

## UUCMC Covenant Circle Session

### January 2018: Intention

#### Opening Words & Chalice Lighting

In any given moment we have two options, to step forward in growth or to step back into safety.  
-Abraham Maslow

#### Reminder of our Covenant

#### Check-In (3-4 minutes each)

#### Topic with Readings

Word Roots: From Latin intentus "to stretch out, lean toward. In 17th Century English law: "state of mind with respect to intelligent volition".

It is not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are you busy about?  
-Henry David Thoreau

Those who have a why to live for can bear almost any how.  
-Friedrich Nietzsche

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.  
-Viktor E. Frankl

Your day is pretty much determined by how you spend your first hour.  
-Anon

"i had every intention of telling you," he claims.  
"but it's already too late," i say.  
he replies with the ever so cliché line that is, "it's never too late."  
i'm not sorry  
that some things just are.  
-C. Eley

Intention is the difference between those old mustard stains and Jackson Pollock.  
-Anon

Those who follow the crowd usually get lost in it.  
-Rick Warren

Any dead fish can go with the flow — you have to be intentionally alive to swim against the current.  
-Ann Voskamp

Cat: Where are you going?

Alice: Which way should I go?  
Cat: That depends on where you are going.  
Alice: I don't know.  
Cat: Then it doesn't matter which way you go.  
-Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.  
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Great minds have purpose, others have wishes  
-Washington Irving

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-Abraham Maslow

Find a purpose to serve, not a lifestyle to live.  
-Criss Jami

With goals, the future is always the focus: Are you going to reach the goal? Will you be happy when you do? What's next? Setting intention, at least according to Buddhist teachings, is quite different than goal making. It is not oriented toward a future outcome. Instead, it is a path or practice that is focused on how you are "being" in the present moment. Your attention is on the ever-present "now" in the constantly changing flow of life. You set your intentions based on understanding what matters most to you and make a commitment to align your worldly actions with your inner values... Goals help you make your place in the world and be an effective person. But being grounded in intention is what provides integrity and unity in your life.. What would it be like if you didn't measure the success of your life just by what you get and don't get, but gave equal or greater priority to how aligned you are with your deepest values?  
-Phillip Moffitt, from The Heart's Intention

“Sacred space” is another way of saying “with intention.”  
-S. Kelley Harrell

#### The Intentional Act of Going to Church

Let me tell you why I come to church. I come to church—and would whether I was a preacher or not—because I fall below my own standards and need to be constantly brought back to them. I am afraid of becoming selfish and indulgent, and my church—my church of the free spirit—brings me back to what I want to be. I could easily despair; doubt and dismay could overwhelm me. My church renews my courage and my hope. It is not enough that I should think about the world and its problems at the level of a newspaper report or magazine discussion. It could too soon become too low a level. I must have my conscience sharpened—sharpened until it goads me to the most thorough and responsible thinking of which I am capable. I must feel again the

love I owe to others. I must not only hear about it but feel it. In church, I do. I am brought toward my best, in every way toward my best.

-Rev. A. Powell Davies, Unitarian Minister

You too can be carved anew by the details of your devotion.

-Mary Oliver

Conscious change is brought about by the two qualities inherent in consciousness – intention and attention... Whatever you put your attention on will grow stronger in your life. Whatever you take your attention away from will wither, disintegrate and disappear.

-Deepak Chopra

I am in earnest - I will not equivocate - I will not excuse - I will not retreat a single inch; and I will be heard.

-William Lloyd Garrison

Gratitude is not an emotion that comes upon us without our control. It is not dependent on what happens to us, but on our intention. Like good posture, it is a practice, an attitude that is entirely our choice in every moment... A friend of mine told me once after a particularly lovely day she came home, sat in her easy chair and said out loud, "Thank You." And she swears she heard a voice say out loud, "You're welcome." Practice gratitude. For everything. For what you see out the window, for what you hear from your co-workers, say "Thank You." When your kids walk in the room, when you take a breath, when your spouse tells you how to drive, when to stub your toe, say "Thank You." Practice gratitude and eventually you will be able to hear the universe say, "You're welcome."

-Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Intentions and Trust

Today I want to greet joy  
Without a trace of suspicion  
I want to open my eyes to the light  
Without a blink of dread  
I want to look at my past  
Without a whisper of shame  
I want to look at my future  
Without a hint of fear  
Today I want to dance  
Without pausing to think  
I want to belly laugh  
Without caring who hears  
I want to open my arms  
and twirl in the sun  
Until I fall breathless  
free to be myself  
full of the joy  
that I open to allow

completely letting go  
Without even a smudge of suspicion  
or a wink of hesitation  
That's my intention  
It's what I want  
-Amy Loyd

#### A Prayer of Good Intention

Dear Lord,  
So far I've done all right.  
I haven't gossiped,  
haven't lost my temper,  
haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent.  
I'm really glad about that.  
But in a few minutes, God,  
I'm going to get out of bed.  
And from then on,  
I'm going to need a lot more help.  
-Anon

#### Questions of Those Who Assume Good Intent:

What if it wasn't an attack, but was a mistake?  
What if it wasn't a mistake, but a miscommunication?  
What if it wasn't a miscommunication, but an oversight?  
What if it wasn't an oversight, but was caused by an undisclosed personal issue?  
-Skip Prichard

Folks write down the name of someone who fills them with frustration, disappointment, and/or resentment, and then I propose that their person is doing the best he or she can. The responses have been wide-ranging... One woman said, "If this was true and my mother was doing the best she can, I would be grief-stricken. I'd rather be angry than sad, so it's easier to believe she's letting me down on purpose than grieve the fact that my mother is never going to be who I need her to be."

-Brené Brown, Rising Strong

Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.

-Parker J. Palmer

I had at least begun to guess that my greatest need might be to let go and be free from the drive after achievement — if only I dared. I had also guessed that perhaps when I had let these go, then I might be free to become aware of some other purpose that was more fundamental, not self-imposed private ambitions but something which grew out of the essence of one's own nature. People said: 'Oh, be yourself at all costs'. But I had found that it was not so easy to know just what one's self was. It was far easier to want what other people seemed to want and then imagine

that the choice was one's own... It was only when I was actively passive, and content to wait and watch, that I really knew what I wanted.

-Marion Milner, quoted in *A Life of One's Own*

I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes. Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You're doing things you've never done before, and more importantly, you're Doing Something. So... Make New Mistakes. Make glorious, amazing mistakes. Make mistakes nobody's ever made before. Don't freeze, don't stop, don't worry that it isn't good enough, or it isn't perfect, whatever it is: art, or love, or work or family or life.

Whatever it is you're scared of doing, Do it.

-Neil Gaiman

## **Silent Reflection**

Questions to prompt discussion (choose ones that work for you)

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the single question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of intention means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?

1. Are you so dead set on telling your life what you intend to do with it that you no longer notice what it intends to do with you? Could your life's purpose be something that comes from life itself rather than something that is forced on it?
2. What dictates your days? Your To-Do list or your intentionality? Do you begin by asking, "What do I have to get done?" or "What do I want this day to be about?"
3. Are you too intentional? Is it time to put down all the "doing" and pay a bit more attention to "being"? Has your long list of intentions left you feeling exhausted and even lost?
4. Are you serving a purpose or living a lifestyle?
5. We all "go along with the crowd" in some way. Which is fine as long as we are doing it intentionally and self-consciously? Are you doing it intentionally and self-consciously?
6. Are you sure "bettering yourself" is what you really want? Or is that hunger inside you about "finding and aligning with your deepest self"? Do you want to "finally be better" or "finally be me"?
7. The philosopher, Nietzsche, said, "No one can build you the bridge on which you, and only you, must cross the river of life," We are all intentionally crossing a bridge of some sort. Are you crossing someone else's bridge? Or your own?

8. Did he/she/they really intentionally hurt you and let you down? What if they're doing the best they can? Could your anger at them really be your way of avoiding feeling grief over the fact that they are just never going to be who you need them to be?
9. Is it finally time to give up that unrealistic intention? The one you've failed at following through on again and again? The one you've been beating yourself up over, again and again? Is it time to intentionally be gentle with yourself and let it go?
10. Do you intentionally allow yourself to make mistakes? New things do not arise without trial and error, missteps and slip-ups. If we're not making mistakes, we're likely choosing safety. Are you intentionally choosing safety over new life?
11. Are you as good at assuming the good intentions of others as you are at defending your own?
12. You surely sent an unintentional message to your child this week. All parents do. The question is: Are you willing to take the time to notice it and fix it?
13. How are you doing at the work of intentional authenticity? Are you succeeding at being the same person on the outside as you are on the inside?
14. What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

**Housekeeping Details** How goes your service project plans? Do you need ideas? Lisa, Michelle or Virginia are happy to help!

**Check-out**

**Closing Words** Habits eat good intentions for breakfast. -John Ortberg