

Being Present to Standing Rock

December 4, 2016

Peterborough Unitarian Universalist Church

Rev. Diana K. McLean

Welcome and Announcements: Anne

Good morning! My name is Anne Huberman, and I am a member of this congregation's Governing Board. It is my pleasure to welcome you this morning to the Peterborough Unitarian Universalist Church, where we gather to worship, nurture, witness, serve and inspire.

Our congregation welcomes everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity or religious background.

We want to extend an especially warm welcome to you if this is your first time here. We know and appreciate that it can be difficult to cross the threshold of a new church for the first time. We hope you will join us after the service for coffee and conversation in Parish Hall, through the door to my right. Please visit our Membership

Table while you are there for more information about our congregation, and to sign up to receive our weekly email updates!

Your order of service includes announcements about important events in the life of the congregation, and more information about us is available on our website. Please take special note of the information about the Peace Light event hosted by Union Congregational Church next Sunday evening, December 14th.

And now, as we prepare to enter into our time of worship, please make sure your cell phones are silenced.

Let us now enter our time of worship with music.

Opening Words - Diana

As we begin this morning's special worship service in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and those who have joined them in North Dakota this weekend, and as we continue to process what the results of last month's presidential election will mean for our nation, I offer you these words, a letter sent yesterday from Canadian Unitarian ministers to their colleagues here in the United States. It is titled "Answering the Call of Love: From Canadian Unitarians To Our Siblings in Spirit in the USA" and reads:

At many Unitarian Universalist gatherings around the globe, a chalice is lit as we come together. It is a symbol of our faith that combines two archetypes – a drinking vessel and a flame. Cups, goblets, and chalices have been used throughout history to symbolize the "partnership way" of being in community – sharing, generosity, sustenance and love. The flame symbolizes witness, sacrifice, testing, courage and illumination. The two were joined as a Unitarian symbol by an Austrian artist, Hans Deutsch, in 1941. It was an underground

symbol in occupied Europe – a promise of assistance for refugees escaping Nazi persecution. We use this symbol with honour and pride.

Our chalice flame is not spontaneous. It requires lighting. It requires determined people to step forward and strike the match. It takes whole communities to sustain that fire. We have entered a time of isolationism and nationalism in many parts of the world, an age when racism, bigotry and hate speech are becoming acceptable.

It is once again time for our chalice light to bring hope to those who are suffering, to serve as a rallying beacon for those who would promote our values and Principles. It will not be easy. There will be times when our light will go out and will need others to rekindle it.

As Canadian Unitarians, we envision a world in which our interdependence calls us to love and justice. We assure you that you are not alone—that we are with you. Together we can answer the call of love shoulder to shoulder – arm in arm with a desire for justice, equity and compassion. Together, we can be ever vigilant, lending moral and practical support to those who will suffer from extreme policies, laws and practices. We embrace and reclaim our flaming chalice as a powerful symbol of our proud tradition. We will stand strong, expressing our Unitarian Universalist values to all who ask, answering the call of love in every way we can.

Together let us keep our chalice light burning bright in North America and the world!

In faith from the Canadian Unitarian Council National Voice Team

Sometimes we need to hear that. We are not alone. We are never alone. "We will stand strong, expressing our Unitarian Universalist values to all who ask, answering the call of love in every way we can."

Come, let us worship together.

Please rise in body or spirit and join me in singing Hymn #73 in our grey hymnal, "Chant for the Seasons. We will sing only the Winter verse, and then we will read our unison affirmation, which is printed in your order of service.

Time for All Ages - Char

Candles of Joy and Sorrow - Diana

We arrive today, as we do every week, with both joys and sorrows in our hearts, and part of the the promise we make to each other is that we will help celebrate the joys and bear the sorrows.

