

Gathering Music: *Bless the Broken Road on flute*

Brief Welcome to Albany UU and intro to Congregational Greeting [Chris J]

Welcome to the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, also known as Albany UU. I'd like to extend a special welcome to those who are visiting with us this morning, whether in person or online. We aspire to be a beloved community, open and welcoming to all. If you'd like to know more about our congregation, please join us after any service for coffee and conversation, and check out our welcome table in the lobby.

Hello, I am Chris Jensen and this is Randy Rosette. We are the co-presenters of today's service. Since 1993, we have been involved in many aspects of the Albany UU community including the music program. As musicians, we see the powerful impact music can have on people.

Today we'll explore how music can help us remember the past, deal with troubled times, share our strength with each other, and maybe even give us some hope for the future.

Now, please turn off your electronic devices and I invite you to briefly say hello to someone near you. If you're online, you're welcome to unmute briefly to greet others online.

Congregational Greeting CHRIS

Guest and Presenters briefly greet a few people in the front row and then return to the chancel within about 45 seconds. RING THE CHIME AGAIN to bring attention back to the service.

Call to Community and Chalice Lighting CHRIS

To open today's service I would like to share an excerpt from *The Courage to Continue on the Journey* by Lyn Cox....

Grant us hearts to love boldly, to embody our faith and our values in living words and deeds. May our hearts open to embrace humility, grace, and reconciliation. Grant us the ability to learn and grow, to let the Spirit of Love and Truth work its transformation upon us and within us. Grant us the spirit of hospitality, the willingness to sustain a fit dwelling place for the holy that resides in all being. Grant us a sense of being at peace in the world, even as we are in motion. To this we add the silent prayers of our hearts. **(PAUSE)**

Introduce and speak the Chalice Lighting words by saying: CHRIS (Randy light chalice)

Each week when we gather, we light a chalice, a symbol of Unitarian Universalism. Please join in saying today's chalice lighting with words by S. William Feiss.

All: We light this flame

Chris: as our fervent plea to brighten the dark corners of our hearts;

All: We hold this flame

Chris: For in it is the promise of warmth for souls grown cold in loss and despair;

All: We kindle this light

Chris: That we might continue to find comfort in its warmth and strength in its light.

Part 1: Story (First half) CHRIS

As we say farewell to 2025, I will start by reading the first part of *Goodbye, Old House* by Margaret Wild and Ann James.

This is the last time I'll fish in this river.

This is the last time I'll run through these trees.

This is the last time I'll pet this pony.

This is the last time I'll swing on this gate.

This is the last time I'll eat at this table.

This is the last time I'll dream by this fire.

This is the last time I'll sleep in this house.

(Pause- picture only)

Goodbye, kitchen.

Goodbye, bathroom.

Goodbye, living room.

Goodbye, big bedroom.

Goodbye, *my* bedroom.

Goodbye, stars on the ceiling.

Goodbye, mouse hole in the corner.

Goodbye, writing on the wall.

(Pause- picture only)

Goodbye, old house, goodbye.

Then say: Please remain seated for all songs today. We welcome the addition of your voice to ours for our first unison song, *Those Were the Days*, by Boris Fomen and Gene Raskin.

Unison Song 1 (CHRIS go to BOSE microphone...R and C sing)

Part 2: Troubled Times

CHRIS: This has been a year full of chaos, darkness, and uncertainty. From the beginning of the second Trump administration to the ongoing undeclared wars in Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan, to the seemingly random fluctuations in import tariffs, the unrelenting stream of change and upheaval can be disturbing, even all-consuming. Many are wondering and observing with dismay as decades of scientific progress and evidence-based health care is unwound and cast aside. The attacks on reproductive rights, intensifying since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, and the associated impacts on health care coverage has been devastating.

The consistent success and proven results of vaccination protocols being challenged and eligibility recommendations reduced or eliminated leaves large segments of the population unprotected and vulnerable.

The democratic foundations of our system of checks and balances are being eroded at an alarming pace. Congress has increasingly abandoned its constitutional responsibilities, and the Supreme Court has enabled a growing concentration of presidential power while showing a striking disregard for long-standing precedent. Even our free and fair elections are not as secure or equitable as we once believed, and many states are actively pursuing changes that could make them even less so.

At the regional level, the persistent issues with water supply contamination in Rensselaer county and contention over the effectiveness of the Hudson River PCB dredging project leads us to consider the long-term effects of these challenges. We are also aware of the significant lack of progress toward the ambitious climate goals outlined in New York State legislation and are concerned about how to make realistic progress toward those goals.

Randy: (Sigh) Such trying times in the world- everywhere. The cacophony surrounding us has been and is overwhelming.

Now, let's take a moment to bring this down to an individual level. 2025 was challenging for me personally. In the first quarter of the year, I was diagnosed with two distinct cancers requiring two major surgeries. Not easy to deal with...but even harder when added to the sadness and trouble in the world that has so affected us all. Each of us in this room has been touched by loss and grief, perhaps caused by illness, the death of a family member or friend, reduction of abilities, increased dependence, the loss of a job or home and more.

People have been and are currently faced with horrendous actions that profoundly impact their lives and well-being. To mention just a few....Consider the record deportation and targeting of immigrants. Think of the significant restrictions and loss of rights affecting transgender individuals. Proposed policy changes and executive actions threaten the protections and rights for marginalized communities. This terrible list goes on and on...

When times get rough, it can be helpful to sing together, especially songs whose lyrics reach deep into our hearts. Let's join our voices in *Bridge Over Troubled Water* by Paul Simon.

