

**Generations & Traditions**  
by  
Michael Walker, Intern Minister

INVOCATION

Some days, we are called to remember where we came from... Other days, we wonder where we are going to...

Our lives are links in a chain that connect our past to our future, and it is often through those we teach that our cherished traditions get passed on... new links in the chain of time...

Let us take time now to think about our families, friends, and the traditions that link us all together...

Let us take time to cherish our traditions... Namastè.

BENEDICTION

When our thoughts wander to the loved ones of our past,

Whether they still be with us or not,

Let us remember them, and all they have taught us,

With love and happiness.

And when our thoughts wander to the loved one of our future,

Let us teach them well, to be good and happy people,

And let us be wise enough to know when to let them go,

For we know that they have learned well,

And they will carry on our traditions.

With these thoughts in mind, let us go out into the day,

With grace in our hearts, and laughter on our lips.

May your week ahead, be full of happiness.

Blessed be and Amen.

## ACTIVITY INTRODUCTION

We are going hear from two church members, Ken and Sara, talking about traditions in their families. Then we will have an activity that I will explain in a couple minutes...

**[Ken & Sara]**

Today, you are invited to think about traditions in your families, especially if they have been passed down from one generation to the next. I thought we might learn a lot about each other, if we all took few moments to share our traditions with each other. So, much like when we take a few minutes to greet your neighbor, for this part of the service, you are invited to greet the people

around you, and share a tradition from your family with them. For the young people here, what is something that you do with your family every year... something you look forward to? Everyone, please take a few minutes to share, and you will be called back by the music.

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*“It is, of course, our grandparents who are instrumental in handing down the culture, in transmitting the traditions down to the new generation.”*

— Selma Wasserman

*“Children are a kind of confirmation of life. The only form of immortality that we can be sure of.”*

— Peter Ustinov

I'm really happy to have this chance to help us create a worship service for all ages. I think that this is important. I want you to know that I plan on speaking in terms we can all understand, so that this service feels like it belongs to everyone here.

While thinking about what it means to have a service for all ages, and while we've been planning our

church's acknowledgement of Kwanzaa, I've been spending some time thinking about traditions in my family, those things that each generation passes on to the next, my grandparents, to my parents, to my sisters and me. Such as gathering the family together for Christmas (or in other families, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and other holidays.) In my family, we had a custom that everyone could open one present on Christmas Eve. Now you tell me, how does an excited kid pick **just one**? Another tradition from my childhood was *the haircut* – every year, the day before the first day of school, Mom would give the kids haircuts. I never liked that... You see, some traditions may have basic reasons for being the way they are – others may be a way for families to have fun together.

Here is another way to think about traditions and generations. On both sides of my family, we've had relatives trying to figure out where we came from. A distant relative from Mom's family, and later my aunt from Dad's family, both spent countless hours digging through old records, so that they could write down our family trees. Alongside the family trees, they both collected what information they could find about all our relatives in America. I was pretty surprised when I found out just how many nurses and doctors, social workers, counselors, and yes, even ministers, that there were in the family tree. Aunts and uncles, cousins once, twice, three times removed, and grandparents, great grandparents, great great grandparents, and all the rest. I learned that I have many family members who are—or were—in

helping professions – people who made it their life's work to help other people. I didn't know this before – but I know it now – it is something of a tradition, through the generations in my family, to be helpers, in some way. Now, I'm not telling you this to make my family sound like they're "*all that and a bag of chips*." I do wonder, though, how much of who we are as people, is based in the values that were passed down in our families.

Sometimes, I also wonder if there is some genetic reason, something inside of us, that makes us want to do the type of work that we do. I've noticed that there are also quite a few musicians on Mom's side, and quite a few artists or craftspeople – people who create beautiful things with their hands – on Dad's side. Is it Nature or Nurture?

Who knows, but I do know that these interests have

become almost traditions, handed down in our families. For a good portion of my grandfather's life, he made cabinets; now his son, my uncle, does the same thing and he has been teaching his son to make them, too.

I'm also aware of traditions that some folks have made, outside of the traditional family. I'm thinking of some grown-ups who don't have families anymore – or are far from them – who volunteer for some important event every year, such as feeding the homeless on Thanksgiving, or other similar traditions. Some people have been doing this for year after year. And you know what, every year, a few new people show up to help too, and the traditions get passed down. Now, that isn't quite the same as our family generations, but it sounds pretty

similar, doesn't it? I think this is just human nature, to create traditions that become meaningful to us, and share them with others.

Our UU children have several traditions here, too, such as the Children's Affirmation during every Sunday morning service. This tradition started in the Children's Chapel, and was later brought into the Meeting House. Our Director of Religious Education, Liz Jones, tells me that she loves that tradition because it continues... in reverse. While most of the traditions I have talked about today, have been passed on from older people to younger people, the children's affirmation has actually been passed on in the opposite direction. She went on to tell me that it has brought tears to her eyes, to see grown

people at a New Member's Orientation, telling everyone that they want to join the church because it is a place for people of open minds, loving hearts and welcoming hands. I love it when the young people teach the old people something new. This is great.

Here's another fun one. I understand that the children in RE have a tradition every year. They decorate the Christmas tree in Bard Hall, and apparently it is customary to make a long paper chain for the tree. I'm told that it started out long before any of the young people here were even born, making this chain that stretched from the Book Room to the stairs on the patio. But they made it a tradition to make this paper chain

longer every year, and now I hear that it stretches from the Book Room, up the stairs, and out the front gate!

And how about Easter? The story I've heard is that the children here have an Easter Egg hunt down on the plateau every year. This happens just like in many churches and communities. The interesting thing is that some the children who first looked for those eggs here, are now some of the grown-ups who hide the eggs for today's children. These traditions keep on every year, creating a way for our young people to be a part of our church community. While not every tradition has to be a game, it is important that we recognize the traditions of our church's children, and continue to honor and uphold their traditions just as much as the church traditions that

the adults cherish. These things go hand in hand, and are essential for the future of our church.

I want to stress the importance of traditions – those little rituals that make meaning in the relationships people have with those they love. They become something that people look forward to. My family is now scattered across the country, and some relatives are even in other countries. But we have been starting to make a tradition over the last few years, which is that as many of us as possible try to meet in one place during the summer. Kind of an unofficial family reunion – it’s more like a shared vacation, and they have been so much fun. I look forward to those all year – I get to see my family so rarely now, that these trips are a real treat.

As another example, I’ve heard someone here at the church say that she has been meeting up with two college friends for a trip every year, and they’ve been doing that for about 25 years now, I think she said. Another person here has a group of lady friends she meets for coffee every Saturday morning. They talk about their lives, their husbands, what their adult children are doing nowadays, and anything else that they are interested in. Each of these traditions is a way for people to stay connected with each other, even if they don’t live together.

Whatever the tradition is – and it doesn’t matter what it is, as long as it is meaningful to you – whatever the tradition is, it serves as a touchstone. A touchstone is

something that is precious and important, that we want to hold onto. Traditions are like that, because they are something that many people can hold onto, and so they become connected to each other. Because we do our traditions together, have fun together, we make wonderful memories to cherish for years to come. This is what I suggest: enjoy the traditions that you have with your families, friends, and church – and if you need to, create a new tradition that will help you and the ones you care about bond with each other. Don't undervalue how important a tradition can be for you, and for all the generations to come.

Blessed be.