Making Our Values Visible
Planning What We Mean to Practice

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Norwich
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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Mohegan people as the traditional caretakers of the land and the rivers where we now live and worship. We honor and pay respect to the Mohegan ancestors and their lineage, who, to this day, uphold traditional practices, artistic expression, religion, and education.

Sermon: Making Our Values Visible

Last Sunday, we began our season of becoming by asking what our summer experiences awakened within us and which of our UU Values called for greater expression. We remembered that paths are not created by good intentions alone, and not just because someone stands at the edge of the field and announces, "There shall be a path." They are formed because a direction is traveled repeatedly. And we ended with a question: What will I practice consistently because I was moved?

Because what we practice **consistently** creates the pathways.

Today, we continue that journey by asking what comes after inspiration. How do we give our passion direction, connect our purpose to our Values, and make practical room for what we say matters? How do we move from talking the talk to planning—and practicing—the walk?

We listened to some Summer Stories—not only as reports of where we went or what we did, but as invitations to notice what happened within us. We asked what surprised us, stretched us, restored us, or unsettled us enough to pay attention. We asked which of our Unitarian Universalist Values became visible

in the lives we actually lived—and what we might want more of, or less of, in the season ahead.

Today, we take the next step. Because being moved matters. Inspiration matters. Passion matters. Purpose matters. But none of them automatically becomes a life.

We can be inspired on Sunday morning and lose the thread by Tuesday afternoon. We can care passionately about justice, compassion, community, or spiritual growth, while our calendar fills with things that have little to do with any of them. We can know our Values, affirm our Values, discuss our Values—and still wonder why they do not feel more visible in the way we live.

So today's question is practical and spiritual: How do we plan to manifest our Values instead of only knowing about them?

And by manifest, I do not mean wishing hard enough for something to magically appear. I mean making something visible. Giving an inward commitment an outward form. Letting what we say matters become recognizable in what we choose, how we spend our time, where we place our attention, and how we respond when an opportunity arrives.

If last week was about choosing the path, this week is about taking the next step on purpose.

What

Let us begin with inspiration.

We often talk about inspiration as though it were a lightning strike: sudden, dramatic, impossible to miss. We wait for the brilliant idea, the unmistakable calling, the burst of energy that makes the next step obvious.

Sometimes inspiration does arrive that way. But often it is quieter. It may come while walking, when we leave the confines of our usual environment and allow our minds to loosen their grip. A change of scenery, fresh air, movement, or a few minutes without a screen can interrupt habitual thinking. When we stop trying so hard to force an answer, a connection we could not see before sometimes becomes visible.

An inspiration walk does not have to be long, fast, or even outdoors. The deeper practice is to create movement and space. Roll or stroll through a garden. Sit beside a window and let your eyes travel. Walk a familiar hallway without

carrying your phone. Step away from the desk. Give your mind permission to wander—and notice what returns with you.

This echoes what we said last week about listening beneath the noise. Some things cannot be heard while every moment is filled. Inspiration often needs a little room.

But inspiration is only the beginning. Inspiration says, “Pay attention to this.” Passion says, “This matters enough to bring energy to it.” Purpose asks, “What might this energy be for?”

Passion is sometimes described as enthusiasm—the cause, activity, relationship, or dream that makes us eager to get out of bed. That can be true. Joy is important. What delights us can reveal gifts we have neglected and parts of ourselves waiting to come alive.

But passion is not always cheerful, and it does not always feel energetic. Sometimes passion is what breaks our heart. It is the injustice we cannot unsee, the suffering we cannot dismiss, the community we cannot abandon, or the possibility we keep returning to even after disappointment. Passion may feel like delight. It may also feel like holy restlessness.

And purpose is not necessarily one grand assignment hidden somewhere in the universe, which we must discover before we can live correctly. That idea can create more anxiety than direction. Purpose may change across the seasons of a life. It can be expressed through paid work, caregiving, friendship, creativity, citizenship, spiritual practice, rest, repair, or service.

Purpose is the direction our deepest commitments give to the life that is actually ours.

For us, the UU Values help test that direction. Does what inspires me move toward greater Interdependence? Does my passion make room for Pluralism, Equity, and Justice? Does my purpose invite Generosity and Transformation? Is Love truly at the center—not only love for the people easiest for me to love, but disciplined concern for the flourishing of people and communities beyond myself?

Passion without Values can become self-importance. Purpose without humility can become certainty about what everyone else should do. But passion aligned

with Values can become courage. Purpose grounded in Love can become faithful action.

So What

Here is where planning enters the spiritual life.

Planning may not sound like a spiritual practice. It may sound like calendars, lists, reminders, schedules, and sticky notes. Useful, perhaps—but not sacred.

Yet a plan is one of the ways we make room for what we say matters.

If Equity matters to me, but I never make time to learn whose needs are being overlooked, Equity remains an idea. If Generosity matters, but I leave the giving of my attention, money, or service entirely to chance, generosity will usually receive whatever is left over. If spiritual growth matters, but quiet reflection has no place in my days, the noise will make the decision for me.

Our schedules are not perfect moral documents. Many people have limited control over their time. Work shifts, health needs, caregiving, financial realities, and responsibilities we did not choose can shape whole days and seasons. We should never look at a crowded calendar and assume it reveals a lack of commitment. Sometimes it reveals love carrying a very heavy load.

But within the choices we do have, time becomes one expression of attention. And attention is one way Values take form.

