

Kwanzaa Reflections

December, 2019, First UU Congregation of Ann Arbor

Day One - Dec 26th

Today is the 1st day of Kwanzaa! Today JeKaren Oyaloya is our guest author, offering us her thoughts on Umoja. Her full bio is at the end of her reflection.



Reflection: This life, we cannot survive it alone. The principle of Umoja reminds us that we are indeed, better together. I think about this principle in relation to what it means to build a family, separate from the one born into. For many people this practice is necessary for a variety of reasons. Their birth family lives far away, they are estranged, two people marry, or adoption. The reasons don't matter as much as the intention. While the conversation might not be had that a group of people will be family, it is clear in the way they consider each other, the way conflict is handled to ensure everyone always sticks together, the way each person contributes to the whole. The unity of family-

making is necessary and joy-filled work.

My family is wide and vast, with so many more glued-on branches than you can imagine. Living all over the world as a person who has never met a stranger, I have collected people as family, people I will always be able to count on even if we never see each other in person again. Many of these people will never meet each other, and yet I know that they will rally with me if ever needed, into a family that I built.

As I move into 2020, I think about the relationships that I have with people that could be stronger. People I want to be more intentional family and people I want to rally with in their time of need. In this layering of relationships and building of family, each person has the ability to build and bring in new people and so on, until we are all connected, by either blood or intention. This is living well. This is a connection that can't be severed. This is unity.

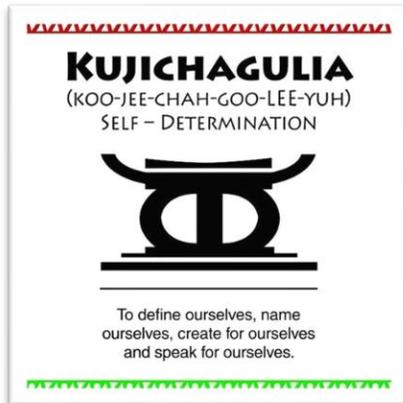


Jekaren Olaya: JaKaren is life-long UU who came to this faith with a friend in high school. A lover of travel and Georgia native, she makes her home wherever she goes.

As a former DRE for multiple congregations across the country she has a passion for faith formation and working with children and youth

Habari gani? Kujichagulia (Self-determination)!

Today is the 2st day of Kwanzaa! Today Camille Wilson will be offering us thoughts on Kujichagulia.



Reflection:

The principle Kujichagulia (self-determination) has special importance to me because it is linked to freedom and pursuing one's goals and dreams. It was a right denied to my African American ancestors, yet one they fought for and helped to make easier for African Americans today to actualize. Pursuing kujichagulia still too often involves significant struggle given society's injustices, but in the words of Maya Angelou: "Still, I rise." And still, as a people, we can beautifully rise. In my everyday life this principle means I strive to continually learn, grow, and exit my comfort zone to achieve new personal and professional goals with

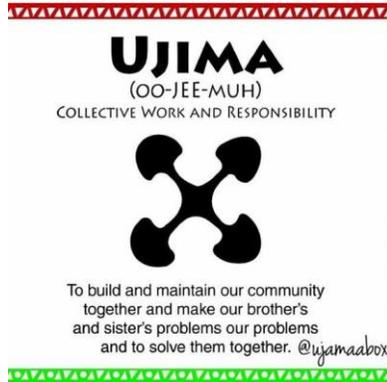
courage and self-esteem.



Camille Wilson: Camille Wilson is an educator, activist-scholar, mom, and lover of culture, art, family, community, and life.

Habari gani? Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility)!

Today is the 3st day of Kwanzaa! Today Constance Dickinson will be offering us their thoughts on Ujima.



Reflection: This principle seems to be under stress nowadays in this country. It's more important now than ever for communities to work together to share resources: financial, emotional and spiritual. The loaf of bread given to welcome a new neighbor; working with neighborhood kids to bag all the leaves on the street.

