



UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALIST

SOCIETY OF  
GREATER SPRINGFIELD



## Chalice Lighters - Lighting Our Chalice, Tending the Flame

As Unitarian Universalists (UU's), why do we light a chalice? When do we do it, and what does it mean? Who gets to light the chalice? Can anyone?

Here at UUSGS, we want *everyone* who wants to light a chalice to be able to do so. Even - and especially - in worship. Unitarians and Universalists have for centuries believed that *each and every* person contains within them the spark of the Divine, the light of truth. *Every* person has inherent worth & dignity; therefore, *any* person can light our chalice.

However... before we do so lightly, it is important to emphasize just how *important* this simple activity is in the life of our community. The chalice has an important history. The chalice is a symbol of some of our most deeply held shared values. The chalice draws us together into depth and care.

OK, maybe this simple act of lighting the chalice isn't so simple after all...

## The Flaming Chalice - Our History:

A flame within a chalice (that is, a cup with a stem and foot) is an important symbol in Unitarian Universalism. Hans Deutsch, an Austrian artist and refugee, first brought together the chalice and the flame as a Unitarian symbol during his work with the Unitarian Service Committee during World War II. To Deutsch, the chalice symbolized sacrifice and love in an image whose meaning was both current and ancient, and one that spans many faith traditions. UU's today have many different interpretations of the flaming chalice, including: the light of reason, the warmth of community, and the flame of hope.

## The Flaming Chalice - Our Practice:

Today, most UU congregations light a chalice to begin their communal worship.<sup>1</sup> This lighting joins those gathered in a common act. It invites each and every person to come in, to be a part of something larger. That flame - and the act of lighting it - also connects us to the web of UU congregations throughout the world.

*"Think about yourself as a container. Sometimes life can feel too big for just you to hold. Too many feelings for just your little container, right? A larger container - a larger vessel - is needed. This is as true of human biology as it is of human spirituality: we need one another. Lighting a chalice is one way we can access a larger container. We join with others the way a glass of water joins with the ocean. By lighting a chalice, sometimes what was filling me up inside isn't just mine to carry any more."  
- Rev. Jason Seymour*



Lighting a chalice is one way to honor and to create space for what we do as a community: the transformations, the support, the healing, the inspiration. Lighting a chalice is an *invocation*, which means it is done symbolically to *invoke* (or "call to mind") our common values.

When else might UU's light a chalice then, other than for worship? Chalice lightings are often important at the beginning of small group ministry, or whenever a difficult or important conversation might occur. Many UU's light

chalices at home, perhaps on a table during a meal, perhaps on a personal altar as a part of a regular practice. During the pandemic, lighting chalices together was an especially important way that individual community members could connect - and stay connected - by doing something symbolic together. Whether you are by yourself, in a small group, or joined with hundreds of others... lighting a chalice is a reminder that we can always ground ourselves in our deepest values, and that the larger vessel is always there for us.

<sup>1</sup> "Worship" is an often misunderstood word. Understood more as lighting up than bowing down, it actually comes from Olde English meaning "acknowledgement of worth"... which is exactly what we do on Sundays and many days in between!

# Would you like to light our chalice?



When we are able to gather in person, Chalice Lighters will help to lead our communal worship services by lighting the common chalice in our sanctuary. While in-person meetings remain restricted, however, you are invited to create a short video of you & yours lighting a chalice. These videos may be included in our public worship services as we gather together online.

## Setting Up:

You will need the following (UUSGS can help you get anything you may not have):

- A chalice
- A candle (battery operated or traditional - with flame source. If using flame, please consider having a second candle and a taper so that you can light the chalice easily and quickly from them. Fumbling with lighters and/or matches does not a good chalice video make!)
- A space that inspires you to enter a spirit of ritual. This can be a table or altar, or maybe even a large rock outside.
- A stationary video recording device and/or designated videographer. Most smart phones are just fine. Please use good lighting and film in **LANDSCAPE** mode (the “long way,” NOT the “tall way”).

*“When we light the chalice in worship, we illuminate a world that we feel called upon to serve with love and a sense of justice. Lighting the chalice for worship signals that we are creating a sacred space and keeping alive a promise that we have made together to care for it. It is our ‘Fire of Commitment.’”*

*- Darcie Farber*

## Getting Ready & Lighting the Chalice:

Before lighting the chalice, set everything up. Set up the shot. Be mindful of your background. Try to include the people who are lighting the chalice with you, not just their hands. Kids are always welcome, of course

Next, take a moment to center yourself and the ones you are with. You can do so in silence or in prayer; two options are included on the next page. Press “RECORD” before centering, or afterward if it won’t be too much of a distraction. Don’t worry about how you look or how long you take to get ready - your video will be trimmed to just the actual lighting of your chalice!

Light your chalice and say (together, if lighting with others): **“Come, let us worship together.”**

Stay in place for a few seconds after lighting before turning off the video. This will allow our editors the space they need for any fades, etc.

That’s it! Celebrate! You did it!

*Thank you for participating, and for bringing forth your light. Stormy seas require beacons.  
May the light we call forth continue to inspire and protect all that is true, holy, and good.*

## **APPENDIX - CENTERING RITUAL:**

You can use the following instructions below or create your own centering moment:

- Stand or sit by your chalice quietly.
- Take a deep breath and allow yourselves to enter a spirit of worship, breathing out and setting aside all urgent demands, if only for a moment...
- Imagine circles - like ripples from a stone thrown into water stretching out around you and from your chalice - stretching to everyone in this community, to other UU's, to all others who gather as we do, have gathered in the past, and will gather in the future.
- Standing in that HUGE circle, imagine that everyone is lifting up a light and the light is growing brighter and brighter.
- Feel the little spark of light inside you call out to them and that great big pool of light answer you back saying "we see you," "we love you," "we're here for you."
- Now it's your turn to answer that call. It's time to light your candle and send all the love you have with your light back to them and out into the world. Invite all who would join you by saying "Come, Let Us Worship TOGETHER".

Another simple, ancient centering prayer is the one repeated by the Psalmist: "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable unto you..." (Psalm 19 - a p)

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- "The Flaming Chalice" on UUA.org: <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/who-we-are/chalice/flaming-chalice>
- Mission, Vision, Values, End of UUSGS (PDF): <http://www.uuspringfield.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/UUSGS-Nested-Bowls.pdf>
  - These statements are part of the *invocation* symbolized in lighting a chalice at UUSGS. These statements belong to this community in particular and are a part of what we call ourselves and one another into as the shared ministry of UUSGS.

## **CONTACT:**

With questions, please feel free to contact Rev. Jason Seymour and/or Darcie Farber, Director of Family Ministry:

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