

SPIRITUAL CARE FOR CLIMATE DISTRESS, ANXIETY & GRIEF

UU MINISTRY FOR EARTH

Overview

The climate crisis is an everything crisis. It is an environmental crisis, an infrastructure crisis, a political, social, and economic crisis. It's a health crisis, and it has become an emotional and spiritual crisis.

There is no quick fix, and yet research shows that gathering in community to companion one another is a primary strategy for addressing this distress. Churches are perfectly situated to do this. When we metabolize our feelings together, we prevent becoming paralyzed and can commit to meaningful action together.

This worship service can be followed by UU Ministry for Earth's workshop or small group ministry resources on the same topic. To find them, visit <https://www.uumfe.org/curriculum/>

Call to Worship

"Grief and love are sisters, woven together from the beginning. Their kinship reminds us that there is no love that does not contain loss and no loss that is not a reminder of the love we carry for what we once held close." (The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief by Francis Weller.) We gather today to honor our love and our grief for Earth and all beings, knowing that as we do, we will be more prepared to act for change.

UU Ministry for Earth
Worship Resource-

Spiritual Care for
Climate Distress,
Anxiety, Grief



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
MINISTRY FOR EARTH

Respect Life. Restore Earth. Renew Spirit.



Chalice Lighting

We light this chalice as a symbol of our gratitude for this community where we companion one another toward healing, love and justice.

Time for All Ages

Through the power of song, beloved Armenian-Canadian troubadour and child advocate Raffi soothes climate-anxious souls with “Green Dream”. It is a soothing lullaby that expresses Raffi's vision of environmental and generational justice.

Readings

From this article by Mary Annaïse Heglar:

I've written before about the importance of grief in the face of an existential crisis. People can't fix the problems if they don't confront them. We have to let people mourn so they can come out on the other side. Perhaps it's time to stop worrying about giving people hope and to start letting people grieve.

Around 2018, the concept of “climate grief” jumped out of academic circles and into the mainstream, and we've gotten better at talking about it as a separate and special kind of grief. But Americans, especially, have not gotten better at processing.

I never want to be the person who can look at so much suffering in this world and feel fine. It hurts because it's supposed to. Turning off the pain would mean turning off my humanity, and I just can't do that. Climate grief is not an illness to cure. It is a condition we will have to live with. But then again, isn't all grief?

By Gabrielle Gelderman

everything from both sides
piling up
pushed to the edge until
cracked, all folding
uneasy, looming

and we're here

in it

this shadow
this valley
the eye

we live in times don't we,
when anyone awake is
breaking

Sermon Prompts

There are different ways of describing the climate distress that people might be experiencing, including: eco-anxiety, eco-guilt, eco-dread, eco-despair, eco-depression, eco-grief, solastalgia, and biospheric concern. Climate anxiety is so prevalent that it will soon be named as a mental health condition in the DSM.

Climate grief as a term can be used to encompass both climate anxiety (anticipatory grief), the grief over impacts already felt or currently being experienced, and the loss of what hasn't been done to address the damage.

Among the impacts of climate distress is a feeling of paralysis or stuckness and powerlessness. We can become immobilized with distress and unmotivated to act for climate justice.

Although it is appropriate to be worried about climate change, at extreme levels, climate distress/anxiety/grief can threaten one's ability to function, making it hard to sleep, work, or even have fun with family or friends.



cont.

And since people don't like to feel negative emotions, we have developed a number of strategies to cope with them:

- denying there's a problem,
- avoiding thinking about it,
- or maintaining an unrealistic optimism that everything will work out.

This makes some sense as a way to protect our mental health, but in reality, it is not very effective. Denying emotional responses does not make them go away. In fact, attempts to suppress them tend to be associated with worse mental health. The central question is not: "How do I overcome the anxiety?" (which is a fair and reasonable response to the situation of climate change), but: "How can we live a good and happy life under the weight of this fearsome knowledge?"

When we suppress our grief for the world, we're also suppressing our compassion for it. If we see grief as a reflection of our love, it can help us to acknowledge and honor this pain, instead of suppressing it.

Without grief and anxiety, we will not be motivated to change. So the goal is not to remove climate anxiety, grief or distress, but to help each other cope with the ebbs and flows of our feelings of distress while maintaining our faith and wellbeing.

Coping with or metabolizing the feelings we have about climate change is very important so that:

- we don't become overwhelmed by these feelings
- we don't try to avoid the problem in order to avoid the feelings
- we don't burn out
- we can keep functioning well in our everyday lives
- we can stay engaged with climate justice and with the changes we are making to reduce the threat.

There is no quick fix, and yet research shows that gathering in community to companion one another is a primary strategy for addressing this distress. Churches are perfectly situated to do this. When we metabolize our feelings together, we prevent becoming paralyzed. Also, reimagining the future we want can soothe this anxiety while also helping us recommit to meaningful action.

In the book *How to Live in a Chaotic Climate* (page 3), the authors say this: Reconnecting is arguably the most important thing you can do for our planet...As we work to reconnect with ourselves, we can then begin to reconnect radically with people, animals, insects, trees, rivers, fungi, and the larger world around us. We can learn to trust others again, to create community, to do meaningful work in a world that can sometimes feel hopeless.

