



Cultivating Compassion: Treat Everyone With Dignity

Theme Angle

We'll explore how compassion takes the form of treating everyone with dignity. As we do that, we will have the chance to learn about one of our inspiring UU ancestors, Dorothy Dix, to explore how the celebration of Indigenous Peoples Day is a form of compassion, and to lift up [our UU Value of Equity](#) and its call to recognize that everyone has inherent worth and dignity.

UU Teachings:

- Love is at the center of our values.
- Equity is one of our values.
- Showing compassion can be hard, but is important to do.

Materials needed:

Name tag inserts and holders

Markers/crayons

Chalice/candle

Chimes

Joys and Sorrows bowl

For activities: map of the US, map of Indigenous lands in the US, 1 hula hoop per person, postcards (optional)

Set-up:

Have some chairs around one table for making name tags. On the other side of the room, have the chalice and joys & concerns bowl in the center with chairs in a circle around it. Keep in mind to leave space between chairs.

Arrival Time

One leader sits by the door to greet the children (and parents) as they arrive. Ask each young person how they are feeling today and acknowledge this.

Ask parents of younger children to sign in their child(ren) on the sheet on the table by the door. Older children (grades 3-5) can sign in themselves. Let parents know they can wait in room 6 and chat with other parents after worship until they pick up their child(ren) at 12p.

One leader greets children as they sit at a table and gives them a name tag insert. Ask them to write their name in a dark color (or write for them if need be). Invite them to decorate it, and then place it in the name tag holder.

As the children finish their name tags, invite them to sit in a circle on the floor or in a chair around the chalice table.

When everyone is seated, ring the chime. Invite them to listen carefully to the sound and when it ends.

Welcome!

Welcome everyone to “Heads, Hearts, and Hands”. Introduce yourselves. Let the group know we’ll have some fun and get to know each other better.

Take attendance. Invite the young people to help with lighting the chalice, extinguishing the chalice, turning off/on the lights, and ringing the chimes as you go through the morning.

Centering

Invite someone to ring the chime. Acknowledge that each of us has different needs in our group and that we need to work together to help make it the best possible.

Remind the group of their covenant.

Light It!

Children can sit or stand in the circle. Note that the group often likes to turn off the lights to see the chalice better, and we ask everyone if it’s okay to do so first. There are also strings of lights to plug in so that the room isn’t completely dark. As Unitarian Universalists, we light a flaming chalice as a way to center ourselves when we gather. Here in Faith Formation, we light our chalice with our own special words and motions:

We light this chalice (invite someone to turn on the candle or pretend to strike a match)

To celebrate Unitarian (make a U with one hand) Universalism (make a U with the other hand)

With open minds (touch hands to head, then open outward)

With loving hearts (cross hands over heart)

With helping hands (hold hands in front, palms up)

Together we care for our planet Earth (hold hands as if holding a large ball)

And for each other. (hold hands towards another person, or hold the person’s hand)

Joys and Sorrows

Explain to the children that we take time to share our joys and sorrows when we are together. We want to know all the happy and sad things that are happening to them.

Pass the bowl around the circle and invite each child to take a stone. Explain that we'll take turns and go around the circle. When it's your turn, say your name, and one thing you are sad or happy about today. Then put your stone into the bowl. If you don't want to share, just say "pass" and put your stone in the bowl. When everyone has gone, put in a stone and say, "This is for the joys and sorrows that were not spoken, but are in our hearts."

Explore It!

Story - Dorothea's Big Heart: A True Story About Compassion and Dignity

This story was adapted from the [history of Dorothea Dix](#), found in Tapestry of Faith: Windows and Mirrors

Set It Up

Today we're talking about compassion—and not just the kind that shows up when someone is sad or hurt, but the kind that's part of how we move through the world, every day. As Unitarian Universalists, we believe that compassion is something we can practice and grow.

Our story today is about one kind of compassion, the kind that happens when we view a big injustice that is hurting people and say to ourselves, "That's not right. I need to do something about it."

This story is about a real person, one of our inspiring UU ancestors who made a big difference by treating people with compassion and dignity, even when the rest of the world didn't.

Option: Invite the group to take turns reading a paragraph.



