

Unfortunately we had some technical difficulties this morning so we do not have a video of the service. Below is the Order of Service with all of the readings and the homily.

Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron

“Honoring Our Foremothers”

Pam Garn Nunn and Loren Frey, Worship Leaders

**Sunday, June 29, 2025
Readings and Homily**

Opening Hymn # 360 Here We Have Gathered

Call to Worship

by Rev. Dr. Maureen Killoran

Welcome, you who come in need of healing,
you who are confused, or have been betrayed.
Welcome, with your problems and your pain.
Welcome, too, your joys and your wonderings,
welcome your need to hope, your longing for assurance.
Instead of answers, here may you find safety for your questions.
Instead of promises, may you find community for your struggles,
people with hands and hearts to join you
in engaging the challenges and changes of our day.

Chalice Lighting

Rev. Amy McKenzie

Welcome to this common, sacred space.
Common, because we are all welcome.
Sacred, because here we transform the ordinary
and attend to the profound.

We carry with us our regrets, doubts, fears, stories, laughter; may they inspire our worship.
Above all, may we each meet what we need most to find,
On this day, in this common, sacred space.

Meditation

Rev. Dr. Maureen Killoran

Spirit of Life and Love, I come before you
black and brown and red and yellow and alabaster,

I come longing for the simpler days that truly never were our lot.

And I am an American.

Hear these voices, as in the complexity of our days,

I am Humanist and Christian, Muslim and Jew,

Pagan and Atheist and Buddhist and UU

And I am an American.

I am one who fought for my country

and I am at the same time one who protested war

And I am an American.

Amongst the divisions of our days,

I've struggled in poverty

and I've accepted the profits of wealth

And I am an American.

In the challenge of our days

I am one who supports my country, right or wrong,

and I am one claims the traditions of dissent

And I am an American.

In this polarized season,

I am Democrat and I am Republican,

I am Libertarian and I am Independent,

I am Green and I am confused.

And I am an American.

Spirit of hope, sit with us in our diversities.

Help us hear one another in our divisions.

Grant that, beginning in this community,

we may honor one another's Truths,

and know that a just and faithful tomorrow

begins here, in our hearts.

For with all our problems, with all our pain,

with all our limitations and mistakes,

We are Americans.

Readings

As we approach the 4th of July this Friday, our nation's attention turns to the birth of our country and the importance of our freedoms. Now last year on this very same Sunday, we talked about the work and importance of women's rights as something to celebrate on July 4th. That was a departure from the usual overall emphasis on our male founding fathers. Why so much emphasis on men? Well, Susan Jhirad, a highly active lay leader of the UU Church of Medford, Massachusetts, has pointed out that females back then were supposed to stay in the home. She wrote the skit that we had planned to present before the weather turned so hot. (In fact, Susan is actually leading the Sunday' service at her own church in MA.) So instead of the skit, Pam and I will offer you some highlights from that skit to emphasize the influence of our foremothers in our history and how we need to guard and maintain women's rights and more in our country today.

Women in the 18th and 19th century, in the early years of our country, were supposed to stay in their place. That meant being in the home, raising children. They could not get an education, vote, nor work outside the home. And they were *especially* not to think for themselves about God or life- but then somehow Unitarian and Universalist women didn't always fit that mold...

For example, Abigail Adams, was our 2nd First Lady, after Martha Washington. And while John was off attending to affairs of state, Abigail fulfilled the role of mother, family farm manager, homemade bullet maker, and more. And she told her husband, in no uncertain terms, when he was writing that new Constitution of his, "Remember the Ladies!" But he didn't. Still, that didn't stop her from continuing to push him, even during the lonely days while she was doing all the work on their farm. She later said that some of their best days were when they had BOTH retired from public life.

Another woman who "strayed" beyond the home was Julia Ward Howe. She not only wrote the Battle Hymn of the Republic, she was also an active abolitionist. She and her husband supported John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry and were strongly against slavery. But she did much more. She also fought for women's rights, prison reform and education for all. That was

important, she noted, because in her day, women couldn't go to college and poor people got *no* education at all. Even so, her husband Samuel didn't believe that women should work outside the home. When he died, leaving her without any money, she was finally able to do what she wanted.

