

**“Centering Love”**  
**Rev. Tracy Johnson**

I want to call your attention to the [Article II graphic by Claire Pullen](#).

Love is at the center and in her color scheme is like a flame on a chalice, burning brightly, igniting the values that surround it. The botanical nature of it seems to say that these values are rooted in and grow out of that center of love. And they are flourishing, my guess is that their grounding is the reason. They fill the spaces that surround them, and in each case, there is an opening for them to expand beyond their walls. And the blossoms, too, unfurl themselves, shouting out their messages; values steeped in love.

A colleague of mine reflected on this image as well, noting the nod to our Universalist heritage, love, the force that drove them onward, the values that express that love gathered round. Not a sentimental love, as Dr. King also lifted up. It is an abiding love, she says, not based on what we accomplish or what we believe. It is the kind of love that holds us together as a community and has the power to hold our world together, too.

Just the other morning I was writing about grace, having been prompted to do so by one of my journal books. And I stopped for a minute to think about what grace actually is. Unmerited favor came to mind, the dictionary definition, I surmised. But it has the same flavor to it. At first, I thought about it in terms of my very humanness, that it is there no matter how flawed I might be. Then I took it a step further though because it didn't seem quite right for flawed to be the baseline; grace the cure. Instead, I began to think about grace itself as the starting point. It is much like this love we are talking about, that which our Universalist forebears talked about, love inherent at the center of each being, love the source of actions, even when we don't get it quite right the first time. It is the thing that connects us, heart to heart, affirming our interdependence.

What do we say about love each week in our affirmation? Go ahead – what is the first line?

That's right! Love is the Spirit of this Meeting House! And just what do we mean by that? Have you ever asked? Thought about the choice of words? The Spirit, we say. We even capitalize it, like it is a real entity, this Spirit, worthy of some grander notice. Because it is actually, even if that sounds a little “spiritual” for our humanist ears. It refers to an essence, I think. If you whittled anything about this place down to its heartwood, you would encounter love. If you look around at all the endeavors we engage, in our faith community and in the wider community, you find the Spirit of love as a core principle. It is acted out in our values as Unitarian Universalists. And this acting out is key for me. It's not just something in our thoughts, a mind exercise – yes, we believe in justice – and that's it - we believe in it. Now we can move on! The acting out takes it from the head and gives it hearts and hands and feet.