A long time ago, over 200 years ago—before there were cell phones or cars or even electricity in most homes, there lived a girl named Dorothea Dix, and even though her world looked very different from ours, she had something very important in common with us: Dorothea believed that every person deserves to be treated with dignity and compassion, respect, and care.

When she was a child, her life was really hard. Her mom was often sick. Her dad wasn't kind. And her family moved from place to place a lot. Dorothea didn't always feel safe or seen. Eventually, she went to live with her grandmother in Boston, and things got better. Dorothea loved to read, and even though girls weren't always taught to study back then, Dorothea taught herself all kinds of things. When she grew up, she became a teacher and opened a school for children who were poor.

She wasn't trying to be famous. She was just a compassionate person who wanted to help. That's what compassion looks like: noticing someone who is hurting and choosing to care. One day, Dorothea decided to visit the Unitarian church where Dr. William Ellery Channing was

speaking. What she heard that day changed her life forever. She heard Dr. Channing preach that God was love, we are all a part of that love, and we are called to show that love to others. This was very different from the sermons she heard in her own church. It wasn't long after that that Dorothea became a Unitarian.

Inspired by her UU faith, she started looking around for people who were being treated unfairly, people who had been forgotten. And one day, she visited a prison where women were being locked up, not because they were dangerous, but because they had mental illnesses. Some of them were chained to the wall, with no warm clothes or blankets. The people in charge said, "It doesn't matter. They don't feel the cold like normal people." But Dorothea knew better. She said, "They are people. They feel cold. They feel pain. They deserve dignity."

And then she did something amazing. She didn't just feel sad. She took action. Dorothea visited every single prison in Massachusetts. She took notes. She asked questions. She wrote reports. She spoke to people in government. And guess what? Because of her work, the state opened hospitals where people with mental illnesses were treated kindly, and given food, clothing, care, and respect.

Then she went to other states. And she did it all again. Over and over, she showed up and spoke out. Dorothea helped change the way our country thinks about mental health. Dorothea believed that:

- People should be treated kindly, even if they think or act differently.
- Everyone deserves dignity, no matter what they're going through.

With her life, she taught many people that compassion often means standing up and saying: "This isn't right. We can do better!" So next time you see someone being left out, or struggling, or treated unfairly—even in a small way—remember Dorothea. Remember that compassion isn't just a feeling. It's something we do.

Discuss It - Reflection to ["Build and Bond"](#)

- Was there a part that made you feel surprised, sad, or inspired?
- Why do you think so many people treated those with mental illness badly in Dorothea's time?
- Do you think we treat people with mental illness better these days?
- Is there a type of person who doesn't deserve compassion? Explain.

Game: Step Out & Help

This activity should take about 10 minutes and can be done with any number of people

Activity Prep

Gather and set out Hula hoops or tape to mark circles on the floor - one per person.

Set It Up

"Today, we are exploring how sometimes we need to be brave and move out of our comfort zone to show compassion. To help us do that, we are going to play a game that helps us practice thinking about others' needs and physically experience what it's like to "step out" of their comfort zone."

Directions

- Set up a bunch of hula hoops ("comfort zones") around the room — one per child.

- Each child stands in a hoop.
- Call out made-up scenarios (e.g., “Someone dropped their lunch tray!” or “A new kid is standing alone at recess.”).
- Ask: Would you step out of your comfort zone to help?
- If yes, the child steps out of the hoop and does a silly move (like jumping jacks, a dance spin, etc.).
- Then return to their hoop for the next scenario.
- Once done, invite the group to sit in their hoop and form a big circle.

Possible Scenarios:

- Someone spilled their drink at lunch
- A new kid is looking for a place to sit at lunchtime
- Someone took the ball away from another in gym class
- Someone is sitting on the sidewalk asking for change
- Someone called your friend a bad name
- You heard someone yell bad things on the playground to someone you don’t know
- Your aunt or uncle said that s/he approves of the government taking away immigrants
- A friend is very sad
- A classmate gets really angry at someone else

Sum It Up

“Let’s all remember that we all have different comfort zones, and that’s okay. What matters is how we treat each other and how we try to do what’s kind, even when it feels hard. That’s one way we live our UU values—by showing compassion, courage, and respect.”

