

Errand Hang

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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Last month, I showcased the relatively-recent expression *FOMO*, which stands for the *Fear of Missing Out*, and speaks to that sense of anxiety that might come about when perceiving that others are doing things, or getting stuff, that we are not – a feeling that has been sharpened by increased exposure to social media, as well as by the obligatory isolation that came with the pandemic.

I also brought along its counterpart, the *Joy of Missing Out*, indicating the liberating opportunity that comes from letting go of the perceived compulsion to live up to others' standards, or by willingly doing without those things or activities that are not always essential, something that we're especially invited to practice during times of spiritual reflection, such as Lent, or Ramadan.

Over the past year, another expression has been making the rounds of the internet – the *errand hang*. This came to wide attention after the writer Annika Hansteen-Izora published a blog post in which they

outlined what might be involved in an errand hang: *seeking company from a friend while attending to everyday tasks*.

Now Annika Hansteen-Izora didn't invent errand hangs – people have been doing this kind of thing for a long time, perhaps as long as there've been people, though their prevalence may depend on each individual culture's norms. I'm not even sure if Annika coined the *phrase* “errand hang”, but they certainly popularized it over the past year.

Since then, other popular bloggers have taken to exploring how errand hangs can have significant impacts in people's lives. The parenting blog *Scary Mommy*, suggests that errand hangs can be lifelines for parents who need to get stuff done, but could use the support of friendly company while doing so.

Not only can the company of a friend enhance the focus of the errand, as each companion can offer advice on important purchases, like diapers or bed frames, but this intentional company can also help each other stay accountable to their responsibilities, by making the mundane task special – perhaps even sacred. This is because, among other things, setting up an errand hang can make certain obligations *fun*. And the power of fun cannot be overlooked. By making a potentially tedious task more appealing, an errand hang encourages its sustained practice.

The opportunity for additional connection can also offer space for healing. The grief support website *What's Your Grief* observes that errand hangs can be an opportunity to reclaim activities one might have done with a now-deceased loved one, and which may be difficult or painful to do alone, but may be more fulfilling and even newly-enjoyable when carried out with a friend who's supportive by simply being *there*.

There's a related – if perhaps distinct – sentiment in the Academy Award-winning movie *Good Will Hunting*, starring (among others) Matt Damon, Minnie Driver, and Robin Williams. The title character Will

Hunting (played by Damon) gets asked out on a date by Skylar (played by Driver), a Harvard student at a bar. As Skylar gives her phone number to Will, she suggests that they could get together for coffee sometime. Being clever, Will counteroffers that they could also get together and eat a bunch of caramels. Responding to Skylar's puzzlement, Will elaborates: "When you think about it, it's as arbitrary as drinking coffee."

Despite the smart-alecky nature of Will's remark, I also think he's exposing the somewhat necessary fiction that's often needed for people to get together when they want to see if they like each other enough to pursue a romantic relationship. Rather than simply say, "let's see if we like each other", you set up an event that's some steps removed from romance or sex: an arbitrary activity – coffee, bowling, apple-picking... eating caramels. How this turns out will depend on the compatibility that the people involved have with each other, and how their interaction in their chosen situation plays out. This may or may not result in a developing relationship, which could span from a next date to lifelong commitment, or anything in between. Whatever the outcome, they at least get to participate on the activity they set out do.

Of course, dates of sorts can also apply for platonic relationships. Folks will often set dates with friends, just to hang around. Here at Olinda, we sometimes have dinner dates that span from two to eight people. It's a structured way to ensure we get together.

Now, in examining the *errand hang*, Annika Hansteen-Izora is describing something slightly different than a dinner with friends or with a potential mate. If you want to get really... academic... about the difference between a pure errand hang and something like the casual date that is anchored over an arbitrary setting like coffee or caramels, then perhaps the distinguishing factor might be that a date setting tends to involve picking an activity that's slightly out of your way (as a way to find a foundation for folks to pursue a potential romantic interest). In contrast, an errand hang, as defined by Hansteen-Izora, involves

activities that you might *already* be obligated to do as part of the course of responsible living (or “adulting”, as people closer to my generation might often say).

My own analysis is that both of these settings fall under the larger category of finding *excuses to get together*. And I’ve talked about these quite a bit.

I’d argue that *church* is something akin to an errand hang. For those of us who view spiritual growth as an essential part of living, then intentionally making for opportunities when we can get together (in whichever way is feasible) is a way to enhance our spiritual practice by inviting greater focus, accountability, and fun to the task of spiritual development. As much as we value spiritual living, some of the tasks involved can sometimes feel tedious, overwhelming, or uncertain. Asking friends to carry these out with us is a way to build the discipline we may need, to share the load, and to find guidance along the way.

We do this in many ways. The most common one might be setting a regular time to get together in some way – a “faith date” – for us that’s usually Sunday. Some among us might take on additional tasks in the running of the church – errands – for which we deliberately hang around together, in groups like boards, committees, task forces, or study groups. In these we can find structure with disciplined norms, have focused discussion, work on accountable practices, and build community.

Every once in a while, we also make special events, which may seem arbitrary in the grander scheme of things, but which are perfectly viable excuses to get together, such as community meals (when it’s feasible), cooking classes, or other kinds of gatherings.

This coming week, we’ll be participating in our traditional aUUction, in which we tackle what might be the otherwise tedious task of raising money for our community, by making an event out of it, encouraging interaction among our members and participants, adding a bit of

friendly rivalry with some bidding, and looking to have fun in putting our contributions together and offering them to each other.

My friends, there are other ways we could get the stuff we might get at the aUUnion, and you could take your own initiative in setting up events and get-togethers like the ones that are offered at the aUUnion, but marking a time to do that collectively ensures that those options are intentionally offered, rather than simply thought about or considered. It also makes the task of something we have to do as responsible stewards of our church – raising money – into a fun activity we can look forward to... which can in turn create other fun options to look forward to.

Above all, my friends, it's an opportunity for community building. It's not the only one, but it's the one that starts as of tomorrow.

My friends, this week, and in the coming months, let us continue to build community together.

So may it be,
In gratitude and conviviality
Amen

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Suggested Hymns:

Opening Hymn #347 Gather the Spirit

~)-| Words & music: Jim Scott, 1946- , © 1990 Jim Scott

GATHER THE SPIRIT

Hymn #360 Here We Have Gathered

~)-| Words: Alicia S. Carpenter, 1930- , © 1979 Alicia S. Carpenter

Music: Genevan psalter, 1543

OLD 124TH

Closing Hymn #76 For Flowers That Bloom about Our Feet

~)-| Words: Minot Judson Savage, 1841-1918

Music: Cyril V. Taylor, b. 1907, © Hope Publishing Co.

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