Working together does build community even when you don't live in the same town, state or country. Consider how we contribute to a go fund me campaign for an up-and-coming artist we have come to admire. Remember how we gave a dollar to the man in front of us at Target so he could buy his little girl something special to wear to school on picture day. Later that man held the door for a young mother who was pushing a stroller with twins. Gestures small and large help build closeness that wouldn't be there otherwise. The more we connect with each other the stronger the ties become within the human community. We see people every day who might be connected to us in unexpected ways. We might be supporting them in projects or just giving off that extra "good vibe" that makes their day a little better.

This coming year I will practice Ujima with communities close and far away. I will help those near me find ways to connect with each other. I will hold the door with the man across from me so a parent can enter a building with dignity. I will graciously accept an elderly man holding the door for me so that he feels good. I will write a letter to the student I sponsor in Days for Girls. I will contribute as best as I can help heal our planet. I will smile at as many people as I can.

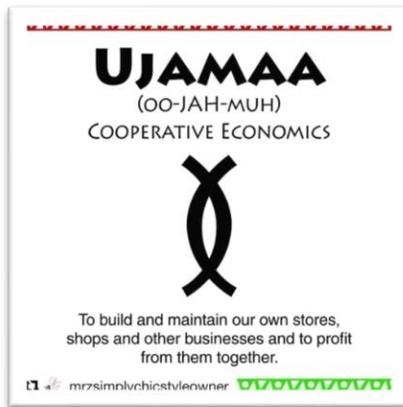


Constance Dickinson: Constance Dickinson is a life-long Unitarian Universalist who lives in Ypsilanti, MI. She lives with her husband, son and their male pets. Soon she plans to adopt two female rescue dogs.

Day Four - Dec 29th

Habari gani? Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)!

Today is the 4th day of Kwanzaa! Today Lou Callaway offers us thoughts on Ujamaa.



Reflection:

As we approach the 2019 Christmas Holiday season, the Annual Celebration of Kwanzaa will be celebrated by African Americans worldwide from December 26th to January 1st. Kwanzaa is the celebration of life observed by people of African descent to honor their heritage.

Of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, the principle of “Ujamaa”: (cooperative economics) provides for “building and maintaining of our own stores and profit from them together.”

My understanding of this principle is that African Americans should strive for independence as business entrepreneurs, owners and managers and those created businesses should be patronized and sustained by fellow African Americans.

In the past as an executive in large and smaller corporations, fair and competitive opportunities for African American businesses and suppliers had been a committed priority. However, I personally have not been involved in “building and maintaining our own stores” as the principle of Ujamaa dictates.

On the other hand, in our personal lives we have accepted the obligation to lend financial support when possible to a number of African American organizations around the United States including the Ann Arbor area.

Absent the opportunity to directly “build and maintain our own stores” in 2020, I will commit to adhering to the Principle of “Ujamaa”, seeking out and supporting African American businesses in all the ways possible, starting with my attendance next year at the Annual African America Downtown Festival in Ann Arbor which I understand showcases local African American businesses.

Hopefully at the end of 2020 I can confirm that even though I can't and will not be able to "build" I helped to support and sustain African American retail stores to an increased level.



Lou Callaway: Lou Callaway is a retired Ford Motor Company automotive executive. He has been a member of the Board of Directors of a number of local non-profits. A graduate of Drake University, a past President of the Rotary Club of Ann Arbor and a member of the UUAA Congregation.

Day Five - Dec 30th

Habari gani? Nia (Purpose)!

Today is the 5th day of Kwanzaa! Today Tisha Berg offers us thoughts on Nia.



Reflection: I believe that the Kwanzaa principle of purpose is best viewed as a reminder for all of us to live intentionally in the spirit of love and respect for ourselves and our fellow travelers here on earth. By virtue of our being here, we are all called to connect in some way with the world around us. It doesn't matter what our particular interests, or "passions" are -- what matters is that we embrace, nurture and celebrate those things within ourselves that bring us joy and find positive ways to share

that joy we feel with others. Whether it's through our work, our hobbies, volunteering in our communities or just being a good friend, purposefully and intentionally sharing our joy and goodwill with others is the highest form of love. I try to live the principle of Purpose in the way I interact with my family and friends every day and I hope to continue living out that value in 2020 as I embark further on my professional journey in the mental health field.

