

**Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fort Myers**  
**Order of Worship**  
**March 9, 2025**

*\*\* Please rise in body or spirit*

**Gathering Music**

To include *Come. Come Whoever You Are* UUCFM Choir

**Welcome     Gary**

**Call to Worship   Sue**

“Religion is not about accepting twenty impossible propositions before breakfast, but about doing things that change you. It is a moral aesthetic, an ethical alchemy. If you behave in a certain way, you will be transformed. The myths and laws of religion are not true because they conform to some metaphysical, scientific or historical reality but because they are life enhancing. They tell you how human nature functions, but you will not discover their truth unless you apply these myths and doctrines to your own life and put them into practice.” How to do that...

“Look into your own heart, discover what it is that gives you pain and then refuse, under any circumstance whatsoever, to inflict that pain on anybody else.”

— Karen Armstrong, *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness*

**\*\*Chalice Lighting** Gary, Sue lights

**\*\*Covenant** by James Vila Blake     Gary

Love is the spirit of this congregation and service its law. This is our great covenant: To dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another.

**\*\*Opening Hymn** #1 May Nothing Evil Cross this Door (Gary introduces)

**A Story for All Ages** from Wisdom Tales from Africa (part of the Charter for Compassion Library) Sue

**Stones of Intention** Gary

**Final Stone** Gary

**Prayer and meditation** Sue

“This is the time to be slow,

Lie low to the wall

Until the bitter weather passes.

Try, as best you can, not to let

The wire brush of doubt

Scrape from your heart

All sense of yourself

And your hesitant light.

If you remain generous,

Time will come good;

And you will find your feet

Again on fresh pastures of promise,

Where the air will be kind

And blushed with beginning.”

— John O'Donohue

### **Reflective Hymn** #95 There is More Love Somewhere

**Sermon    Charter for Compassion      The Heart Part-Rev. Sue**  
**The Hands Part-Bill Petrarca**

Good morning. Today, we gather with open hearts, seeking to deepen our connection to each other and to the world around us. Our exploration today centers on one of the most profound and transformative values that can unite all of humanity: compassion. In particular, we will reflect on the Charter for Compassion, an initiative that seeks to restore compassion to the heart of humanity's ethical and spiritual practices.

Compassion, at its core, is more than a feeling. It is an action, a conscious choice to engage with the world from a place of deep empathy and love. It challenges us to see beyond our own lives, to recognize the suffering of others, and to act in ways that alleviate that suffering. The Charter for Compassion calls upon us to live this principle... its spiritual value reaches deep into our shared history, stretching across cultures, religions, and philosophies.

Let us begin by grounding ourselves in the origins and history of the Charter for Compassion.

The Charter for Compassion was founded in 2009 by Karen Armstrong, a renowned religious scholar and former nun, in response to a growing sense of

division and violence in the world. Armstrong's years of study in comparative religion led her to one clear conclusion: compassion is the central tenet of all the world's major religions. From the Buddha's teachings of loving-kindness (that you heard about a couple of weeks ago from Andy) to the teachings of Jesus, Muhammad, and the ancient philosophers, compassion has been seen as the thread that binds humanity together.

In 2008, Armstrong was awarded the Ted Prize, which allowed her to realize her dream of creating a global movement based on this central principle. She called upon people of all faiths and cultures to unite around a single shared value: compassion. The result was the Charter for Compassion, a document that articulates the importance of compassion in all human relationships and actions.

The Charter reads, in part:

*"The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical, and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves."*

This statement is more than a simple golden rule (which by the way can be found in every religious tradition in one form or another)—it is a challenge. It is a challenge to consider not only our individual well-being but to recognize the suffering of others as equal to our own. It is a call to see every individual as part of the greater web of life and to live with a deep awareness of how our actions impact others.

We develop our compassion by looking first at what it means to be human. We live in a world full of suffering, both personal and collective. Yet, it is in this very suffering that compassion is born. Compassion does not mean simply feeling pity for another—it means walking alongside others, offering a hand, choosing to share in the pain and joy of others.

For Unitarian Universalists, the practice of compassion aligns deeply with our principles. Our principles echo in the Charter for Compassion, which emphasizes that compassion is not merely a personal virtue but a communal ethic and a call to

act for justice and to create a world where everyone is treated with respect, fairness, and care.

The spiritual origins of compassion are found not only in the world's religious traditions but also in the wisdom of the human heart. Compassion asks us to transcend the boundaries of self-interest and to connect with the suffering of others. It invites us into a deeper relationship with life itself, recognizing that our well-being is intimately tied to the well-being of the entire world. Compassion is not just an ethical choice; it is a way of being that invites us to transform our consciousness and our society.

