

The General Assembly of Unitarian
and Free Christian Churches

Sing in my heart all...

the stirrings of

COMPASSION

A Worship Resource Pack prepared by

The Worship Panel



Introduction to the Worship Pack

At the Annual Meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, held at the University of Swansea, in April 2011, it was resolved unanimously that the GA should become a signatory to the Charter for Compassion. Literally within seconds of the decision being taken it was determined that, however else we might support the charter, we must do so through worship.

This Worship Pack has all the worship material needed for a worship service, and in most sections you will have a choice of materials. Obviously you can also include your own material and other elements of worship, e.g. candles of joy and concern, silence, musical interludes, discussion, and so forth.

Opening Words

- 1 We come together this morning, seeking a reality beyond our narrow selves; that binds us in compassion, love, and understanding to other human beings, and to the interdependent web of all living things.

May our hearts and minds be opened this hour, to the power and the insight that weaves together the scattered threads of our experience, and help us remember the wholeness of which we are part.

We come together to renew our faith in the holiness, the goodness, the beauty of life. To reaffirm the way of the open mind and the full heart; to rekindle the flame of memory and hope; and to reclaim the vision of an earth more fair, with all her people one.

Rev. David Usher

- 2 Today we celebrate a dream awakening.
Today we worship with renewed hope in our hearts.
Today we act on an audacity of hopes and dreams for the future.
Today we begin the hard work for justice, equity, and compassion in all human relations, for today is a day like no other and it is ours to shape with vision and action.
Let us worship together and celebrate a dream awakening.

Elizabeth M Strong

- 3 Spirit of Life, come unto me:
Sing in my heart, all the stirrings of compassion.
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea,
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close, wings set me free.
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

Carolyn McDade

[Note: *Spirit of Life* – No.148 in *Sing Your Faith* could be used at many points in a Worship Service on Compassion – spoken or sung]

- 4 Richard S Gilbert *Come into the circle of caring* (from 'In the Holy Quiet of this Hour')

Chalice Lighting

1 Words attributed to the Buddha:

Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle,
and the life of that candle will not be shortened.
Happiness never decreases by being shared.

Lynne Readett

2 As the flame points upwards... so be our aims.
As the light illuminates the room...
so may we enlighten the world to its need for compassion.
As the flame heats the chalice...
so may our compassion warm the world.

John Smith Wilkinson

3 Every day brings struggle, every day brings joy.
Every day brings us the opportunity to ease the struggle of another,
to be the joy in another's life.
May this flame remind us to carry our light to each other and to the world.

Vance Bass

Prayers and Meditations

1 Jan Struther wrote:
*Hard words will break no bones:
But more than bones are broken
By the inescapable stones
Of fond words left unspoken.*

And so let us pray:

So let us in the quiet of our minds speak fond words:
for those to whom we are close and who are close to us;
for those whose presence is now a memory;
for fond friends and helpful neighbours.

And let us in the quiet of our minds speak fond words for those we too often forget:
for those who are struggling with poverty, with tyranny, or with disasters
for those who seek work, a home, or better health
for those who are discriminated against because of who they are.

And let us in the quiet of our minds try speaking fond words for those for whom we find
it difficult to speak fond word:
for those whom we never see but on whom we depend
for those who irritate us because they are only doing their job
for those with whom we are out of sorts.

And let us in the quiet of our minds just hope that someone else
is speaking fond words:
for those whom we love to hate
for those whom we cannot love and who are unlovely to us
for those whom we have forgotten.

Hard words will break no bones:
But more than bones are broken
By the inescapable stones
Of fond words left unspoken. Amen

Andrew M Hill: Fond Words

2 A meditation on Mark 13: 5-8

Jesus said, "Many will come claiming my name and saying, 'I am he...'"

May our hearts and minds beware of all who dress their arrogance, hatred, and
ambition in the clothes of faith.

Jesus said, "When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; such
things are bound to happen..."

There is no easy way to peace. May despair never overwhelm us
when fragile hopes fail.

Jesus said, "For nation will go to war against nation, kingdom against kingdom..."

In every age that has been true. The Last Days are always with us.

Jesus said, "There will be earthquakes in many places; there will be famines..."

Unthinking nature combines with human folly, bringing misery and death
without justice or distinction.

Jesus said, "These are the birth-pangs of the new age."

