

**All Souls Church, Unitarian
Covenant Group Theme Guide
September, 2021**

Reunion

1 There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered. **Nelson Mandela**

2 Deciding to remember, and what to remember, is how we decide who we are. **Robert Pinsky**

3 The best effect of fine persons is felt after we have left their presence. **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

4 Reunions with people, places, things, and ourselves happen every day around us and within us. Whether to participate or not will always be our choice. **Nancy Copeland-Payton, from her introduction to *Restoring Life's Missing Pieces: The Spiritual Power of Remembering and Reuniting with People, Places, Things and Self* by Caren Goldman**

5 When you remember me, it means that you have carried something of who I am with you, that I have left some mark of who I am on who you are. It means that you can summon me back to your mind even though countless years and miles may stand between us. It means that if we meet again, you will know me. **Frederick Buechner**

6 We do not remember days; we remember moments. **Cesare Pavese**

7 Family faces are magic mirrors. Looking at the people who belong to us we see the past, present, and future. **Gail Buckley**

8 Souls tend to go back to who feels like home. **N.R. Hart**

9 Time and time again, we reconnect. It's like the universe nudges us to give it one more chance. **Nikki Rowe**

10 As for you, you are part of my "Church" of friends who are in many ways more important to me than the institution. **Thomas Merton, *Striving Towards Being: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz* (Robert Faggen, editor)**

11 For if heaven is about anything at all, it is about reunion. It is about being joined again with those we love. **Melannie Svoboda, *Rummaging for God: Seeking the Holy in Every Nook and Cranny***

12 The image of the "table" is a powerful one for me. It runs through biblical history and it is as contemporary as the evening meal that helps hold a family together, the potluck supper that cements social and spiritual connections, or the special gathering of loved ones that marks a reunion or holiday celebration. It is at the table that we see each other's faces, remind ourselves of the ties that bind us, and rededicate ourselves to who and what we were meant to be. It is also an opportunity to be thankful for what we have so that it might not slip away.

— Jim Wallis, Who Speaks for God?

13 Tonight we come together
to make this house our own,
to celebrate that certainty
amid so much unknown.

We thank the ones who built it
of brick and wood and pane,
the walls to grant us safety,
the roof against the rain.

But we know it isn't finished,
and we accept our part:
filling it with meaning,
building it by heart.

This house won't be a paradise:
We'll fight. We'll feel alone.
But then we'll come together,
and this house will be our home.

The joys and sorrow yet to come,
the worst winds that have blown:
We'll love each other here,
and this house will be our home.

--Tim Myers

14 We gather in gratitude--
May our past, present, and future
Be honored and blessed.
May we, as family,
Be stitched together as
One heart, one home--
One everlasting love.

--Annie Dougherty

15 Circles appear wherever we call them. I called a circle as part of my twenty-fifth college reunion. Circling was still such a new concept, I wanted to see if the readiness I felt in other groups was also present among women who had mostly grown up in the middle of the Middle West. One early evening in June of 1993, we closed the doors to the girls' dorm, and twenty women from Macalester College, Class of '68, looked at each other anew. On a coffee table, I laid out a Balinese cloth, candles, and a basket that travels with me. To this centerpiece, each woman contributed an object that symbolically represented her life now: photos of family, a favorite book, an identification badge from work, a running shoe, a rock from Lake Superior. We lit the candles and looked at each other in the flickering light, seeing remembered twenty-year-old faces in our forty-seven year-old eyes. We opened the discussion and began sharing all the things we don't always take time to speak about in the busyness of our days. It had been a quarter of a century since we came of age: now what? As we went around the group, each woman held her object, said what she had come to say. It took three hours of close attention.

— Christina Baldwin, *Calling the Circle: The First and Future Culture*

16 But there's no vocabulary
For love within a family, love that's lived in
But not looked at, love within the light of which
All else is seen, the love within which
All other love finds speech.
This love is silent.

--T.S. Eliot, *The Elder Statesman*

17 If you were to name a knickknack, curio, souvenir, necklace, watch, piece of clothing, or something else that instantly reunites you with special childhood memories, what would it be? . . . If it is still part of your life, where do you keep it and when do you visit, admire, or use it?" You see, nothing can be excluded from the process of dealing with the missing pieces of our lives that need to be re-claimed as useful resources for our personal renewal.

--Caren Goldman, *Restoring Life's Missing Pieces: The Spiritual Power of Remembering and Reuniting with People, Places, Things and Self*

For Reflection and Discussion

A Have you experienced a reunion recently? It could be large or small, formal or informal. What did you take away from the event?

B Have you ever pushed away from a reunion even though it felt like an important opportunity to reconnect with some aspect of your past? Do you know why you resist the event?

C Have you felt an urge to revisit your birthplace or travel to your ancestors' homelands?

D Are you eager for an All Souls reunion? What are you looking forward to?

--Compiled by Mary Beth Hatem for All Souls Church, United