As we reflect on the Charter for Compassion today, I invite you to consider what compassion means in your own life. How can you embody compassion in your relationships, in your work, in your community, and in your inner life?

Can you imagine a world where compassion is not only an ideal but a lived reality? A world where the suffering of others moves us to act, where love and empathy are the foundation of our interactions, and where justice is not a distant aspiration but an ongoing commitment?

In the words of Karen Armstrong, *"Compassion is the keen awareness of the interdependence of all living beings, which manifests itself in the desire to help others."* Let us embrace this awareness and let it guide our steps. Let us make compassion the heart of our spiritual practice, knowing that in each act of kindness, in each moment of care, we are helping to heal the world.

## **BILL:**

In January, our Board of Trustees took an important action. We voted to affirm the Charter for Compassion. In a minute, some friends will be joining us by video to explain the Charter, but first I would like to set the context for this important Board action and then close with what we're doing about it.

Born of our deep interdependence, we acknowledge that compassion is **love in action**. It is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity.

Sometimes compassion can feel like a passive emotion. But the Charter for Compassion makes it clear that, by affirming the Charter, we commit to restoring compassion to the center of morality in our communities.

After viewing this video, I'd like to tell you how we plan to build a Compassionate Florida by first making our local community, Fort Myers, a City of Compassion.

SHOW CHARTER VIDEO

 THE CHARTER FOR COMPASSION

I believe we are called as Americans, as UUs, as human beings to resist those among us—the Evil Empire—whose goal is one of division and oppression using the instruments of hatred: extremism, racism, bigotry, and white supremacy, to further their agenda of greed and power.

But we have a not-so-secret force flowing through our veins and dominant in our DNA which is the basis for our humanity—compassion. You could say “The force is with us!” You could say we are the Jedi Knights of Love. Our lightsaber is compassion. It's not in a clenched fist, but an outstretched resolute hand of justice.

So, here's what we need to do right here in Lee County.

The first step is to galvanize Compassion Partnerships – form “Circles of Trust”

Under the auspices of Floridians for Democracy, we have begun forming those partnerships. In addition to ourselves, the following have agreed to work with us in some capacity:

- FGCU (Roots of Compassion and Kindness Center)

- Quality Life Center
- L.I.F.E. congregations and other interfaith networks
- The Collaboratory
- Gulf Coast Symphony
- Race & Ethics/SALT Ministries (Rev Barrion Staples)
- Indivisible chapters
- And several advocacy groups in SWFL

Once formed, the circles of trust will invite civic leaders to work through local issues on the basis of formulating policy that is consistent with human decency—independent of political ideology. This means the community comes together to relieve pain and suffering wherever it exists in the community.

What we do here in SWFL will become a model for other UU churches throughout Florida. In my role as President of UU Justice Florida, I've asked all 43 UU churches in Florida to follow our lead. Some are ahead of us already.

There are communities in other states as well as Florida who are already seeing the benefits of Compassionate Cities. We are fortunate to have the successes of San Antonio, TX, Louisville ,KY, Las Vegas, NV; and St. Pete's and St. Augustine's here in Florida, as well as dozens of Compassionate initiatives across the country as resources for our efforts here. I urge you to go to [CharterForCompassion.org](http://CharterForCompassion.org) to read more about what is a global movement.

But, more importantly, compassion requires that we cultivate a deep awareness of our own hearts. It asks us to acknowledge the suffering within ourselves—our fears, our insecurities, and our wounds—and to treat ourselves with the same tenderness we would offer to a beloved friend. It is from this place of self-compassion that we are able to extend love to others. May the force **first** be with you!

From interfaith dialogues to grassroots movements for social justice, the Charter calls us to unite in common cause, recognizing that together, we can create a

community, a state, and a nation where compassion is the driving force behind all our actions.

We need to shift from a divided nation of red and blue bubbles to a healed Beloved Community of Americans – the way we make that a reality is through the compassion within each of us.

Please let me or any Board member know if you would like to work with us in this important effort for these times that find ourselves.

**Offering** Gary

**Offertory/Anthem**      *I See the You in You* UUCFM Choir

**\*\*Words of Gratitude** Gary

By the work of our hands, and the work of our hearts, our love is made real.  
May we be grateful for all that is given, and grateful for all that is shared.

**\*\*Extinguishing the Chalice** by Elizabeth Selle Jones Gary speaks (Sue extinguishes)

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

**\*\*Hymn** #128 For All That is Our Life Gary introduces

**Closing Words** Sue

May we be filled with compassion,  
Not only for those who are near, but for all beings,  
May we be gentle with ourselves,



And extend kindness to those in need.  
May we see the interconnectedness of all life,  
And act in ways that restore justice and peace.  
May compassion be our guide, our strength,  
And the light that leads us toward a more just and loving world.

**Farewell Words** Gary

**Postlude**