Connecting Our Exploration

Show and pass around the map of the United States. Ask the group what this might have to do with our theme of compassion. Invite answers.

Ask who they think made the map? Whose story does it tell?

Then show and pass around the Indigenous Peoples’ map. Ask if anyone has ever seen a map like this, and highlight that these maps have been missing from most schools and history books for a long time. Lift up that this one shows Native lands — the homelands of Indigenous peoples who lived here long before the borders and cities we know today.

Ask if they know why they don’t have school on Monday. If they say “Columbus Day”, explain that we are now calling it Indigenous Peoples’ Day, although many cities and towns still do not acknowledge this. Invite conversation on why this change is desired and why not everyone agrees with it.

Explain that today is about exploring our UU value of Equity and how compassion takes the form of treating everyone with dignity. One of the ways we live this out and practice compassion is by celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day. When we are practicing compassion, not just with our

feelings, but with our actions, we are saying: Everyone deserves to have their story told. Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity.

Taking Action

Invite the group to write or email their school board, principal, and elected officials to call it Indigenous Peoples' Day if it isn't already. Have postcards to write on at home. Parents can help them with this.

Closing Circle

Have the group help clean up, if needed. Ring the chime to gather in a circle. If you have a snack, pass it out. Invite them to sit/stand in a circle. Share thoughts to the following:

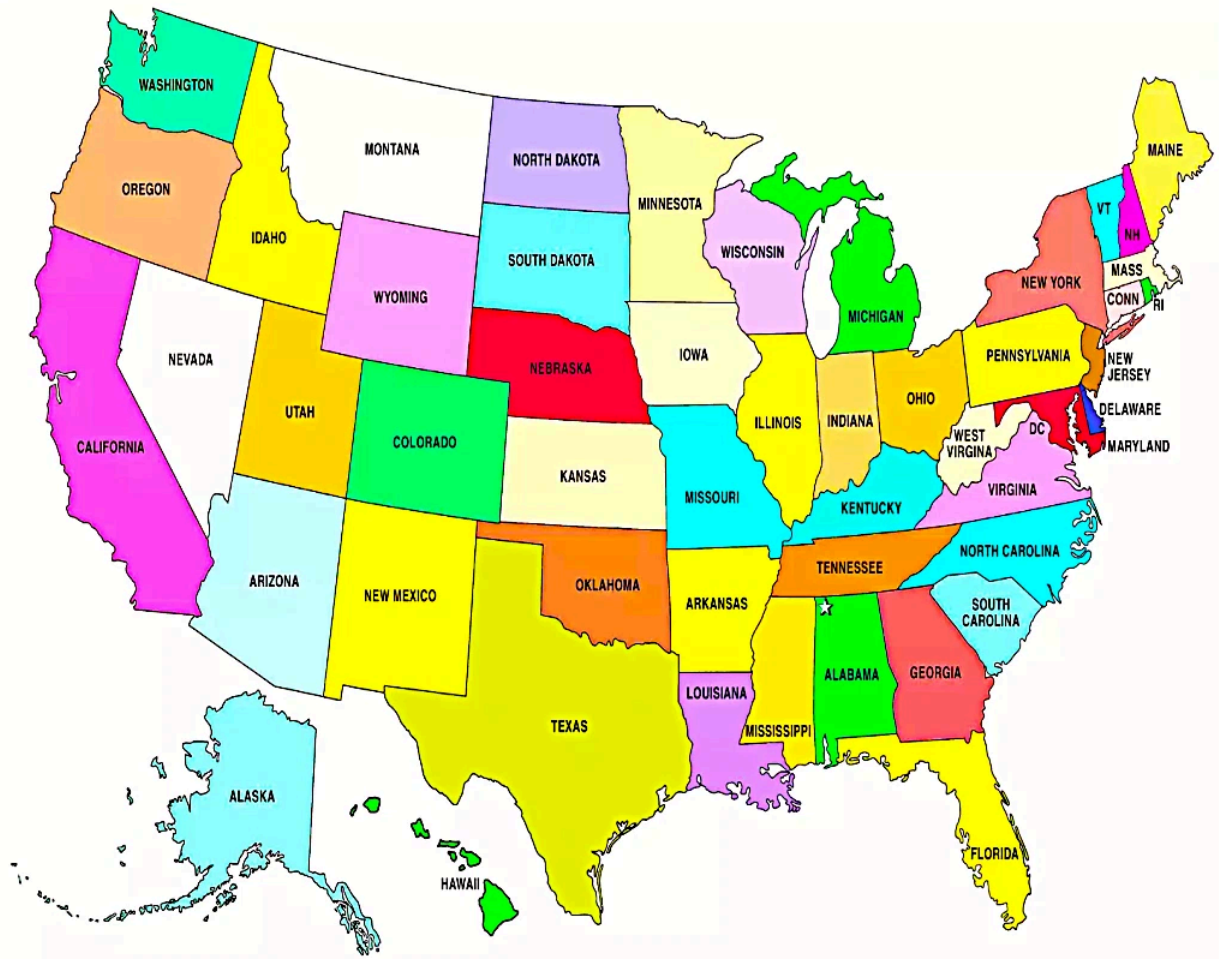
- **Why should we care about equity and compassion at UCE?**

