

**First Universalist Yarmouth, ME  
UU the Vote Worship Service, Sept 27th, 2020**

**Service Co-Leaders, Sue Ellen Bordwell, Rev. Hillary Collins-Gilpatrick,  
Jeanette March Newton, & Raj Vinnakota**

**Opening Words**

Welcome to our UU the Vote Service.

Welcome to October. Thirty days to the election - and I don't know about you, but I certainly feel like *anything* could happen between then and now.

How fittingly then, that our church wide theme this month is "deep listening," a practice that invites us to go beyond the hoopla and anxiety and listen to what else is being expressed right now -

What else is being expressed by those in the margins,  
What else is being expressed by those we love and don't love,  
What else is echoing through nature,  
And what else our own spirits are echoing underneath it all.

Today I am very excited to listen to the prayers, stories and wisdom of our fellow community members. Together we will be sharing the pulpit to lift up the need for voting rights for all and reflect on the question "Why Do We Vote?"

This service is not going to endorse one politician over the other, nor is it going to get into the weeds of current political affairs, rather, it's our hope that this service will compel and inspire you to listen deeply to your heart and mind and ask yourself why do *you* vote?

What values are forefront when you choose your candidates,  
when you head to the polls,  
when you hope for a particular outcome?  
And how will you continue to live out those values whether your candidate wins or loses?

Big questions. Where to start?

Well, let's start where we are - on this Sunday morning, in this worship service, in this sanctuary of our Unitarian Universalist faith.

Our opening words are the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

## Reading

“A Prayer for Our Country”

by Rabbi Ayetet Cohen, as adapted by Sue Ellen Bordwell

Spirit of Love and Justice,  
Bless this country and all who dwell within it.

Help us to experience the blessings of our lives and circumstances,  
To be vigilant, compassionate, and brave.  
Strengthen us when we are afraid.

Help us to channel our anger  
So that it motivates us to just action.  
Help us to feel our fear  
So that we do not become numb.  
Help us to be generous with others  
So that we raise each other up.

Help us to be humble in our fear,  
knowing that as vulnerable as we feel there are those at greater risk,  
And that it is our responsibility to stand with them.

Help us to taste the sweetness of liberty  
To not take for granted the freedoms won in generations past.

Source of all Life,  
Guide our leaders with right-ness,  
Strengthen their hearts but keep them from hardening  
That they may use their influence and authority to speak truth and act for justice.

May all who live in this country share in its bounty,  
Enjoy its freedoms and be protected by its laws.  
May this nation use its power and wealth to be a voice for justice,  
peace and equality for all.

May we be strong and have courage  
To be bold in our action and deep in our compassion,  
To discern when we must listen and when we must act,  
To uproot bigotry, intolerance, misogyny, racism,  
discrimination and violence in all its forms,  
To celebrate the many faces of love reflected in the wondrous diversity of humanity,  
To welcome the stranger and the immigrant,  
And to honor the gifts of those who seek refuge and possibility here.

Let justice well up like water,  
And the Spirit of Love and Justice become a mighty stream.

## **Reflections: “Why We Vote”**

### “Why I Vote” by Jeanette March Newton

When asked, “Why do you vote?” I took a short mental trip back to 1969 when I was able to vote for the first time at the age of 21. It was pretty exciting time considering my home state of New Jersey had a governorship up for grabs. It definitely felt like a rite of passage into adulthood. A right to be taken with sober respect.

The world was in the midst of the Vietnam War, protests were a regular occurrence and many a conversation swirled around young men being of an age to be drafted and sent to war and yet being too young to vote. That debate, the protests and the deep national angst continued on as friends my age and younger donned uniforms.

In 1972 my real interest in the right to vote came into focus with the Presidential Election between Nixon and McGovern. It was an intense, trying time, and voting really seemed to matter if voices were to be heard, much like today. Thank goodness this was pre 24- hour cable news. In that era scheduled news came into our homes three times a day, and that was plenty.

In 1971 the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment was signed giving 18 year olds the right to vote. Imagine that! In some ways it seemed like a major correction for the nation. At least the young people sent to fight in a war also had the right to vote.

This was a wakeup call for me. With all the US History classes taken in school, with certain details escaping my grasp, teachers would find it difficult to believe it took the signing of the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment to clarify for me how the Amendments made the Constitution of the United States a living document.  
Some of us take more time than others.

This revelation caused me to look back and reconsider voting rights, their importance and history. From white, land owning men, to white men, to men of color, to women, to young adults, every step was hard fought. And though not on the front lines of the determination and fight, I have always had a strong sense of the importance of each vote. Yes, to put a voice to my values, but to also show respect for those who came before me, working with great effort and sacrifice to make the right to vote accessible.

My husband Alan served in the United States Air Force for 26 years.  
We relocated 13 times during his time of service.

Our declared state of residence stayed New Jersey right up until his retirement and our move to Maine in 2005. Living in places far and wide within the US and overseas, we maintained US voting rights with an anchor in NJ even though we did not reside in the state.