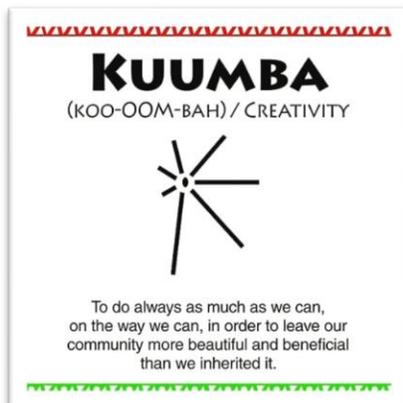


Tisha Berg: I am a mom, wife, psychotherapist and doctoral student in Media Psychology. I'm a native New Yorker who moved to Michigan 3 years ago after a 12-year stint of living in Los Angeles. Although I miss the perpetual sun, being a member of the welcoming community at Ann Arbor UU warms my heart.

Day Six - Dec 31st

Habari gani? Kuumba (Creativity)!

Today is the 6th day of Kwanzaa! Today Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout offers us thoughts on Kuumba.



Reflection:

In its less complex role, adding -ity to a descriptive word changes it into a noun. Take the word *intentional*, say. *Intentional* describes something done with intent. *Intentionality* is happening when an effort is taken with intention. A person *responsible* for a child, they have *responsibility*. It's not glamorous work, and we hardly ever even notice its usefulness. But, it saves us from eye-rollingly-long sentences ("That is the thing for which you are responsible" can be "That's your responsibility.") and offers direct access to what a sentence actually means. It's hero's work to make everyday

language efficient and easier to use.

What makes this efficient and easy also renders it rather narrow. a narrow binary, where things qualify or don't. But take this sentence: "There's a possibility of change." Here, *possibility* requires us to imagine just about any possible version of change, any form, any amount, any chance. And we must prepare for the possibility of change to manifest in ways beyond what we'd imagined. That is, at least, if we want to recognize the change when it comes.

Too often, we speak of creativity in the first mode, as if it were a magic you either have or not. We describe creative people as if there were an impermeable wall between 'them' and the commoner, as if to dream an innovation and make it real were beyond the grasp of most human minds. Fooled by false

premise, we voluntarily disqualify our own experiences of symphonies or opinions of paintings. “I thought the concert was great,” I hear almost daily. “But, I’m not an artist.”

But the power to create is not a gift; it is a discipline. The proficient artist is constantly making space for insight and expertise to arrive. She lives in the practice room. She works over the same phrase of melody time after time. She discovers at the pace that the art reveals itself. Her willingness to learn is patient and relentless, because she imagines it possible to find fluency where she now fumbles. In this possibility and persistence, she is very often exactly right. And there, the impossibilities she imagined begin to live in her fingertips. Her performance sounds the result of ritual and relationship—everything she had hope to hear, looking different than anything she’d predicted.

Today, Kwanzaa calls us to remember creativity. In the light of this day, we would be well-served to remember that creation is the birthright and duty of all people. Let us remember that Black Christianity was born when our ancestors harvested the subversive stories, improbable hope from the very religious practice being used to justify their enslavement. Let us remember that Ebonics is the sophisticated linguistic response our generations developed when the imposed English language could not contain the breadth of emotional and intellectual particularities common to black experience and expression. And remember that DuBois, Dunbar, Truth, Douglass, Morrison, Giovanni, Angelou, and every single black preacher ever to live pioneered a journey past the barriers of English literature.