Journaling Prompts for Congregants

Invite people to write or draw about these questions during the service.

1. When I think about the condition of our world, I would say things are getting...
2. Looking ahead at the future, my concerns include...
3. What I love and hope to never lose due to climate disruption include...
4. The losses I've already experienced due to climate disruption include....
5. The losses others have already experienced due to climate disruption include...
6. Some feelings that come up when I think about these are...
7. What I notice in my internal world or thoughts is...
8. What it feels like in my body is...
9. A pattern that repeats itself when I feel climate distress/anxiety/grief is...

Meditation - Breathing Through with Joanna Macy, adapted for this service.

Now that you have named your grief and feelings, let us enter into a time of meditation.

Begin by attending, in an alert yet relaxed fashion, to your breathing, not trying to breathe any special way, long or deep or slow, just being with it.

And then we notice that we're not deciding each time to breathe in or out.

It's happening without our volition. It's like we're being breathed, being breathed by life, just as the person on either side of you is being breathed by life, just like everyone in this place, this town, this continent, this planet, is at this moment being breathed by life. The humans, and the more than human beings - as they fly through the air and swim through the seas of this beautiful planet - all being breathed by life.

So you can begin to sense that your breath is part of a vast living web of all beings breathing - of all beings being breathed by life.

And now this practice invites us to be with what arises in our minds and to blend that with the rhythm of our breathing, and particularly with what is hard to take in right now. The news of natural disasters, hunger and disruption due to climate.

So we can let those images rise in us. And instead of closing down and turning away, we can relax and open.

We allow these images to arise in our mind. Take them on your breath, like dark granules on your breath, and instead of closing them out, you breathe them right through you.

That's right - breathe them out on a stream of air. Imagine a ribbon of air coming up and that stream going through your windpipe, your lungs. And now by an act of the imagination, by the power of your imagination, you take that stream through your heart, and out an opening in your heart, back into the healing resources of the web of life.

In this fashion, we breathe through these images of suffering, pain, images of people and nature.

We can take all of that through on the ribbon of air. This practice is for enhancing our capacity for compassion, but not by sandbagging and holding on to the grief of the world. Do let it flow through you. You can do that.

So let's practice that again. Whatever images of climate disruption arise, the grief and loss you might be feeling, anything else that has come up today, just let them go through the heart. They need to do that. Our hearts need to be open to the pain of our world. And then let them flow right on out, right on out into the healing web of life.

Now, perhaps there are no images or thoughts or feelings there for you to breathe in. Perhaps there's just blankness and numbness. Breathe that through too. Breathe that numbness through your heart, because that's a very real part of our world.

Or perhaps what surfaces for you is your own suffering of your own life, your own failures, what you have not yet done. And you breathe that through your body, through the heart and on out, because that is an inseparable part of our world at this time.

And perhaps you might begin to feel or imagine a sense of discomfort in the chest cavity as if your heart would break.

Well, you remember that your heart is not an object that can break, but that, if it were, they say the heart that breaks open can hold the whole universe. It is that big.

So we practice and we take some time learning this and getting used to it.

This kind of practice of dropping our defenses, not closing the doors and banging shut the windows, but opening to let the world flow through us is a wonderfully freeing part of our day's activity.

It's not in lieu of action, but it's preparatory to action, so that you can let your response - to the needs of the world - flow, not compulsively out of some need to be self important or hyper busy, out of a natural response to shared grief.

Sense our awareness that comes through the breath - that we are constantly connected, how intricately we belong with each other. This living breathing web of life.

Music

Loosen, Loosen by Aly Halpert - A song/prayer/meditation to heal personal and societal grief. For ordinary grief, extraordinary grief, the unbearable kind and the unseen kind and the enduring kind, in service of exhales and letting go of what is ours and not ours, of compassion, lightness, & becoming who we are after and through it all.

In Singing the Journey:

#1002 Comfort Me

#1006 In My Quiet Sorrow

#1012 When I Am Frightened

#1053 How Could Anyone



Closing Words

We live in times don't we,
When anyone awake is breaking.

We give thanks for time and space to see grief as a reflection of our love; for the freedom to acknowledge and honor pain, instead of suppressing it. May our climate grief and anxiety motivate us to change and maintain our wellbeing.

Go in peace.

OR

blessing the boats
by Lucille Clifton

(at St. Mary's)
may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

More for Children and Youth

Detailed information on age-appropriate approaches and discussions about climate grief can be obtained by downloading the Talk Climate with Young People - Full Article (pdf). The Talk Climate with Kids Info Graphic (pdf) is also great to remind yourself (or your church community) of some of the do's and don'ts of talking about climate with kids.

Small Group Ministry

A four-session small group ministry curriculum is available here to take this topic further. And a 2.5 hour workshop is here.

Thank you to this month's team:

Colleen Hamilton, MA Ed, PhD, Director of Religious Education, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sunnyvale (CA); Rev. Kelly Dignan, Co-Director, UU Ministry for Earth.

Please let us know how you're using these resources by completing this form:

<https://forms.gle/JA6d3nmEggT5BGK46>

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QUESTIONS ABOUT MONTHLY
MUSINGS? PLEASE EMAIL
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