary congregations that are infused with a spirit and passion to join others in life- and planet-saving work. We recognize that our work must be intersectional, as described by the worldwide Sustainable Development Goals that start with the elimination of poverty, and for which climate action is an integral part.*
- Visit the website of [UU Ministry for Earth](#), whose mission is “to empower and resource you for faith-grounded and accountable action for climate and environmental justice.” Check out the [Environmental Justice Practitioners Network \(EJPN\)](#), a Unitarian Universalist community focused on learning about—and taking action at—the intersections of racial, class, and ecological justice. Consider gathering a team from your congregation to attend EJPN monthly webinars and participate in opportunities for connecting and reflecting with other activists. View [recorded webinars](#) spotlighting the work of activists working at the intersections of environmental, racial, and economic justice. Among the webinars are 1) a conversation with UUA co-moderator Elandria Williams, who is training director at PeoplesHub, an interactive online training school that supports people and groups where they live, 2) a presentation from Kandi Mossett (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara – North Dakota), lead organizer with Indigenous Environmental Network and Indigenous Rising, about the

long history of injustice that led to oil drilling on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation and the Dakota Access Pipeline project, and several others. Gather a group to view the webinars and learn together.

- Learn about the environmental justice demands of [The Poor People's Campaign](#). This national campaign for moral revival states: "We have a fundamental right to clean water, air, and a healthy environment and public resources to monitor, penalize, and reverse the polluting impacts of fossil fuel industries." Learn more about this work by reading "[A Leader in the War on Poverty Opens a New Front: Pollution](#)" (*New York Times*, August 24, 2018). Find out how you can get involved.

A group of seven or fewer participants can discuss next steps together. With a larger group, have participants self-select groups of three to five to brainstorm further learning, coalition building, and action.

As you share ideas, assess the desire of the group to continue. Collect email addresses. If appropriate, invite individual participants to commit to specific actions and timelines.

Closing (10 minutes)

Share these words from Deborah J. Cruz, with Alex Kapitan, from page 144:

When it comes to environmental justice, the challenges we face as a species are enormous, complex, and backed by hundreds of years of history, as well as enormous wealth and power. There is no quick fix. Time, effort, and resources are needed to fully understand the social, environmental, economic, and spiritual complexities presented by fossil fuel export terminals, tar sands pipelines, fracking, coal mining, and so on, as well as the impacts on all human and natural communities. More time, effort, and resources will be necessary to craft culturally appropriate responses, alternatives, and solutions, which will be equally as complex.

Then, share these words from UUA co-moderator Elandria Williams, adapted from an April 26, 2018 webinar:

We are at a "Which side are you on?" ...moment, where we have to [decide]... "Are we radical revolutionaries wanting transformation?" or are we people who just think the Earth should be a nice happy place? We are at that moment. And because we're at that

moment, we've got to be ready to... stand with communities how they see fit, and moving in the direction they want to go, and we're ready to go alongside because we believe in it and believe in them.

Invite participants to share a closing word or phrase about what they are taking away from their reading and discussion.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.