Our third foremother of note was Frances Watkins Harper, a novelist, poet, writer and educator. She started working as a seamstress at age 14, and didn't marry until she was 35 and had already begun her writing and activism. Some called her "the mother of African-American journalism" because she wrote and published so many magazine articles. She also fought against slavery, and helped slaves escape through the Underground Railway. Though she loved her husband Fenton, and her 3 step-children, she felt compelled to stop lecturing while she was married to him. She only started again after he died. Her work did not end with the Civil War. Then she joined Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in fighting for women's right to vote.

Pam: Our fourth foremother of influence was Lydia Maria (pronounced Ma-ry-a) Child. You may not recognize her name, but you know the song she wrote, "Over the River and Through the Woods." But she did not see that as her shining achievement. She also wrote well-loved children's stories and a book called *The Frugal Housewife*, was very popular. That book grew out of the difficulty that she and her husband had surviving financially. She described her husband David as a good man but noted that he couldn't manage money and wound up in jail for debt. Despite their economic struggles, they worked together in many of the same causes, including the abolition of slavery and the Underground Railway. After David died, she continued her own work. And for the first time, she had some financial security. Later, she founded the Massachusetts Women's Suffrage association, advocating for the vote for women.

Loren: Four strong women who defied the limitations of women's roles in our history. All worked for the right of women to vote, but none lived to actually cast a vote in their lifetime. Even though Harper and Howe lived into the first decade of the 20th century, it wasn't until 1920 that women (and then only white women) were allowed to vote.

Homily

Strong women with strongly held beliefs, determined to make a difference in their world, and they did. But they were constrained by their gender and the standards of their times. And that makes their achievements even more memorable. Fast forward to today. If you once told me that women, minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals and immigrants would still be fighting for their rights in 2025, I wouldn't have believed you. But here we are on the cusp of July 4, 2025, 299 years after the Declaration of Independence was signed, and I am increasingly afraid that all that's been accomplished in my lifetime and others may be undone. There are national calls for women to stay at home and have more babies to fulfill our nation's "promise." Payments of \$1000 or \$5000 have been touted to sweeten the "motherhood push." Then there's the SAVE Act. That stands for Safeguard American Voter Eligibility. It will require official identifying documentation of citizenship in order for people to vote. But women who changed their name when they married will have to present *birth* name identification to vote. If you changed your name when you married, you could be denied the right to vote. And if you're a woman or transgender person who has served in the military, you are being devalued and pushed out of positions that you earned.

I worry that the rights that women have fought for will be eroded once again. If you're a poor, single parent, your Medicaid, food stamps, and WIC benefits are in terrible jeopardy and that means that your children's future is in terrible jeopardy. Those concerns (and more) have led me back to public demonstrations for the first time since the Vietnam War. (Yes, I'm that old.) Back then, my husband was a reluctant Army officer, and we went to the 1971 anti-war demonstration at the U.S. Capitol anyway. (In civilian clothes, mind you!) But when Peter, Paul, and Mary started singing and the TV cameras began to pan the crowd, we had to leave—military officers were supposed to *support* the war, *not* oppose it. And there were federal agents watching the crowds back then.

These days, though, when I see a camera pointed at me in progressive demonstrations, I hold up my sign and look straight at it. I'm sending letters to representatives and senators. I'm writing postcards to encourage people to vote for progressive candidates. Because there's too much at stake not to speak up and make sure that we keep our freedoms. And I'm pretty sure that all our ladies from the 1800s are right here with us in spirit. Freedom is not free; we must stay vigilant and make ourselves heard to keep it. As we celebrate July 4th this week, may we honor all those who are threatened and yet contribute to our country: women, minorities, Native Americans, LGBTQ+, refugees, and more. If we are to be the land of the free and home of the brave, then it must include everyone, not just a chosen few.

Extinguishing the Chalice**Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Selle (adapted)**

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of hope, the warmth of community or the fire of commitment. These we carry with us until we meet again.

Benediction***Reverend Tom Schade (adapted)***

My friends,

There is a power at work in the universe.

It works through human hands,

but it was not made by human hands.

It is a creative, sustaining, and transforming power

and we can trust that power with our lives

It will sustain us whenever we take a stand on the side of love;

It will support us when we ask for help

It will inspire us when we most need it

Trust in that power.

We are, together, held by that power.

Amen