These are among the countless who nurtured the untended outskirts, gave voice to the ignored narratives of blackness, articulated the singular musicality of black communication. Remember that black America built the very foundations of all American music on the blue note, having mastered singing the quarter tones between what piano keys can sound, and in this space grew the very foundation of American music. And remember that 1871 was the year when the first accredited southern black university knew no direct path to financial security, and students and faculty founded the Fisk Jubilee Singers, choosing faith and diligence over flail and frenzy. Remember the ensemble toured Europe, brought the spiritual to the professional concert stage—the first time the possibility had ever been realized. The Singers are the reason black spirituals are known anywhere in the world, the reason they are known everywhere in the world, and why the University stands to this day.

Is there space for the experiences of your past to teach you what to craft of tomorrow? Is there much room in your busy schedule to imagine what’s possible in the space beyond the limits of your current comforts? Are you willing to tend your memories of failure, to know your faults as growing edges, to work and wait until wisdom sprouts from the place you planted your regret? Will you make space for your spirit to unclench from its complacencies, for your heart to know compassion as an inspiring strength, for your vantage to expand and expect the makings of justice.

Would you live any differently if you had a part in healing humanity’s sins and suffering? What if we each had a part? This possibility is rather simple to understand. You do. Whether we find our part depends entirely on whether we will make space for the possibility, the time and effort to create love with our living.

That’s your responsibility. And mine too.

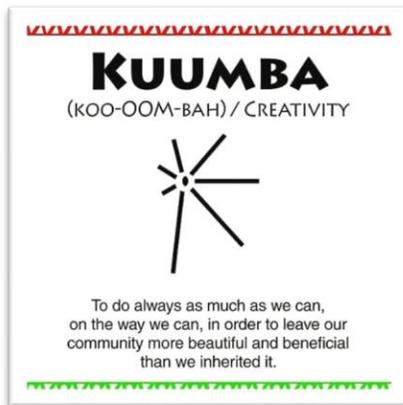


Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout serves as the Director of Worship and Music at UUAA. He is a member of the Unitarian Universalist Musicians Network, Chorus America, the American Choral Directors Association, and Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Fraternity. For a more complete list of his many accomplishments, see the [UUAA Staff web page](#).

Day Seven – Jan 1st, 2020

Habari gani? Imani (Faith)!

Today is the 7th day of Kwanzaa! Today Quiana Perkins will be offering us their thoughts on Imani.



Reflection: I am a faith practitioner.

What does that mean?

For me, it means, that I move through the world held by a force of love and connection that I cannot see but I know is real and that I depend on it for survival.

That any attempt to break, sever, or harm the connection results in a pain that will not end until I have recommitted to that connection with my whole heart.

In other words, when I step away from what I call God, I experience a profound discomfort that can only be resolved when I

return to my God source.

My faith is alive! As a parent, partner and community member, there is a shared investment in each other surviving and thriving which for me is directly connected to what I know and experience as God. And that I must be active, engaged and protective of those dynamics as a function of my faith. I proudly call myself a faith-centered activist: I cannot separate my call to act on the behalf of harmed/marginalized people from my call to be aligned with my God core.

In my current job as a Pastoral Care Coordinator, I stand in solidarity with people who go through every unimaginable life movement (births, deaths, etc); holding them in my heart, assuring them that they are not alone and being present to their process is FAITH! Faith that we are not meant to be alone in the turning points of life. It is my stewardship and duty to be present for others in times of need and joy. This spiritual hospitality holds up the sky.

2020: It will come as no surprise to learn that in November I leaned into the faith that has been sustaining me and committed to a path in Ministry.

What that looks like is open and vast. I am not sure if that will look like school and learning and Master of Divinity; if that will mean following the path of Community Ministry, or some other path that has yet to be created. I do have faith that my birth, chosen and faith families will hold me to growth and excellence. Faith that no matter what form this passion takes, I will have my ancestors' blessing and descendants' pride.

This is my Faith. This is my Imani. This is my hope for the coming year.



Quiana Perkins serves as UUAA's Social Justice & Pastoral Care Coordinator. She is Minnesota born and raised. She is a proud and beloved member of Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism. She is also the mama of two amazing pre-teens.