This age can be one of wisdom and compassion if we will make it so, with firm
resolve and prayers that give birth to actions.

The vision of a better world is true, whatever happens.
May it be bright in our lives, however long the world must wait.

© Cliff Reed, The Last Days

*[The following words could be used as a reading or a prayer, but perhaps are better as a focus
for meditation and reflection. This could be with music or silence, the words could be read aloud
or printed in the order of service for private reading.]*

3 Compassionate Living

I am not my possessions,
I am not my position,
I am not what I know,
I am not what I can do.
I am those I love,
I am those who depend on me,
I am the ignored, the neglected, the abandoned,
I am the unlovely and the unloved...

May we be joined with all saintly and heroic people,
with all wronged and suffering people,
with all vile and unlovely people,
with all hopeless and wasted people.
May we take their burdens on ourselves,
giving and learning, reverencing and renewing,
bearing and sharing until the moment of death;
for only those who will share suffering will bring help.

Author unknown

Stories

1 A story for young children

[Adapted from “One Flower in a Field” by Joshua Searle-White.]

[As in all good story-telling feel free to condense, expand, and, of course, ask questions]

Once upon a time, there was a field. It was a perfectly nice field, but it was very dry. There was a stream near it, but the water just went round the field, not into it. So the grass was dry. There were some good things – like thistles, and nice hollows... it could have been a perfect field, except for the very dry grass.

And it had something else. All over the field there were beautiful, healthy flowers. There were buttercups and cornflowers and daisies and... they were all there. Why were there healthy flowers in such a dry field? – flowers need water and there wasn't any water, even for the grass.

This is what was happening. Next to each individual flower was a hole; and every hole was home to an animal. Each animal had just one job to do... to look after that one flower. They didn't have to worry about any of the other flowers, just theirs. Every morning, the animals went down to the stream, scooped up some water, carried it back, and watered their flower.

The tallest and healthiest flower in that field was – a sunflower. That sunflower was looked after by a rabbit. The sunflower was tall, and bright, and strong. Rabbit was proud of it.

One day, rabbit was hopping around the field when she saw a very strange sight... a flower that wasn't looking healthy. It was a daisy, and it was wilted and droopy. The rabbit went closer to see what the problem was. The daisy needed water. The petals were wilting and the ground very dry. The rabbit felt sorry for the daisy.

And do you know what she did? She did nothing at all!

There are lots of other flowers here, and they're fine. So she went home and got on with her own work – watering her own flower. But every day, she hopped back up to the top of the hill to see how the daisy was doing. And every day, the daisy looked a little worse. Rabbit was worried. When she was getting water for her own flower she was sad that no one seemed to be helping the daisy.

Why didn't the rabbit go back to the stream, get more water, and help out the daisy?

A very good question; and the rabbit did wonder about it. She thought about watering the daisy, but then she thought “well, you can't just walk into someone's garden and water it without asking, can you? That flower is probably someone else's to water. They might be cross with me!” Or she'd think, “Maybe the flower likes being like that”.

Rabbit continued to worry. But one day, she really couldn't take it any more. She thought, "this just isn't right. Flowers aren't supposed to wilt like that. They're meant to be colourful and bright." And she hopped over to the daisy, with some water.

She was about to water the daisy when a spiky hedgehog popped out of a hole and shouted at her "what are you doing?" "I'm watering this daisy; it's dry and will die" "So?" said the hedgehog. "It's my daisy. It's none of your business if it dies. I'll look after it how I want! Go home and take care of your own flower"

The rabbit looked at the poor sad daisy, and gathering all her courage tipped her water into the ground around the daisy, and then turned and hopped home. She could hear the hedgehog muttering and mumbling..

The rabbit came back day after day to water the daisy and the hedgehog kept muttering rude things about her and giving her horrible looks, but he didn't stop her. Soon the daisy began to look a bit better, and eventually became bright and strong..

But, what was really odd was that as the daisy got brighter, rabbit's sunflower also became stronger and more beautiful. And stranger still, all the flowers in the field started to look brighter. It looked like there was just more water everywhere.

The rabbit never really understood what happened, and neither do we. It could be that the other animals were following her example, and running around watering other animals' flowers too.

Or maybe, it's because when someone waters a wilting flower somewhere, all flowers everywhere grow a little bit brighter?

Who knows? We'll just have to try it that way and see!

