

“Inspiration & Action – We Have the Power”

Dianne M. Daniels; UUCN, January 4, 2026

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Opening Words/Call to Worship by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels

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This is a congregation that gathers in faith.

Not faith in one religion or one God or any one way.

We gather in faith of the power of diversity, the power of love, and the hope of a world transformed by our care.

We gather in faith in ourselves and those around us.

Not a faith that requires perfection or rightness in one another.

Rather, a faith that in our shared imperfection we may learn to stumble and fall together.

Faith that we will help one another to rise and to try again and again.

We are Unitarian Universalists.

Chalice Lighting: To Keep the Embers Alive by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels

We light this chalice at the threshold of a new year,
not because the world is finished becoming whole,
But because it is not.

We light this flame as a sign of courage that does not shout,
of hope that does not hurry,
of love that refuses to be extinguished.

In a time when power so often looks like control,
We remember another truth: that power also lives in
conscience, in community,
and in the quiet persistence of people
who choose to keep showing up.

May this flame remind us that even the smallest light,
Tended with care, can keep the embers alive
until others gather near.

Prayer and Meditation – O Universal Spirit of Love by Dorothy May Emerson

Universal Spirit of love, O God within each one of us, whose power reaches to the stars, whose love connects us one to another and to all creation—we are one.

We cry out with the pain of this broken world. With all our capacity for love, we ask: why can't we wrap this world in love and bring healing?

We confess that we are not always able to express the love we know is inside us. We feel constricted and hesitant, afraid that our love will be rejected or misused.

We pray for forgiveness, that we may learn to forgive others and accept their forgiveness of us. Help us let go of fear so we can move on, opening our hearts to one another.

We pray for empowerment that we may learn to love more fully. Let our love shine forth from this sacred place that others may know that here they will find freedom, acceptance, community, and love.

We give thanks for the blessings of love in our lives and for the chance we have to love again and always.

May we feel the love inside us connecting with the love in each other and the stars.

Amen. Ase. Blessed Be.

**Sermon: “We Have the Power: Inspiration for a New Year”
by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels**

Good morning, beloveds. I am excited to be with you again today, starting a new calendar year together, in the presence of people who are seeking a positive start to the new year. Inspiration and Action to bring us into a new season of expressing the values that mean so much to all of us within this life-giving faith.

WHAT – Naming the Moment We’re In

We arrive at the beginning of a new year carrying a complicated mix of emotions.

There is hope, yes—but there is also fatigue.

There is longing—but also grief.

There is resolve—but also a quiet fear that nothing we do really matters or makes a difference anymore.

Many of us feel this tension acutely when we look at the world around us: corporate consolidation that feels untouchable, political systems that seem deaf to everyday people, ecological systems under stress, and cultural narratives that reward extraction over care, speed over wisdom, and profit over people.

It is into that emotional and spiritual landscape that these words from Chris Hedges speak with unsettling clarity:

“We may feel, in the face of the ruthless corporate destruction of our nation, our culture, and our ecosystem, powerless and weak. But we are not.”

Notice where he begins—not with strategy, not with outrage, but with how we feel.

Powerlessness. Weakness. Fatigue. Disorientation.

That naming matters, because inspiration that ignores reality is not inspiration—it’s denial.

But Hedges does not stop there.

He goes on to insist that we possess a power that terrifies systems built on domination and extraction: the power of sustained, values-rooted action.

Not necessarily dramatic. Not always visible. Not guaranteed to “win” in our lifetime; But real.

What he calls “acts of rebellion,” we might call acts of conscience. Acts of love. Acts of justice.

Acts of transformation that refuse to let the dominant narrative be the only story told.

This is not about storming the gates – or the Capitol.

It is about keeping the embers alive—the embers of human dignity, mutual care, truth-telling, and moral imagination.

And that brings us squarely into Unitarian Universalist territory.

Because our faith has always insisted that power does not only flow from institutions downward.

Power also rises—from conscience, from community, from courage, from love made visible in action.

This is the What of today's sermon: We live in a moment where many feel powerless—but that feeling is not the truth of who we are.

Power does not only live in headlines or halls of government.
It lives in rooms like ours.

When we open our doors to host meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, we are making a theological statement.

We are saying that people are not disposable.

That addiction does not get the final word.

That human beings, with support, honesty, and community, can reclaim their power over substances that once threatened to destroy their lives.

When we offer financial support to organizations like Norwich Human Services and The Salvation Army, we are practicing faith—not abstract faith, but lived faith.

Faith that love still matters.

Faith that safety nets are holy work.

Faith in the inherent worth and dignity of every perfectly imperfect, beloved human being.

These are not small things.

They are acts of resistance against despair.

They are acts of trust in transformation.

They are how we keep the embers alive—not someday, but now.

SO WHAT – Reframing Power Through UU Values

So what does it mean to say, “We have the power”—not as a slogan, but as a spiritual claim?

First, it requires us to redefine power itself.

The dominant culture teaches us that power looks like scale, money, control, speed, and visibility. If you don't have a platform, a lobbyist, or a billion-dollar balance sheet, you're told your influence is negligible.

But our faith tells a different story.

Transformation reminds us that change is not merely reactive; it is chosen.

Transformation begins when we stop waiting for permission and start living as if our values matter—because they do.

Action is not something we take after change arrives. Action is what creates change.