Voting is a right not to be interrupted.  
Not to be taken for granted.  
Let your voice be heard – VOTE!!

“Why I Vote” by Rev. Hillary Collins-Gilpatrick

*“Gather the spirit, harvest the power.  
Our separate fires will kindle one flame.”*

It’s Tuesday morning, February 11th, 2020, the day of the New Hampshire Primary, which, as you know, is a pretty big deal.

I’m in Bethlehem NH, sitting at the steering wheel of a minivan. I am a designated “town hall shuttle driver” for the morning, taxi-ing students back and forth to the polls from our boarding school campus.

Behind me in the van are seven energized, chatty 18 year olds, headed off to vote for the very first time.

They were all registered, they all had a pass to leave class, and, my friends, these young adults were ready to go.

“Man, I am so pumped to vote!” one of them shouted as I turned the key in the ignition. “Me too!” another of them replied, “Hillary, can we go to Dunkin Donuts after to celebrate?”

“Obviously” I hollered back as a collective cheer rose up from behind me.

I turned right out of campus and headed to the local town hall, grateful to be on this ride with these bouncy folks. They didn’t express the symptoms of anxiety that I was managing about this primary.

As I waited for them to pile into the van after breakfast, I was still undecided about who I was going to vote for - turning the candidates over and over in my brain, making concessions with my values, thinking about who could last in the long run. I wasn’t feeling great.

Had I not known these students personally, I might have attributed their joyful excitement to youthful naivete, or just the thrill of getting off campus and skipping AP physics.

But no, in this van with me I had the Leader of the School Sustainability club, I had members of the Black Student Union, I had the student leader of the anti-racist white affinity group, I had a kid who wanted to be a public school teacher, I had the student council Judge who helped students in disciplinary trouble. They hailed from Indiana, the Bronx, DC, Boston, California.

These were young Americans deeply invested in the lives and livelihoods of Americans. And they were thrilled to go vote.

Driving to the town with them all, I listened as they discussed their chosen candidates. Some were psyched to vote for a particular person, others were still undecided like me. Naturally their conversation unfolded into one that was just about what mattered to them, and as it did, a bigger picture unfolded for me that stretched beyond the election.

We got to the town hall and took selfies as we stood in line, appreciating this moment of connection with one another and with those around us.

We had our names checked off by the poll workers and one by one were handed a ballot. Some of the students couldn’t help but smile as they held it in their hands. We voted, headed out, and we waited for one another outside.

A couple students \*\*lifted their arms, Rocky-style,\*\* in triumph as they exited the building. We got back in the van, and headed to Dunkin Donuts to celebrate.

Sitting in the donut shop waiting for folks to order, I sat down with one of the students and asked her why she was so excited to vote today.

“Hillary,” she replied --students were on a first name basis with teachers, “This is my chance to tell the people of this country what I need.

They can take it or leave it, but they have to look at it and see that I’m here, All those dudes in charge gotta know I’m here, I’m a citizen, and I’m going to be here.”

“Hmm,” I rubbed my chin, “So, like, you’re not freaking out about whether or not your candidate wins?”

“No, I am, I hope my candidate wins because if they don’t ,I think this country is going to get really bad for a lot of people, like scary bad.”

“Yeah,” I nodded feeling validated.

“But you know what, Hillary -”

“What?”

“No matter who wins, I’m still gonna try to do all the stuff that I think is important for me and people like me to live a good life. So yeah, I gotta vote because I need the US to know I exist, and I need to at least try to get someone in office who’s on my side and will help make life better for people -

But either way we got work to do and we need to do that work.”

I paused to write her words down in a notebook, which she thought was hilarious,

“Hillary, aren’t you supposed to, like, be my teacher, like - I take notes on what you say?”

“Yeah, not today my friend, not right now. Today, you’re my teacher.”

She raised an eyebrow and smirked.

Everyone got their donuts and warm drinks.

We piled in the van, headed back to school, and got back to work.

## **Benediction**

“A Prayer to Build a National Community” by Sr. Simone Campbell, leader of Nuns on the Bus

Spirit of Love and Justice,

During the days, weeks, and months ahead, stir our hearts and minds that we might fight for a vision that is worthy of your call to honor all creation.

A vision of who we are as a people, grounded in community and care for all, especially the most marginalized.

A vision that cares for our earth and heals the planet.

A vision that ends structural racism, bigotry and sexism so rife now in our nation and in our history.

A vision that ensures hungry people are fed, children are nourished, and immigrants are welcomed.

Spirit of Love and Justice, breathe in us and our leaders a new resolve...that committed to this new American promise, we will work together to build a national community grounded in healing, fearlessly based on truth, and living out a sense of shared responsibility.

Spirit of Love and Justice, bring out of this time of global and national chaos a new creation: a new community that can, with love and justice, realize this new promise.

With profound hope, let We The People Say:

AMEN!

