

# *Where the Heart Is*

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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*Finding Your Pad* © 2022 Rod E.S.Q.

For many of us, the first thing we might think of when we hear of the composer Henry Mancini might be the Pink Panther theme. I know that it's one of the tunes that is part of the soundtrack of my life, and I suspect that this might be the case for many who grew up watching the animated shorts by United Artists.

And if you went to high school in Ontario, chances are you also heard another one of his iconic themes after studying Shakespeare's iconic play *Romeo and Juliet* – if your class also happened to watch the film adaptation by Franco Zeffirelli.

Like the play, and its film adaptations, the epic *Love theme from Romeo and Juliet* by Nino Rota, and arranged by Mancini, is at once evocative in its sense of lovelorn longing, and in its mood of melancholy heartbreak. *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the quintessential love stories – you know the story. And, it is also appropriately classified amid the *tragedy* section of Shakespeare's works.

The tragedy comes from the other major theme in the play – family. The star-crossed lovers were kept from the fairy-tale ending to live happily ever after... because their love was unacceptable in their society.

The play explores this tension – and questions it. When Juliet asks “Wherefore art thou Romeo?” she's not all that concerned with his first name, she's really asking about his *family* name – Montague – and its implied feud with her own Capulet provenance. And in asking “What's in a name?” shortly before Romeo approaches her balcony, she wonders

whether those family connections really warrant cancelling her own desire for a new family of her choosing, even if their families of origin seek to get in the way... which they did – with tragic consequences.

Their story rings true to many people who have needed to redefine or reconsider what family means to them. Among the LGBTQ+ community, the ability to form – and find support among – a family of choice has often been a life-saving necessity, when their families of origin have not been supportive of their sexual or gender identities. And this continues to be a recurring theme in stories that feature Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer, *plus*, characters.

Of course, even if your family of origin is supportive and continues to be a part of your life, it is always valuable to consider who your extended family of choice might be. You might not always call them family, but they may still hold that same nurturing and trusting company, which you would expect from anyone who you might consider family.

These may be friends who you can confide in, coworkers who you might connect with, communities that bring you joy and a sense of belonging... a church that offers you a spiritual home, for inspiration, comfort, and occasional challenges and invitations for growth. These can all encompass a larger family of choice. People who can help you feel at *home*.

If home is where the heart is, then the people who feed your soul – be they families of origin or families of choice – are what elevate the places where you live into *spaces for life*.

As we have been reminded over the past couple of years, our church goes beyond the walls of our building, and its core lies in the people – the assembly – that form the church.

Of course, we do not forget that the *places* also matter. Anyone who has ever been homeless, or precariously housed, knows that a reliable

roof and a set of walls have a value of their own – with immediate, primary importance.

And we also know that beyond physical survival, our emotional well-being and spiritual survival also hinges on needs beyond protection from the weather, which is why finding effective support networks often go along with any comprehensive housing strategy. The two form a complementary mashup of protection and support, that allow souls not only to survive, but to thrive.

There is a reason why I still broadcast our live services from our building, which is the place that often houses our spiritual home. The physical place is one of the things that can help us tell each other the story of our faith family of choice. And we take this opportunity to remember that we bring that faith into the ordinary places of our lives, even if that means that we sometimes watch, or read, the sermon from the places that represent your more habitual homes.

Because that's another thing, we each can have multiple places, and multiple communities, that we can call home, and each may involve a different aspect of our family, writ large.

I have shared before that when people ask me where I'm from, I am sometimes puzzled and have trouble giving a direct answer. Often, I presume people are wondering where I was born, and that's a bit easier to answer, but it is clear that other times, people want to know where it is that I consider home.

And that's trickier, because my heart has been in many places, and parts of it still are. Having lived for extended periods of time in at least six different places (and some shorter spans in a few others) I have been fortunate that I've usually been able to be with family of origin, or find families of choice, or a combination thereof, wherever I live. I sometimes joke that I'm poly-metropolitan, as I feel like coming home whenever I visit any of the places where I've been. And then, when I

come back to Leamington after any of these visits, I am coming home again.

All this to say that home and family will look different, depending on your story and your needs.

As we observe Family Day this weekend, we also consider how families can come in all shapes and sizes. Our Unitarian Universalist faith has called us to be intentionally inclusive of this diversity, and this includes recognizing that families may not always look the way that some of us might have come to expect.

This may mean remembering that, for some folks in our community, families of choice may be as important or even more important than families of origin. Or it may mean keeping in mind that many households are bigger or smaller than the nuclear family that has often been considered traditional.

It may mean staying mindful of our language... it remains common, for instance, to ask couples when they might start a family by having children, and this phrasing has a risk of overlooking the fact that they may already consider themselves a family, not to mention that there may be reasons why children are not there yet, or are not there any more, or may never be there, but a family is there nonetheless.

My friends, building and finding family can sometimes be *hard* work, as can be maintaining a connection or rebuilding connection with existing family. It is also *heart* work, as this labour of love invites us to co-create spaces we can call home, be they in our houses or dwellings, or beyond the walls where we spend most of our time.

My friends, observing and celebrating the complementary mashup of people and places is part of a shared ministry, as is the work of reimagining and being open to seeing in how many places, and in how

many ways, our kindred spirits find family and make themselves at home.

My friends, may the spirit of the Family holiday offer you one of many holy days in which to find where the heart is.

So may it be,  
In love, in housewarming, and in grace,

Amen

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*Suggested Hymns:*

**Opening Hymn #290 Bring, O Past, Your Honor**

~)-| Words: Charles H. Lyttle, 1884-1980

Music: John Bachus Dykes, 1823-1876

NICEA

**Hymn #324 Where My Free Spirit Onward Leads**

~)-| Words: Alicia S. Carpenter, 1930- , © 1989 Alicia S. Carpenter

Music: English traditional melody, harmony and arr. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958, used by perm. of Oxford University Press

KINGSFOLD

**Closing Hymn #175 We Celebrate the Web of Life**

~)-| Words: Alicia S. Carpenter, 1930- , © 1990 Alicia S. Carpenter

Music: Melchior Vulpius, c. 1560-1616

CHRISTUS DER IST MEIN LEBEN – (suggestion to try singing with LAND OF REST tune)