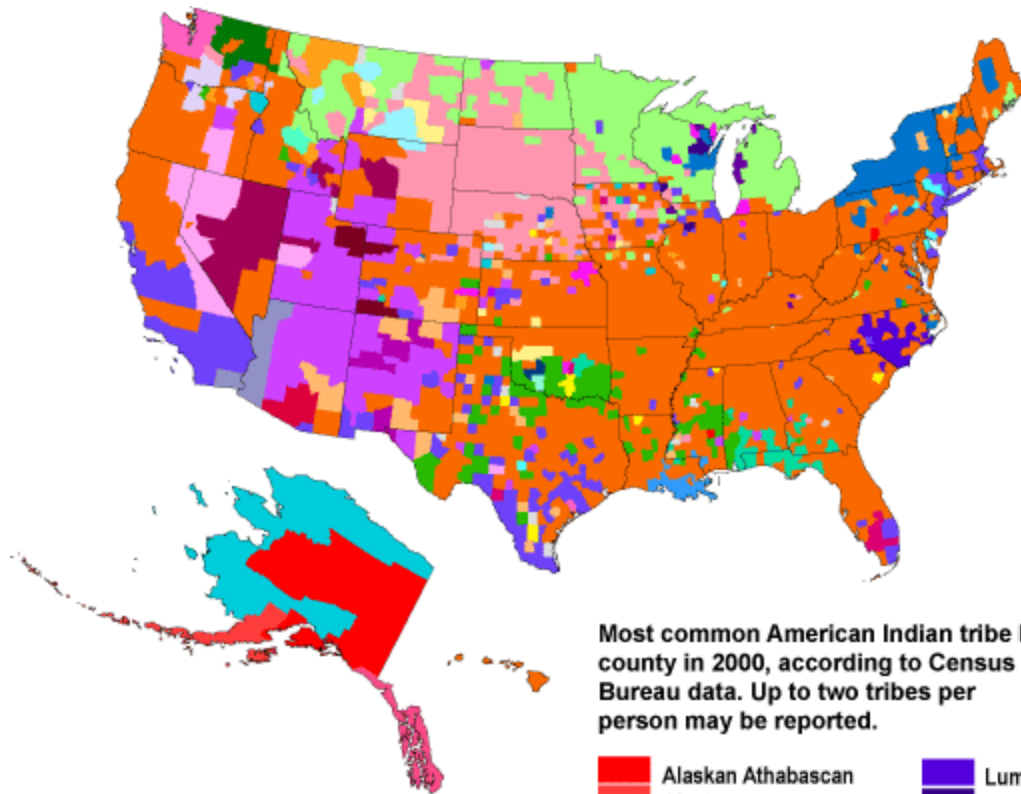
Extinguish the chalice.

Thank each child for sharing and being here today. Sing *This Little Light of Mine*.

Leader Notes - What worked well? What could be better?

Adapted by Kathy Underwood, DLFF





Most common American Indian tribe by county in 2000, according to Census Bureau data. Up to two tribes per person may be reported.

