

ORDER OF WORSHIP AT THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF ASHEVILLE

The printed Order of Service that ushers hand out to those attending worship each week is more than just a playbill describing what will happen over the course of the service. It is a theological document, describing the journey that the worship service will invite those who are present to take together that day. It reflects our understanding of what is important in worship and what we hope to achieve through worship. Though the order of worship may change slightly from week to week, this is the regular format we seek to follow.

GATHERING

The service begins with us gathering together as one community, arriving from many different places in this community to join as one people with a common purpose.

Call to Worship

The chime serves as notice that the service is beginning and invites participants to attend to worship, to end their conversations or private reveries and join as a community.

Welcome

This is led by the Minister or, if a guest is speaking, by the Worship Associate. The leader introduces him/herself, the guest speaker, if there is one, and the church in a few words. She/he also invites participation in the coffee hour afterward and the larger life of the church with reference to the announcements, highlighting important events in the coming week, and briefly shares pastoral concerns brought to him or her by pastoral visitors.

Prelude

Music invites us into a different space, to let go of whatever may have been preoccupying us and focus our minds and hearts on being present.

SHAPING OUR COMMUNITY

Having gathered as a community, we now begin the work of shaping that community. This is the portion of the service includes rituals of celebration and affirmation, such as child dedication, welcoming new members, the dedication of teachers, pastoral visitors, and others, the lighting of candles for births and deaths, are performed.

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting

The symbol of our community, the flaming chalice, is lighted accompanied by spoken words, from the Worship Associate on duty that day or guest speaker, that focus our attention on the theme of worship that day and our gathered community.

Opening Hymn

The first hymn typically is inviting, rousing and either well-known to the congregation or easily taught.

Affirmation or Ceremony or Story

For a faith tradition that often makes much of that which it denies, this is an important moment to name that which we as a community affirm. The affirmation is written or organized in responsive format, trading spoken parts between the worship leader and the congregation. The affirmation may be composed or compiled from other resources. If the words are gathered from another source, the source should be listed.

This is also the place in the service where ceremonies are performed and stories are told, when there is an intergenerational beginning. When there is a ceremony, such as Child Dedication, New Member Welcoming, or Teacher Dedication, or a story is told for children and youth, the affirmation is omitted. When a story is told for an Intergenerational Beginning the worship leader invites the congregation to sing the children to their classes with the song "As You Go," which should be printed in the order of service.

Offertory

The Offertory is the piece of music that is played while the Offering is received. The Offering closes the "Shaping Our Community" section of our service, affirming that key to how we shape our community is how we support it. One a month we share all cash received and designated checks with an organization in the community that reflects our values. The offering is introduced by the worship leader or worship associate and those present for worship are invited to light candles of joy or concern from the chalice flame.

REFLECTING

Having gathered and shaped our community, we begin the work at the heart of our faith: the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We frame this as "Reflecting," offering different ways of encountering the world and the many sources of wisdom that it offers.

Spoken & Silent Meditation

Both spoken and silent meditations invite the congregation to open their hearts and minds and put themselves in touch with their own deep source of knowing. The silence should be long enough to enable those present to quiet themselves, usually 1 to 2 minutes.

Musical Reflection/Hymn

This music, either performed or joined in a hymn, serves as a response to the previous moment of personal reflection and usually has a meditative feeling to it.

Reading(s)

This reading can be a text that the following sermon is centered on, or it could be an evocative comment on the theme of the service. It offers a different voice from that of the worship leader and is often read by the Worship Associate or a member of the congregation.

Anthem

The central music piece of the service, sung by the choir or presented by guest musicians.

Sermon

Our tradition points to the sermon as the central moment of the service. It represents the worship leader's best efforts to name the truth as he or she perceives it, words that, as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, give us "life passed through the fire of thought." Typically it is 15 to 20 minutes in length.

GOING FORTH TOGETHER

After concluding our reflecting, we prepare to end the service, reminding ourselves of the hope and values that inform and underlie our community.

Hymn

This closing hymn gathers us once again as a community prepared to reenter our daily lives with purpose and faith.

Closing Words

A few brief words to remind the congregation of the work before them.

Closing Song

Those present are invited to join hands in singing this song composed for our congregation.

Postlude

This music ends the service. Congregants are welcome to leave, but are asked in the order of service to do so quietly out of courtesy to the musician. After the closing song, the minister or worship leader extinguishes the chalice flame and goes to the foyer with the Worship Associate to greet members of the congregation as they leave.