I'm going to begin by lighting the first candle today, in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux people and all who have joined them in the fight to protect the water and land threatened by the Dakota Access Pipeline. As we gather here this morning, three groups are converging at the camp, despite the inhospitable conditions common in winter in North Dakota. It is the second time a call has gone out for clergy and other people of all faiths to come join in prayerful, peaceful witness at the camp, and many Unitarian Universalists are among those who responded. This weekend, there are also a couple thousand military veterans self-deploying, coming to place themselves between the water protectors and the militarized police. As a result of that movement, there was also a request for trained chaplains coming to support those veterans and others at the camp. Unitarian Universalists are among those chaplains, including Rev.

Shayna Appel, who was the interim pastor before my arrival here. I light the candle for Shayna, for all the other Unitarian Universalists and other people of faith being present in North Dakota at this very moment, and for all the water protectors and their efforts.

After I've lit that first candle, if you have a personal joy or sorrow that you would like to share this morning, please come forward, light a candle either on the candelabra or one of the trays of tealights, and share briefly what is in your heart. You may also choose to light a candle in silence.

(candles lit)

I light one final candle for all those joys and sorrows not ready to be, or needing to be, spoken aloud, though we carry them in the silent sanctuaries of our hearts.

Pastoral Prayer - Diana

Please join me in a spirit of meditation or prayer.

Spirit of Life and Love, God of many names and beyond naming,

For the water protectors and their allies in North Dakota, we pray.

For the veterans who have joined them and the chaplains serving those veterans, we pray.

We pray for all those who are taking courageous action in the face of oppression and violence.

We pray also for those who are the targets of messages of hate, including mosques across the country receiving identical handwritten letters containing threats.

We pray for all those who are hurting or afraid in our nation and in our world.

We pray that we might find the strength and courage to do something to lessen the pain and fear.

We pray that all people will know safety and freedom one day, and we pray that day will arrive soon.

Amen.

(sing Spirit of Life)

Candle for Social Justice - Julie Flood Page

#155 Circle Round for Freedom (one time through)

Introduction to the Offering - Diana

Generosity is one of the spiritual qualities we aspire to, and one of the practices we nurture in this community.

This week, as part of being present to Standing Rock, our offering (except for anything clearly marked as pledge payments) will be sent to the Bismarck-Mandan Unitarian Universalist Congregation, which has been doing outstanding work supporting the people of Standing Rock. That congregation, with 63 members and a half-time minister, Rev. Karen van Fossen, has answered the call of love. This is from their fundraising request on faithify.org:

The Bismarck-Mandan UU Congregation is a small and mighty progressive community in a conservative North Dakota. They answered a call to be faithful

allies to the Standing Rock Sioux back in April. First serving as a place to ship supplies and transport to the camps 40 miles south. Then Unitarian Universalists and other progressives starting arriving and needed help with physical logistics, mental & spiritual preparation and pastoral companionship. This is a lot to ask of a part time minister and a congregation of 63, particularly when the closest UU congregation is 200 miles away!

The Bismarck-Mandan UU Congregation has had numerous UUs from 16 states so far: Alaska, California, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. And more are coming! They are now working with the College of Social Justice to strengthen the pilgrimage journey.

The Bismarck-Mandan UU Congregation was the site of a community teach-in, hosting Winona LaDuke. Out of the teach in came the petition calling for an

Environmental Impact Statement. This small and mighty congregation wants to keep playing a role in getting the word out to the world as to what is going on at the Sacred Stone and Oceti Sakowin Camps.

Sometimes mission finds you, rather than you finding your mission. Every month they hold a Sunday service with a Water is Life theme. Please keep the momentum going over the harsh Dakota winter by joining with other UUs through this Faithify campaign to be sure their minister is compensated for the full time work she has dedicated on our behalf and on the behalf of justice.

Their Faithify campaign ended a few days ago, but they are still receiving donations as their work continues. By contributing to them, we join them in answering the call of love.

As the offering is collected, please give as generously as you are able.

Sermon: Being Present to Standing Rock - Diana

At 11:00 this morning our time, Interfaith Prayers will be taking place at the Oceti Sakowin (oh-chay-dee shah-koh-wee) camp in North Dakota. In solidarity with that event, this morning instead of a traditional sermon, I offer you the words of people who are there now or have been there already, including both indigenous leaders and Unitarian Universalists who have come at their invitation.

