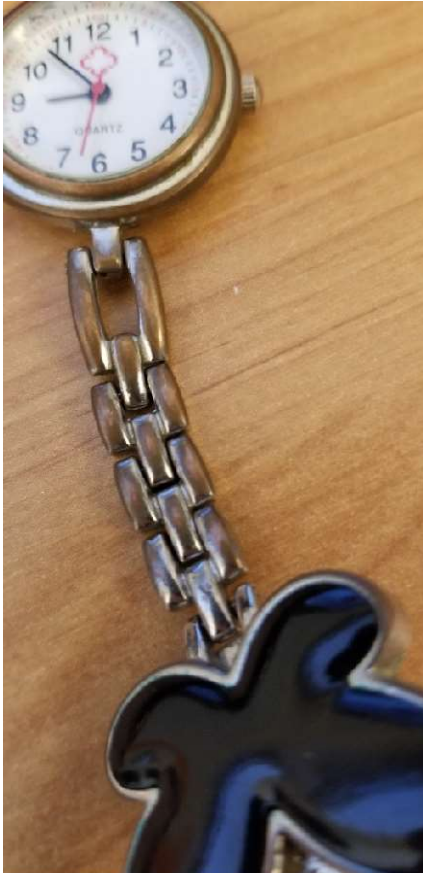


# *Ordinary Time*

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

*Rev. Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel*

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When I began seminary as a Unitarian Universalist guest at a college from the United Church of Canada, I was quite welcome to bring along my own theology and spiritual outlook – we had much overlap in our approaches after all. There were, however, some house rules.

Whenever it was my turn to lead the Wednesday worship for my peers, I was required to use the common lectionary, following the liturgical year that the United Church shares with many mainline churches. I was free to include as much Unitarian Universalist material or interpretation as made sense to me, but at least one of the readings needed to come from that week's lectionary.

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This seemed to me like a reasonable request by my host, as they were also offering generous accommodation for me as a spiritual guest, and I saw it as an exciting challenge that would invite me to get better acquainted with my peers' scripture, tradition, and practice.

So, I became quite acquainted with the United Church's hymnal, *Voices United*, where you would find a very specific calendar with a three-year cycle, and each year being labeled A, B, and C (we're on year C, if you're wondering). And each of these years has specific biblical readings for a given week, along with designated weeks for times of anticipation and fasting, such as Advent and Lent, as well as holidays like Christmas and Easter, which are more familiar to us. There are also additional feasts and observances, like an entire season for Epiphany,

following Christmas (the Epiphany season actually spans several weeks, beyond the single day that I mention from time to time), as well as Pentecost, following Easter.

In some churches, the rest of the year has the rather inspiring label of “Ordinary Time” (though the United Church uses the label of “Proper” time). And, as it happens, this past week marks our return to this *Ordinary Time*.

The “Ordinary Time” tag might give the impression that this is the boring time when nothing interesting happens or is worth observing. And while there may be less pageantry involved, with fewer observances, or holidays with lesser brand recognition than those in early winter and spring, this isn’t really any kind of “throwaway” time, as if church somehow stopped mattering or spiritual growth took a backseat. On the contrary, it’s a time when space can be given toward deeper contemplation about what the other special times have raised up.

The story of incarnation that comes with Christmas, or the message of resurrection that comes with Easter, can resonate throughout the year. In this way, the people of the church might be invited to explore how these transcendent themes may be present in their lives and the lives of their communities.

Sunday itself can be considered an echo of sorts for the story of Easter. This may come by invoking the story itself, as happens weekly in many churches, as well as in inviting a renewal of inspiration in each congregant’s life and opportunities to reveal hidden holiness in the apparent ordinariness of everyday living.

In the same way that the “ordinary” weekdays offer a time to live the spirituality that comes from the weekend renewal of Sunday, so does Ordinary Time offer a kind of “weekdays” of the year, in which to live out the pageantry evoked by the year’s “weekend” of the major winter and spring holidays.

One feature of our Unitarian Universalist tradition is that our liturgical calendar tends to be quite flexible. We tend to have rather few “prescribed” holidays, and even these might vary between congregations, or even in the same community from time to time.