Story adapted by *Kate McKenna*

2 **A story for older children...and adults: When has the night ended?**

A rabbi gathered his students together very early one morning, before the sun had risen. 'How do you know when the night has ended and the day has come?' he asked them.

One student answered: 'When you can see an animal in the distance and you can tell whether it is a sheep or a goat.'

'That's not the answer,' said the rabbi.

'When you can tell whether a distant tree is a fig tree or an apple tree,' said another.

'No,' replied the rabbi. 'That is wrong, too.'

A few more students had a try, but each time the rabbi shook his head. 'Tell us, then,' said one student, 'when do we know that the night has ended and day has come?'

'When you can look at the face of any man or woman and see them as your brother or your sister. If you cannot do this, it is still night, no matter what the time of day,' said the rabbi.

Bill Darlison, Concentration and Compassion

Short Readings

1 The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37)

2 A young man applied to join a Zen Buddhist community. He was interviewed by the Zen master, who said applicants were admitted to the community only if they had skills and talents to offer. 'Is there something you are particularly good at?' asked the master. The applicant thought for a while and then replied that he was quite a good chess-player. 'We already have a good chess-player in the community', said the master, 'but come along next week and if you can beat him, you can join our community'. The young man arrived at the appointed time, was ushered into a large hall where the whole community was gathered, and in the centre of the hall stood a table with a chess board set up with a monk sat at the board ready to start the game. 'Before you start', said the master, 'there is something you must both know'. He drew a large sword from under his robe and said, 'The one who loses the game will be beheaded'.

The game started and after a few minutes it was very evident the applicant was a much superior player to his opponent as he took one piece after another. The applicant raised his eyes to look at his opponent, saw him trembling, dripping with sweat and staring fearfully at the chessboard, whereupon the applicant began to make silly moves so his opponent could take his pieces. It reached the stage where the next move would have been checkmate for the applicant, at which point the master stepped forward, said there was no further need for the game, kicked the table over, turned to the applicant and said, 'You are welcome to join our community, for you know the meaning of compassion.'

David Monk
(Faith and Freedom Vol.54 No.153, 2001)

3 The Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh refers to the 'door' of compassion as the door of the heart. It is a central belief within religious traditions the world over, that within all people is a heart of compassion. Sadly, the door is often closed, preventing any 'movement out'. It is closed because people are so wounded by many of their life experiences, often from a very early age, that the only way they believe they can survive is to deny or repress the suffering in themselves. When the door of the heart is opened, this personal suffering is exposed. If there is a willingness to acknowledge and 'own' this suffering the heart moves out to others who are suffering, Compassion is a way of relating to others in their suffering which comes from acknowledging and embracing the suffering in oneself.

Suffering is a universal condition of existence, as Buddha announced in the First noble Truth and it is interesting to note that this truth of suffering is 'noble', in other words, it is a fact of existence deserving of our recognition and respect. There is a widespread belief that people should not have to suffer, that there is something wrong, even shameful, about suffering and consequently there is cultural pressure to deny and repress it. But, all sentient beings are afflicted with suffering in different ways relating to their different conditions and life experiences, and it is this existential/universal fact of suffering that required our respect.

Respect for suffering arises through being aware of the interdependent web of existence...we must have first of all openness to the suffering we carry within ourselves, for when we hear the cries coming from within, compassion finds expression in the way we relate to others. As David Brazier expresses it in his book *The Feeling Buddha*: 'When we recognise, acknowledge and contain our own afflictions and are no longer afraid of the shadows that arise within ourselves, we put ourselves in a position to think well of others and to be useful in the world.'

David Monk
(Faith and Freedom Vol.54 No.153, 2001)

4 Giving the Charter a Human Face

When the GA voted this year to become a partner organisation affirming the Charter for Compassion, there were, unsurprisingly, no dissenting voices. Who could find anything to disagree with in the universal principle of compassion, the connectedness of all things and the Golden Rule at the heart of human relations? But it does help to have a more concrete idea of how we can practise compassion in our everyday lives.

One problem with the term “compassion” is that it is often misinterpreted as meaning “feeling sorry for people”. Karen Armstrong says that the word should denote enduring another person’s pain with them and entering generously into their point of view. That is why compassion is aptly summed up in the Golden Rule, which asks us to look into our own hearts, discover what gives us pain and then refuse to inflict that pain on anyone else, or indeed what the native Americans meant by “going a mile in another man’s moccasins”. This principle has been at the heart of the Fairtrade movement over the past twenty years.