I begin with these words from Chief Arvol Looking Horse, 19th Generation Keeper of White Buffalo Calf Pipe Bundle, Spiritual Leader of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Nations, who extended the invitation for religious people to come to the camp this weekend:

“The hearts of all people’s faiths must now unite in believing we can change the path we are now on. We, from heart of Turtle Island, have a great message for

the world to unite for our children's future. Already we have witnessed many nations of life are now dying because of contamination: those that swim, those that crawl, those that fly, the plant nation, the four legged, and now the two legged.

We are asking the religious people to come and support our youth, to stand side by side with them, because they are standing in prayer. If you can find it in your heart, pray with them and stand beside them. The police department and National Guard would listen to each and every one of you.

This is a very serious time we are in. I know in my heart there are millions of people that feel this is long overdue. It is time that all of us become leaders to help protect the sacred upon Mother Earth. She is the source of life and not a resource.

In a Sacred Hoop of Life, where there is no ending and no beginning.”

Those of us who are unable to be physically present in North Dakota today were invited to hold prayer events in our locations across the nation, focusing our attention and our energy on those who are at the forefront of this resistance movement.

My friend and UU seminarian Greta Seidohl sent this as she traveled towards Standing Rock yesterday:

As we journey North on our pilgrimage to Standing Rock, I am struck by this land...

Vast and windblown.

Rich and open.

Stoic and raw.

My prayer is to carry the spirit of the land in my heart - open to listen to and learn the vastness of beauty and justice, with the strength of a windblown prairie.

Please join me, as you are willing and able, in prayer for the land, the water, & the lives they have birthed - how ever shall we repay them - the parents of us all.

Unitarian Universalist minister Reverend Allison Miller shared her experience of the camp, which may not be what you have seen on the news, on her Facebook page a few days ago. She wrote:

A glimpse of life at Oceti Sakowin, The Seven Council Fires of the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota:

This is a Prayerful, Ceremonial Camp-

- Words, prayers, and music of Native People's rise up throughout the day around the Sacred Fire
- So many people have come from around the country and around the globe to add their prayers in this communion of struggle

This is a Peaceful Camp-

- We are invited to move at all times with intention, practice, and commitment to non-violence in our thoughts, words, and deeds. (No cursing, weapons, alcohol, drugs, negative intentions towards another, etc.)
- Many days there is a non-violent direct action training to be extremely mindful about who represent and how we represent at all times

This is a Camp Dedicated to Protecting Water-

- Mni Wiconi [mnee wee-choh-nee] — Water is Life

- Water Protectors (not Protesters). Our shared purpose in coming together is to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline, which threatens the safety of the water supply for human and animal life. (Note: It was originally slated to pass by the town of Bismarck, but moved out of safety concern for the residents. Moving it just upstream of the reservation on land that does not belong to the U.S. is an example of environmental racism and colonization.)

This is a Camp Practicing De-centering Whiteness-

- This is an indigenous led camp where we follow and learn from the wisdom held by the elders and other indigenous leadership entrusted to run this cooperative camp. It is their home and others are welcomed guests.
- This is a place for white people to practice leaning into the discomfort of not deciding everything, not knowing everything, and not bending the culture and community to fit our needs.

This is a Camp Preparing for Winter-

- The Seven Council Fires have gathered together for the first time since the 1800s. It is a prayerful, peaceful, powerful presence. They are here to stay. They are connected, as we all are, to this land. Winter will not make them go away.

The intention to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline is firm.

- It is cold and getting colder. This is a working camp. Right now, people are creating more winterized structures with heating systems and more insulation for shelter, gathering places, kitchens, and the children's school.

As our opening hymn said, “winter is upon us”—and even more so, it is already upon the people living in tents and yurts in North Dakota. As Rev. Miller said, winter will not make them go away, but it will make their resistance efforts more challenging, and may reduce the number of allies showing up to support them.

Rev. Christina Sillari of Portland Maine wrote this prayer:

Oh Great Spirit,

we offer gratitude to be awake and alive today,
as we pray for the people [of] Standing Rock.