Transformation happens when we move from passive consumption to intentional participation in shaping our lives and our communities.

Love, at the center of our UU values, is not sentimental. It is relational, demanding, and courageous. Love asks us to stay present rather than numb, engaged rather than cynical.

Love says: I will not surrender my humanity simply because the system is inhumane.

And love is powerful precisely because it cannot be easily co-opted. It resists commodification. It multiplies when shared.

Pluralism reminds us that we are not alone in this work.
No single person carries the whole burden.
No single ideology has all the answers.

Power grows when diverse voices are honored and woven together into something larger than any one perspective.

The myth that only lone heroes make history is just that—a myth. Real change emerges from networks, communities, and relationships that sustain one another over time.

And Justice grounds all of this in material reality.

Justice is not just about intention; it's about impact. It asks not only “What do I believe?” but “How do my choices affect the most vulnerable among us?”

Justice insists that inspiration must eventually move beyond feeling into form—into practices, policies, and patterns of living that align with our deepest values.

Together, these values tell us something essential:

Power is not something we wait to be given.

Power is something we practice.

A reminder that “Everywhere I go, I take my personal power with me.”

Power is not left behind when we leave the sanctuary.

It travels with us into grocery stores, voting booths, family conversations, board meetings, classrooms, workplaces, and quiet moments of decision that no one else ever sees.

And here's a crucial theological aspect: The corporate state is not terrified of outrage. It is terrified of persistence.

Outrage burns hot and fast.

Persistence builds movements.

Outrage spikes.

Persistence compounds.

Small, consistent actions ripple outward in ways we often cannot measure in real time.

This is why despair is such an effective tool of domination. When people believe their actions don't matter, they stop acting. When they stop acting, the status quo remains undisturbed.

Inspiration, then, is not about hype.

It is about re-mem-bering—putting ourselves back together with our agency—our power—intact.

NOW WHAT – Reclaiming the Reins of This New Year

So now what?

If inspiration is not just a feeling but a call to agency, how do we step into this new year differently?

First, we stop living in reaction mode.

One of the most insidious effects of our current moment is how easily it traps us in the past—rehashing what went wrong, replaying losses, nursing exhaustion. While reflection has its place, living there drains our capacity to imagine what comes next.

The new year invites us—not to forget the past—but to refuse to be immobilized by it.

Action is proactive, not reactive

Reclaiming our power means asking better questions:

- What is mine to do now?
- Where does my influence naturally flow?
- What small, sustainable action aligns with my values—and can be repeated?

Second, we commit to **purposeful** action, not performative action.

- Not everything needs to be posted.
- Not everything needs to be perfect.
- Not everything needs to scale.

Purposeful action is grounded, relational, and realistic.

- It might look like mentoring one person.
- Showing up consistently in a local organization.
- Having a courageous conversation.
- Redirecting spending.
- Voting with intention.
- Refusing to normalize cruelty in everyday interactions.

We must emphasize clarity, focus, and alignment—knowing your “why” so your energy doesn’t scatter.

This is how inspiration becomes sustainable rather than exhausting.

Third, we practice collective courage.

Pluralism teaches us that we don’t all act in the same way—but we can act together.

- Some of us write.
- Some of us organize.
- Some of us teach.
- Some of us care for bodies and spirits.
- Some of us fund the work.
- Some of us quietly keep the lights on.

All of it matters.

And finally, we trust time beyond our own lifetime.

This may be the hardest spiritual discipline of all.

Chris Hedges reminds us that some outcomes may not arrive while we are here to witness them.

That does not mean the work is futile. It means we are part of a long arc of faithfulness.

Our UU ancestors understood this.

They planted institutions, movements, and ideas they would never fully see realized.

We benefit from their courage—and others will benefit from ours.

So let this be the invitation of this new year:

- Not to fix everything.
- Not to carry everything.
- But to take the reins of what is yours to shape.
- To live as if love is powerful.
- To act as if justice is possible.
- To trust that transformation begins exactly where you stand.

Because it does.

And because—despite everything—we still have the power.

So as we stand at the beginning of this new year, let us release the myth that power only belongs to institutions, corporations, or forces beyond our reach.

Let us remember instead that power lives wherever love is practiced, wherever justice is chosen, wherever transformation is nurtured one faithful step at a time.

We may not control the pace of history, but we do shape the quality of our presence within it.

We keep the embers alive when we refuse despair, when we act with intention, and when we trust that even what seems small can carry great meaning forward.

Before we leave this space today, I invite us to speak that truth aloud together—not as wishful thinking, but as commitment.

Let these words become a practice you carry with you, a reminder of who you are and how you choose to move through the world.

Please use the Call & Response insert in your order of service, and respond as you are willing.

Closing Blessing – Call & Response

Minister: As we step into this new year,
I invite you to claim your voice
and speak your own agency into being.

Minister: My presence matters.
People: My presence matters.

Minister: I will carry my values with courage.
People: I will carry my values with courage.

Minister: I will resist despair without surrendering truth.
People: I will resist despair.

Minister: I will tend what is fragile and vital.
People: I will keep the embers alive.

Minister: And when the way feels uncertain,
when the work feels slow,
when the future feels unfinished—Love will guide me forward.
People: Love will guide me forward.

Minister: Go in peace.
Go with courage.
Go in the power that is already yours.