The selling of goods from poorer countries on Fairtrade terms is a system that is built on promises and the fact that they are largely commercial ones doesn’t make them any less binding. The basic promises are:- that a fair price for the goods will be paid, covering production and labour costs and that a premium based on retail sales will be paid to the community, for use as they see fit. For basic foodstuffs that have world price agreements, if the world price rises, the Fairtrade price will also rise, if the world price falls, the Fairtrade price will not fall. Sellers are also granted long-term contracts, which let them plan ahead and cushion them to some extent if disasters happen. Farmers in the Windward Islands have been able to keep going, with the promise of the continuance of sales contacts despite the hurricanes that have decimated banana crops during the past few years.

We know this because one of the producers who visited Aberdeen during Fairtrade Fortnight in 2008 was a banana farmer from St Lucia, who could tell us about the effect of Fairtrade on his life at first hand. Over the years we have also been visited by two cocoa farmers from Ghana, a tea producer from Kenya, a honey farmer from Chile and two Palestinian olive oil producers. All of them confirmed that their lives had been transformed by the continuing promise of a fair price and a guaranteed market for their produce. Mostly this had resulted in very simple improvements, like being able to send their children to school or installing water pumps, clinics or even roads in their villages. Visitors like these are really the best proof we have that Fairtrade as a system works. The fact that people can come to us and say “yes, Fairtrade has given us a better life” endorses any efforts we may make to buy Fairtrade goods. We may feel that the supermarkets still make extra profit from Fairtrade lines, or that some of the bigger manufacturing companies convert token items of their produce to Fairtrade because it improves their image, but if ordinary farmers in developing countries can benefit, then the system is working. Of course there is always room for improvement, but that’s not a good reason to write Fairtrade off.

So here is a very simple way that we can all implement the Charter for Compassion in our everyday lives. Just buy Fairtrade products. Of course, you can go further: make

your church a certificated Fairtrade one; take part in local awareness-raising events; find out more about the lives behind the products; but at bottom you will be entering into other people's lives and sharing their concerns if you just do that one thing. Buy Fairtrade and you will be giving the Charter a human face.

Sue Good

Longer Texts

(longer texts might be better shared between a number of readers – different voice colours add interest)

1 Freedom to be Compassionate

[A condensed version of a sermon by Rev Richard F Boeke]

In Atlanta, Georgia, on the gravestone of Martin Luther King, Junior, are these words. "Free at last, free at last. Thank God, I am free at last." Like all non-violent spiritual leaders, at the heart of King's leadership is compassion. 'I cannot afford the luxury of hate,' he said.

What is Freedom? After the nightmare of World War II, Camus, Sartre and the Existentialists told us, "You are condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, you are responsible for everything you do. It is up to you to give life a meaning."

In contrast to the Existentialist Individualism of Sartre, Martin Luther King had a more organic view of his role. He said, "We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now...we are not makers of history...we are made by history." King did not choose to lead the Civil Rights movement. Like Lincoln, he had studied and prepared himself in the hope that his time would come. When the time came in Montgomery, Alabama, King was there, and King was ready to follow Rosa Parks: "I'll not move to the back of the bus, I'll sit right here."

Peace making was the ongoing dream of Gandhi and King. For warring communities from Libya to Lebanon, from Pakistan to the Philippines it continues today. Here the work of Compassion is forgiveness. "Bitterness imprisons life; love releases it." He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate.

In today's language, Saint Paul's words, "Faith, Hope, and Charity," are better translated as "TRUST, HOPE, AND COMPASSION." It takes not only Compassion, but acts of Trust and Hope to build peace.

Rev. Christopher Hudson of All Souls Church, Belfast, Northern Ireland told a British IARF conference of his decades of work for peace: "To forgive, it is important to empathize. Not to negate the realities of what has happened. Those who committed horrible deeds regretted them, but felt there was a need to carry them out...part of forgiveness is understanding. Understanding allows us to leave the myths and empathize with the other as human."

In Christopher Hudson's words is the wisdom of Buddhist teaching, "If you understand, there is no need to forgive." Even with understanding, there will still be lingering baggage in our hearts. We pray, "Help us to rid ourselves of the baggage we still carry."