We ask you great spirit, and all who serve you
to keep safe the people of standing rock
to keep them warm and fed,
nourished not only with food and water
but with courage, strength, and support.

We pray for the children and elders in the camp,
for laying down their bodies and offering their spirits
for all that has been stolen from them,
their culture, their land, and their dignity.

We pray that the obstacles put before them,
the sound and light pollution in the evenings,

the cutting off of water and internet,
the use of weaponry that maims and harms,
the inhuman arrest and mistreatment of people,
and the defiling of burial grounds and sacred objects;
by the oil company, the state and local police, and our government,
be stopped and dissolved by the work of the people,
who are sending money and supplies,
who are volunteering in the camp,
who are signing petitions and calling their politicians,
and who are educating the public and holding vigils.
We pray for the elders of the more than 500 tribes,
who are working together to save the sacred land and water,
our scared water and land, that through their nonviolence,
through their songs and prayers of gratitude and forgiveness,
they do not lose hope and that we, who they see as their

brothers and sisters, do all that we can to help them.

For they are doing this work for all of us and for our planet,

so we must bow to them with deep humility and gratitude.

Blessed be!

I learned that yesterday some of the veterans were going before the tribal elders and asking forgiveness for years of abuse of American Indians by the United States government. That is a powerful image—veterans willing to be present not only to the current realities of the water protectors in North Dakota, but also to the historical reality of the oppression perpetrated by the government these veterans served against the indigenous people of this land. To add to the complexity, it is important to understand that these two groups—the military and the indigenous people—are anything but separate. American Indians serve in the United States military at a higher per capita rate than any other ethnic minority.

My friend and colleague Rev. Florence Caplow, who went to Standing Rock the first time a call for clergy went out, shared this prayer on a conference call for people planning solidarity actions this weekend:

We call out to the four directions
and to the power of life that flows through all things
to protect the lives of those at Standing Rock
to soften the hearts of the police so that violence is renounced
to awaken in our government officials the force of conscience
and to answer the prayers of people everywhere
and particularly the prayers of the traditional protectors of the Missouri River,
the Hunkpapa Lakota of Standing Rock,
that the black snake pipeline dies forever

on the plains of North Dakota

never to be revived.

Some of you had the opportunity to hear Winona LaDuke speak here in Peterborough or in Keene last week. LaDuke, a long-time activist for both indigenous rights and environmental justice, also delivered the Ware Lecture at the Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly in Minneapolis in 2010.

LaDuke wrote in an article published in Indian Country News on November 29th:

None of us know how this moment in history is going to work out. On December 4, thousands of military veterans are coming to support the people and the river—veterans of Iraq, Vietnam, and every war in between. I am interested how the Army Corps will speak with the veterans. The veterans join the thousands of elected officials, religious and cultural leaders who have come to stand with the

river and the people. In the end that's what will remain, long after Energy Transfer is bankrupt and the state of North Dakota has come to reckoning. The river will remain.

I am reminded [LaDuke writes] of a quote originating from Thunder Valley. "How long are you going to let others determine the future for your children? Are we not warriors? When our ancestors went to battle they did not know what the consequences would be, all they knew is that, without action, things would not go well for their children. Don't operate out of a place of fear, operate from hope. With hope everything is possible. The time is now."

We do not know what the consequences of this weekend's actions in North Dakota will be, or what the consequences of actions of resistance to the oppression likely to happen after inauguration next month. All we know is that without action, things will

not go well for our children. We must, therefore, operate from a place of hope, in which everything is possible.

The time is, indeed, now.

Amen.

Hymn #1064, Blue Boat Home

One of the ways we can be present to Standing Rock is to be present to our own connectedness to this planet we call home. Please rise in body or spirit and join me in singing Hymn #1064 in the turquoise hymnal, Blue Boat Home.

Candle Extinguishing - Ushers

Benediction - Diana

As we prepare to leave our time of shared worship, may we continue to be present to the Standing Rock people and to what is happening in North Dakota. May we continue to be present to the need to protect both indigenous people's rights and the health of our planet.

May that be our practice, and our prayer.

Go in peace, go in love.