At Olinda, we happen to celebrate, in some way or another, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas with regularity. And we often observe elements of the preparatory seasons for some of these, such as Advent, as well as Lent. We’ve also taken on the practice of commemorating our dead toward the beginning of November, and certain months invite us to pay special attention to certain matters of social justice, such as February and Black History; or June, which often includes awareness about Indigenous peoples as well as LGBTQ+ Pride. And other designated days come up from time to time.

We also have some of our tradition’s own homegrown holiday observances, such as the Water Ceremony at the beginning of September, and our Flower Celebration in a couple of weeks.

So, we do indeed follow a liturgical calendar of sorts, though it may be a bit more fluid than what many mainline churches have established.

However it is that our liturgical calendar may be, or the specific seasons and holidays we may choose to observe, we still find ourselves with weeks and Sundays that may not seem to immediately call for a particular theme or focus... we have our own sense of “ordinary time”.

And it is during these times that we may explore and strengthen the deeper awareness that may have come from the designated “special” times. That is why we don’t stop talking about Pride or about Indigenous matters at the end of June – we carry that prophetic imperative through other days and months, and we revisit that awareness on other “ordinary” Sundays. We may have guests that speak to Reconciliation in June, but we also have those conversations or

guests in other months. We may participate in Pride advocacy in June, or August, or any other time we are called to do so.

We might make special time in February to get better acquainted with Black history, and we *then* continue to consider how we might be part of anti-racism work during the year. We make a regular practice of commemorating our dead at the beginning of November, but that does not mean that we don't also honour our ancestors and our loved ones gone before at other times of the year, sometimes in other special ceremonies, and sometimes during quiet times in our hearts.

We don't just talk about Naloxone and harm-reduction on that one time when we invited Overdose Prevention Windsor to offer a workshop; we bring up the different dimensions of drugs, benign and dangerous ones, legal and illicit, in different discussions at different times. We consider our own use of socially-accepted drugs, such as coffee. And we may check out the free Naloxone trainings and kits that we can get at most local pharmacies on just about any ordinary day.

Week to week, many of us gather as a church on Sunday, to make some intentional time for contemplation and open up space for inspiration. But, of course, the ordinary time of our lives, which happens during the rest of the week is not any less important – in fact, it is the time when we get to apply the renewed sense of call that we might find on a given Sunday. Sometimes this might be something in the weekly message that has resonated, or it might be a hymn or song that has become part of the soundtrack of your life, or it might be a connection that you've made among the community, and now have opportunities to follow up on, and fulfill them in a deeper way.

Church may be where we remember the practice of being human, and we cultivate this practice during the ordinary time of our ordinary days, that every casual corner may bloom into a shrine.

My friends, in a couple of weeks, we'll be winding down our church's program year. For many of us, summer might offer some additional opportunities for rest and renewal, and perhaps have a few more "lower-key" days. There will be some holidays along the way, maybe even a couple of church services, but the ordinary days of summer may give some time to reconnect with the extraordinary times, places, and people of our lives.

My friends, the times that come outside of church are precisely the times to *be* church, beyond our walls.

My friends, may ordinary time be the time to live what is special.

So may it be,  
In this ordinary, and blessed, time,  
Amen

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### *Suggested Hymns:*

#### **Opening Hymn #1 Prayer for this House**

Words: Louis Untermeyer, 1885-1977, © 1923 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, renewed 1951 by Louis Untermeyer, reprinted by perm. of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company

Music: Robert N. Quaille, b. 1867

OLDBRIDGE

#### **Hymn #86 Blessed Spirit of My Life**

Words & music: Shelley Jackson Denham, 1950- ,

© 1987 Shelley Jackson Denham

PRAYER

#### **Closing Hymn #354 We Laugh, We Cry**

~)-| Words & Music: Shelley Jackson Denham, 1950- , © 1980 Shelley Jackson Denham,

~)-| harmony by Betsy Jo Angebrandt, 1931- , © 1992 UUA

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