Karen Armstrong seeks "to bring forth the compassion that exists potentially within every human being...you cannot learn to swim by sitting by the side of the pool and

watching others.” She warns us, “if you cannot love yourself, you cannot love other people either.” She takes us through the dark side in which people are driven to self-hatred. What we most attack in others is what we most fear in ourselves.

Compassion is opening your self to be one with the flowing water of life. Compassion is being born again and again, not just as who you were, but as what you can be. You can be so angry that you are not free: so angry that you lose the blessing of Compassion.

Karen Armstrong spoke at the UUA General Assembly in Charlotte, North Carolina in June 2011. This is part of what she said:

It is tragic that the religions which have this ethic (compassion) right at the heart of their faith are seen to be the major cause of hatred and disdain and exclusion. What is compassion? I think the word has so fallen out of our lexicon that people are confused about it. In English, people often think it means pity or feeling sorry for people. They think it's a touchy feely thing.

The word compassion comes from a Greek/Latin root that means **to endure something with another person**. That means putting yourself imaginatively in other people's shoes and not just seeing things from your own blinkered and often self-interested perspective.

There's a very early Buddhist prayer attributed to the Buddha himself which says, “let us cherish all creatures, all creatures, as a mother her only child.”

2 **Heed the call of compassion**

Under this heading an article by Desmond Tutu and Karen Armstrong appeared on guardian.co.uk This was on September 25th 2009, just prior to the launch of the charter. It can be referred to on-line.

3 **Charter for Compassion**

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

We therefore call upon all men and women ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

4 **Responsive Litany based on the Charter for Compassion**

(This responsive litany is placed here because it is clearly directly linked with the actual Charter)

Compassion is the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions

It calls us to treat others as we wish to be treated ourselves.

Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures.

To dethrone ourselves from the centre of the world.

In both public and private life to refrain from inflicting pain.

To act or speak violently and to incite hatred is a denial of our basic humanity.

We have failed to live compassionately.

Some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

We call all men and women to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion.

To return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate.

To encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity.

To cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings – even those regarded as enemies.

To make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world.

Compassion can break down boundaries.

Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to a fulfilled humanity.

Compassion is the path to enlightenment, to the creation of a just economy, and a peaceful global community.

Author unknown

Closing Words and Benedictions

With love and compassion
for each other and the world,
may we go from here more
worthy of the gift of life and
of the blessings of the earth,
our common home.
Amen.

© Cliff Reed

Our time in this place may have ended,
But our connection to each other and this community remains.
Together may we walk the path of justice,
Speak words of love, live the selfless deed,
Tread gently upon the earth, and fill the world with compassion.

Kathy A Huff

May love permeate your every heartbeat,
may faith guide your every step,
may truth and compassion be your Eternal travelling companions.
And may a deep, abiding Spirit rest joyously
in your every waking wish,
and your every resting dream.

Becca Reynolds

Spirit of wisdom and knowledge
As we extinguish the flame here
Give us the fire to spread compassion as we leave this place.
Fill our minds with everything that is true
Everything that is good
and guide us into the heights and depths,
the breadth and length of compassionate living.
That we may know for ourselves
the love that surpasses knowledge
and be passionate ambassadors of peace in the world.

John S Wilkinson

Hymns

[There are many hymns that would support a worship service on compassion. The following list is just a suggestion; others may be more appropriate for your worship service]

Sing Your Faith

- 11 Blessed Spirit of my life
- 92 Let us renew our covenant
- 119 O source of many cultures
- 124 One more step
- 128 Our world is one world
- 139 Sacred the body
- 181 Wake, now, my senses

Hymns of Faith and Freedom

- 208 We believe in human kindness
- 248 God make my life a little light
- 274 O God whose law is in the sky
- 314 When my heart with joy o'erflowing
- 316 Make channels for the streams of love
- 318 Can I see another's woe
- 338 Make me a channel of your peace

Hymns for Living

173	The church is not where altar stands
180	This old world is full of sorrow
181	Can I see another's woe
182	We must be one with all
186	Make channels for the streams of love
187	We believe in human kindness
191	Now let us sing in loving celebration
198	For the healing of the nations

Vesper Hymns

Sing Your Faith	226	From you I receive
Hymns of Faith and Freedom	474	From all that dwell below the skies
Hymns for Living	314	Let peace encircle all the world

Acknowledgements

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Our thanks also to copyright holders for giving permission to use texts.

