

Making This House Our Home
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First Unitarian Congregation, Toronto
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There is a difference between a house and a home.

A house is a structure—walls, windows, a roof that keeps out the rain. It can be measured in square feet, insured, bought, and sold. A house can be empty. It can be silent. It can stand for years without ever truly being lived in.

But a home—a home is something else entirely.

A home is made of presence. Of laughter echoing down hallways. Of conversations that stretch longer than expected. Of meals shared, even the ones that didn't really turn out, undercooked, or overcooked or just somehow not right. A home is where we bring not just our strengths, but our whole selves—our questions, our failings, our grief, our becoming.

A home is not built once.

It is built again and again, by all who dwell within it.

We also know that “home” is not equally available to everyone. For some, home has been a place of silence, or fear, or not being fully seen. Some have been excluded from it—by family, by society, by systems that decide who belongs and who does not.

So, our task is not simply to enjoy home—but to *create* it more justly, more intentionally, more widely, wherever we find ourselves.

When we talk about making this house a home, we are not pointing backward to what was, to another time, another place—we are reaching toward what could be.

This building—these walls, these chairs, these familiar corners—this is our house.

It shelters us. It holds our gatherings. It is where we mark the seasons of our lives: child dedications, memorials, moments of joy, moments of heartbreak. In a few short months we have done all of this here. Our presence, our work, our gathering are making this sacred space. It is where we come when the world feels too heavy—or too beautiful—to carry alone.

But this building, on its own, without us, without those we don't yet know, is not a home.

It becomes a home when someone notices the newcomer standing hesitantly at the door—and walks over.

It becomes a home when someone says, “I’m not sure I believe what I used to believe,” and hears in response not judgment, but curiosity.

It becomes a home when we risk telling the truth about our lives—and trust that we will be held.

It becomes a home when we make a mistake, when we hurt someone, and when we have the courage to reach out, to do what we can to make it right.

In Unitarian Universalism, we often say: *deeds, not creeds*.

We do not gather because we all believe the same things. We gather because we choose to build something together—something grounded in love, in justice, in the ongoing search for truth.

But that kind of community does not happen by accident. It is not automatic. It is not guaranteed. It is built—intentionally, imperfectly, and collectively.

Making a house, this house, our home requires three things:

presence, participation, and promise.

First, presence.

A home is made by showing up.

Not just physically—though that matters—but emotionally, spiritually. Bringing your real self into the room. Letting yourself be seen, even a little more than is comfortable.

Presence says: *I am here. I belong here. And I am willing to be part of what happens here.*

Second, participation.

A home is not a place we consume. It isn’t like your gym, or the anonymous coffee shop, where attendance is transactional. It is a place we contribute. In a home, we don’t ask only, “What do I get?” We also ask, “How do I help create it?” “What can I give?”

Sometimes that giving looks like volunteering, teaching, organizing, donating, making coffee, singing. Sometimes it looks quieter: listening deeply, offering encouragement, holding space for someone else’s pain.

And third, promise.

A home is built on covenant. This, in our Unitarian Universalist tradition, is key. We don't have a common understanding. We don't have a creed that provides the glue that makes us a people. Instead we gather with promises to one another. Not a contract, not a rigid set of rules—but a living promise about how we will be with one another.

We promise to make space for each other. We promise to listen. We promise to grow—even when growth is uncomfortable. We promise to return, again and again, to love.

And perhaps most importantly, we promise not perfection—but commitment.

Because every real home experiences strain. Misunderstanding. Moments when we fall short of who we want to be.

What makes it a home is not that these moments never happen.

It is that we stay. We repair. We begin again.

So what does it mean—really—to make this house our home?

It means recognizing that this place is not “someone else's responsibility.”

It is not the minister's alone.

Not the board's alone.

Not the long-time members' alone.

It belongs to all of us—and it is shaped by all of us, and we, in turn, are shaped by it.

Sometimes I wonder about what my life would be like had I not, as the young adult, young parent I was, found our congregation in Hamilton. I sometimes think that much of my current life would be unrecognizable. My home in Unitarian Universalism has shaped me in so many ways. I know I have been held when I needed to be held. When tragedy has touched my life, people have cared, bringing food, flowers and friendship. I've also been challenged, asked to see more than that which I'd been taught to consider.

I know that some of you have been changed by your encounters in this community. And that you, in turn, have helped it become what it is today.

A home is not built once.

It is built again and again, by all who dwell within it. And here we are...

Every greeting, every act of generosity, every moment of courage adds something to the foundation. Every time we choose connection over isolation, generosity over scarcity, hope over indifference—we are building. Every time we support one another and every time, we challenge one another and let ourselves be challenged, we are building something that is

bigger than any one of us. Mark Morrison-Reed, one of your former ministers wrote, “The religious community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be seen, and our strength too limited to do all that must be done. Together, our vision widens and our strength is renewed.” Here we build the place where those that need a place to rest, a place to find ease can do so. Here too, we build the home where those that need to be challenged to cast their vision wider are, in fact, challenged. It is important work. Our mission affirms this. Each week we hear the words: our mission is to nurture connection, share life’s joys and sorrows, and act for love and justice.

It’s a strange thing being a member of a congregation. We are here because something in us knows that we need this place. But, there is something else we must remember:

We are not only building a home for ourselves.

We are building a home for the person who will walk through these doors for the first time next month...or next year...or ten years from now. Someone who is searching.

Someone who has been told they do not belong. Someone who is longing for a place where they can breathe more freely. We are building a home for the child that is not yet born, for the children that will need compassionate adults to help them see the world with the warmth of compassion and the spark of justice.

What will they find here?

Today is our opportunity to reflect.

Where have you already experienced this place as home? Where are you being called to deepen your participation? What would it mean—for you—to help make this house more fully a home?

Today is the beginning of the annual Generosity campaign. We are asking you, and all the members of this congregation, to consider your financial contribution for the fiscal year, July to June. Your choices will help inform our plans. The dreams we have for this congregation are big ones. Reality will be shaped, in part, by the budget we create for ourselves. Because the truth is, love may be freely given, but community has real, tangible needs. Heat, light, staff, programs—these are the structures that make our shared life possible.

Stewardship, at its heart, is not about obligation.

It is about participation.

It is about saying: *This matters to me. I want to help sustain it.* We know that everyone's ability to give is based on their particular reality. There is no ‘cookie cutter’ giving guidance.

But what we do know is that we need people to be generous, and, if possible, to increase their financial contribution. The dreams we have for this congregation are big ones. The degree to which they are achievable is up to each one of us.

Because in the end, a home is not something we inherit. It is something we build—together. With open hands. With open hearts. With a shared commitment to love that is lived, not just spoken.

May we continue that work. May we strengthen these walls not only with resources, but with care. May we widen these doors with welcome.

And may we, together, make this house our home.