The purpose of planning is not to squeeze more productivity out of every minute. A life aligned with our Values must include rest, delight, relationships, and room to breathe. The purpose is to reduce the distance between what matters to us and what receives our presence.

This is why a list of ten important things can still leave us overwhelmed. Ten priorities are often ten competitors. Planning asks us to choose. What is most important now? What belongs to another day? What can be delegated? What can be released? What needs a protected place because otherwise the urgent will crowd out the meaningful?

Last week, I asked you to choose one practice—not seven. Today I want to add: give that practice an appointment.

If your Value is Interdependence and your practice is reaching out to someone who may feel alone, when will you call? If your Value is Pluralism and your

practice is learning from a perspective different from your own, what will you read, attend, or listen to—and when? If your Value is Justice, what specific issue will receive your attention, and what is one action you will take?

If your Value is Equity, where will you ask, "Who is having to work harder to belong?" If your Value is Generosity, what will you share, with whom, and how regularly? If your Value is Transformation, what old pattern will you interrupt, and what will you practice in its place? If Love is at the center, who will experience that Love because of something you actually do?

A plan turns "someday" into a place we can recognize.

And this is where we must distinguish planning from control. We do not control every outcome. We do not know which effort will succeed, which conversation will change a relationship, which act of justice will shift a system, or which spiritual practice will open something within us. Planning is not a guarantee. It is a form of consent. We are consenting to show up for the Value we claim to hold.

There is a phrase often used in planning: What gets scheduled gets done. I would soften that for spiritual life. What gets scheduled still may not get done. Life happens. Bodies get tired. Emergencies arrive. Courage falters. But what we give a place has a better chance of becoming practice than what we leave only as a good intention.

And when we miss the appointment, we do what we said last week: notice and return. Not perfection. Practice.

Now What

So let us make this very simple. To make a Value visible, we need four things: a Value, an expression, a next step, and a place.

First, name the Value. Not the Value you think you ought to choose. Which one is alive for you now? Which one has been showing up in your joy, your concern, your longing, or your holy restlessness?

Second, name what that Value would look like in this season. Justice might look like learning and speaking. Generosity might look like offering time without resentment—or protecting rest so you can offer your presence without depletion. Pluralism might look like curiosity in one difficult relationship.

Transformation might look like letting go of a habit that no longer serves. Love might look like repair.

Third, choose one next step. Make it small enough to do and meaningful enough to matter. Not “be more generous,” but “set aside an amount to give.” Not “care more about the Earth,” but “change one household practice or join one local effort.” Not “be a better listener,” but “ask one question and wait through the silence before responding.”

Fourth, give it a place. Put it on the calendar. Write it in a journal. Leave yourself a reminder. Tell someone who can encourage you. Connect it to something you already do. Decide where and when you are likely to take the step.

Value. Expression. Next step. Place.

That is not a formula for controlling transformation. It is a way of preparing to meet the opportunity when it comes.

Sometimes the plan may be to go looking for inspiration. Take a walk. Sit in a place that restores you. Make a list of what you enjoyed before life became crowded. Remember the people whose lives inspire you, and ask what quality—not their exact path—you want to embody. Revisit a dream you set aside, not to judge yourself for abandoning it, but to ask whether it still sings to your soul.

Sometimes the plan may be to follow passion—not by overturning your whole life tomorrow, but by giving ten honest minutes to the cause, creativity, relationship, or question that keeps calling your name.

Sometimes the plan may be to clarify purpose. Ask: How do I want to be remembered? What do I want my presence to make more possible? What is mine to do in this season—not for all time, not for everyone, but here and now?

And sometimes faithful planning means deciding what you will not do. Every yes occupies space. If we want more time for reflection, relationship, justice, creativity, or rest, we may need less distraction, less automatic agreement, less activity undertaken only because it has always been done, or less effort spent trying to be everything to everybody.

Our congregation must practice this too. A church can believe in seven beautiful Values and still scatter its energy in seventy directions. Our shared purpose asks us to discern together: What are we uniquely called to make more real in this

community? Where is there passion among us? What need meets our gifts? What next step can we take—and what will we release so we can take it faithfully?

We will not all choose the same Value or the same practice. Pluralism means our callings will differ. Interdependence means those different callings can strengthen one another. Equity and Justice remind us to ask who benefits and who has been overlooked. Generosity invites us to share what we have. Transformation keeps us willing to change. Love holds the center.

The goal is not to become busier people. The goal is to become more aligned people. The goal is not a congregation with more activity. It is a congregation whose activity increasingly reveals its deepest commitments.

Closing

Last week, we stood at the edge of a field and chose a path worth making.

This week, we take the next step on purpose.

We listen for inspiration. We notice the passion that brings joy or holy restlessness. We allow our Values to give that energy direction. Then we make a plan—not because plans guarantee transformation, but because Love deserves more than our leftover time and our best intentions.

Choose one Value.

Name how you want it to become visible.

Choose one step.

Give it a place in your real life.

Then begin. And if you miss the moment, return. If the plan no longer fits, revise it. If you become discouraged, remember that paths are not created by one heroic stride. They are formed by faithful steps taken again and again.

This is how we walk the walk: not by speaking perfectly about our Values, but by giving them hands and feet, time and attention, choices and consequences.

May our inspiration become attention. May our passion become courage. May our purpose become direction. May our plans become practice. And may our practice make Love visible in the world.

Let us continue becoming.