Unison Song 2 (C to microphone, R and C sing)

Part 3: Community (C back to pulpit)

CHRIS: How do we deal with all this darkness and uncertainty? For some people, inner strength and will power (or what some would call stubbornness) may deal with a portion of the burden. However, most of us feel that we need help, and will turn to the support of groups, formal or informal, with which we have connections. These could be traditional fraternal organizations, arts and/or music ensembles, neighborhood committees, or charitable support groups. At Albany UU, we might request the formal support of the minister or a Pastoral Care Associate, share rapport with a committee or work group in which we participate, be refreshed by the extended conversation we have in coffee hour or in a hallway on Sunday, or feel touched by a visit, card, or phone call from our Caring Network.

Randy: When we are hurting and facing hardship, each of us reacts differently. A person might withdraw, isolating from others and their usual activities. Another becomes anxious and stressed out. Some become very involved in activities to keep busy and focus elsewhere. Many emphasize self-care, using mindfulness, yoga, and other practices that encourage mental, physical, and emotional well-being.

For me, as I dealt with cancer, I researched and became as knowledgeable as I could and followed the steps recommended by the traditional health care system. These actions addressed the physical piece. But, what about my feelings, the worry and the fear? After a bit, I figured out that the most meaningful way I could heal was to ask for help from my community, my friends and family.

Bill Withers wrote a timeless song about mutual aid and community strength. Let's sing together, *Lean on Me* to capture his strong message.

Unison Song 3 (C to microphone, R and C sing)

Joys & Sorrows (PCA) SHARON

A Pastoral Care Associate will come to the pulpit to lead the Joys & Sorrows ritual. They have their own script.

*After the stone-moving ritual, the PCA will end by asking the congregation to remain seated to sing **One More Step**. (CHRIS MOVE to Microphone to join R for song, then back to pulpit)*

Part 4: Action and Hello

CHRIS: When we look at the myriad of issues that confront us daily, it's easy to throw up your hands and say, "How can I possibly do anything about all this!" As members and friends of Albany UU, we have literally dozens of examples of specific steps and actions that we can take. We can help make gains in energy efficiency, support less advantaged people with neighborhood outreach like our Saturday community breakfast, attend rallies and forums in support of progressive legislation and fair elections, join a small group to explore spiritual growth, volunteer at a local school like

Sheridan Prep, and many, many more. When we see and experience the positive effects of our actions upon others, not only does it affect us similarly, but also helps us to see the possibility of hope going forward.

Randy: Well, Chris, as you reh-collected significant Albany UU efforts to improve our world.... I want to bring up other encouraging happenings. Personally, I am moving toward full recovery from cancer with ongoing maintenance and preventative measures. I continue to marvel at the support and friendship shared with me by so many including our Albany UU community members. Statewide, Governor Hochul recently announced support for the NY Medical Aid in Dying legislation which will be signed in January. Republican Representative Elise Stefanik withdrew from the NY gubernatorial race and will not run again for Congress. The November elections showed strong support for the Democratic party locally, statewide and nationally. The end of 2025 has shown powerful organizing of the transgender community and its allies, along with growing public support. Advocacy for reproductive rights, healthcare access, and affordable housing continues. So many organizations and individuals are FIGHTING for Justice and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. Perhaps I am misguided, but these things give me HOPE. Won't you accompany me as I look to the future with HOPE for Resilience and positive Change? Let's all be part of a better future as we say Hello to 2026.

Part 4: Hello *Goodbye, Old House* (cont...) Randy....

Let's continue with the ending of *Goodbye, Old House*. (**Randy reads then sits down**)

This is the first time I'll jump over these cracks.

This is the first time I'll push open this gate.

This is the first time I'll climb up this tree.

This is the first time I'll look over this fence.

This is the first time I'll pet this cat.

This is the first time I'll walk through this door.

Hello, kitchen.

Hello, bathroom.

Hello, living room.

Hello, big bedroom.

Hello, *my* bedroom.

Hello, comfy window seat.

Hello, bright city lights.

Hello, writing on the wall.

Hello, new house, hello.

Offering (CHRIS) *Introduce the offering and instruct people on giving options.*

We and many Albany UU choir members collaborated to develop virtual music to keep our connections and our community strong. Here is *Give Us Hope*.

[Offertory during collection then say...]

For all you have given, in all the ways you give, thank you.

Benediction (Randy)

To close with another quote from Lyn Cox:

Spirit of Life and Love, known by many names and yet fully known by none, we give thanks for this time and this place of renewal. We give thanks for the ability to begin again: after the disaster, after the tragedy, after the loss, after meeting the challenge set before us. Grant us the courage to continue on the journey, the courage to speak up for the well

being of others and ourselves and the planet. May we forgive each other when our courage falls short, and may we try again. Let us cultivate together the strength to welcome every kind of gift and all manner of ways to be on the journey together.

Please stay seated while we sing our final unison song *Auld Lang Syne* including special lyrics.

Final Unison Song (**Randy and Chris sing then move to chalice**)

Chalice Extinguishing (**Randy reads and Chris extinguishes the chalice**)

As we extinguish the chalice, please join in the words shown on the screen by Debra Burrell:

Fire consumes and casts a bright light.

May our chalice flame consume our regrets for the past,

our fears about the future,

and our worries about today.

May it light for us a path of joy and peace.

Closing Script / Invitation to Social Time (**Randy**)

Our service has ended, but all are invited to stay for conversation and fellowship in Channing Hall, through these doors (*point toward door to hall*) and down the hall.

Please DO come back next Sunday, when Charlotte Baldes, Carolyn Stetson, Luis Torres share their individual perspectives during our “This I Believe” service.

We’re glad you joined us today.

Traveling Music **Randy plays *You’ve Got a Friend in Me* on the Bose—**
-----*Worship leaders process out.*