

Order of Service  
**Simple Gifts**  
October 25, 2009

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**Gathering Music**

John Burkhardt

**Individual Candle Lighting ♥**

**Declaration** (unison reading)

*Love is the spirit of this fellowship*

*And service is its law.*

*This is our great covenant:*

*To dwell together in peace,*

*To seek truth in love,*

*And to help one another.*

-- James Vila Blake

**Prelude**

John Burkhardt

**Introit**

Pine Cone Choir

**Welcome & Announcements**

Scott Harris, Board Member

**Call to Worship and Chalice Lighting**

Gathered in the arms of fellowship

We seek that support from each other

That helps us to reach our personal goals,

That helps us to become better people,

And that helps us to actualize ourselves as human beings.

Let us worship together once again.

**Chalice Response**

*Rise up, O flame, by thy light glowing,*

*show to us beauty, vision and joy.*

**New Member Ingathering**

**Offertory**

John Burkhardt

*This is a Fellowship of ourselves.*

*Its energy and resources are our energy and resources.*

*Its wealth is what we share.*

*When we contribute to the life of this community*

*We affirm our lives within it.*

-- Mary Allen Walden

**Story for All Ages** Ted Hegvik and Bruce Davis

Form an arch for the children as they go to their classes.

*Sing and rejoice. Sing and rejoice.*

*Let all things living now sing and rejoice. (4X)*

**Connecting in Fellowship**

\* **Hymn #123, “Spirit of Life”**

**Sharing of Joys and Sorrows** Jeff Anderson, Worship Associate

**Meditation and Prayer**

May we in this moment

Come together in the stillness that holds us,

In the silence that we are.

Amen

**Readings** from “The Circle of Simplicity,” by Cecile Andrews

**A Country’s Heritage**

Gathering around the fire has a special meaning for Americans,

because that’s the way we began—gathered around the hearth

in a house we had built with our own hands

or gathered around an open fire under the sky

as we set out across the land.

When we create a new vision of life,

we need to build on what we cherish in our past.

To feel a sense of dignity, a nation needs to have a sense of pride in its heritage.

We have seen it as African Americans recapture their roots,

And as women reclaim their history.

Our founding fathers and mothers advocated the simple life,

warned against excess and shallow materialism,

exhorted us to develop the inner life.  
Along the way, we've forgotten this,  
but now people are remembering.  
Recapturing the simple life is  
a return to the good life.

### **Introduction to *Circle of Simplicity***

Joan's job was beginning to take up her whole life. She thought about it all the time—usually with a tense, sick feeling in her stomach. And it was not that she was the CEO or anything—just a vice president for an HMO. ...

... She hadn't seen many of her friends this year. She just couldn't face the effort of having people to dinner—cleaning her house, going through the piles of clutter, or cooking! And it probably wouldn't be any fun anyway....

Besides, when could they do it? On Saturdays she and Joel tried to get out of town—even if they took briefcases full of work with them. Theoretically, they left town to spend some time together, but they both kept [checking their email and voice mail, returning calls to everybody else who was catching up on their work. They might as well stay home—the calls would be cheaper.

She had never really worried about money, but lately she had been running up bills—buying things she didn't need, like those new shoes and the bread maker. Bread maker! That was a joke. Another kitchen appliance that would never get used.....

It was the rushing around that drove her crazy. She couldn't seem to stop, even on the weekends. She wished she could just sit and stare into space.

But the worst thing was the Sunday night dread. She would think about Monday morning and work, and her stomach would tighten and jaw muscles clench. Actually, it would start on Saturday, when she wondered whether she could get all her errands done. She'd think: Am I enjoying my time enough? Do I dare go for a walk, or should I do the laundry? The only time she felt free was on Friday night, and she was too tired to enjoy it. They'd be asleep on the couch by 8:30, the television blaring.

Was this it? Wasn't there something missing?

**Interlude** “Teach your Children” by Crosby, Stills, and Nash

Real Folk

**Sermon** Simple Gifts

Rev. Bruce Davis

Few of us would deny that, on the whole, our American life style has provided us with unprecedented advantages. The consumer society that we have created, especially during the twentieth century, offers comfort, safety, and stimulation well beyond what our forebears experienced. Our opportunity to have things is, on average, far beyond what our brothers and sisters in other lands could even dream of. We’ve won the proverbial lottery!

Or have we? Another way to look at our situation is that we have indentured ourselves to the abundance we thought was the American dream. The stuff we’ve acquired begins to own *us*. The more stuff there is, the more we have to take care of and the less real freedom there is in our lives.

When we talk about simplicity, we are not raising up “frugality” as our eighth Unitarian Universalist principle. Poverty is not the goal of simplifying our lives. The saying, “less is more,” is true only when it *is* true. It can be just as true that “less is less.” Happiness for some in our world, in our county, and even in our congregation would mean acquiring more goods and services to help meet basic life needs, and it is part of our role as humanitarians to ensure that people have the *opportunity* to get those basic needs met. This is part of our justice mission as a UU Fellowship.

Ultimately simplifying our lives is a comprehensive *intention* toward improving the *quality* of our life experience. What I may choose to do in simplifying my complex life might therefore be very different from what you choose to do. In the twenty years that I’ve had association with the so-called Voluntary Simplicity movement, my purpose has been to make more conscious choices.

Richard Gregg was one of the earliest authors writing about simplicity. A student of Mahatma Gandhi, Gregg wrote the following in 1936:

Voluntary simplicity involves both inner and outer condition. It means singleness of purpose, sincerity and honesty within, as well as avoidance of exterior clutter, of many possessions irrelevant to the chief purpose of

life. It means an ordering and guiding of our energy and our desires, a partial restraint in some directions in order to secure greater abundance of life in other directions. It involves a deliberate organization of life for a purpose. Of course, as different people have different purposes in life, what is relevant to the purpose of one person might not be relevant to the purpose of another.... The degree of simplification is a matter for each individual to settle himself.

Simplifying means a comprehensive reordering of one's life in the directions of one's own life purposes. Simplifying one's life both depends on and actively involves the value stated in our fourth Unitarian Universalist principle: "the free and responsible search for truth and meaning."

One of the more recent teachers in the simplicity movement is Duane Elgin, whose book, *Voluntary Simplicity* is a classic. His emphasis is not to simplify for its own sake. He puts the emphasis on the word "voluntary," suggesting that simplification depends primarily on what's important to you. Even within a family the goals of simplification may differ. In his classic text he writes the following:

To live more voluntarily is to live more deliberately, intentionally, and purposefully—in short, it is to live more consciously. We cannot be deliberate when we are distracted from life. We cannot be intentional when we are not paying attention. We cannot be purposeful when we are not being present. Therefore, to act in a voluntary manner is to be aware of ourselves as we move through life. This requires that we not only pay attention to the actions we take in the outer world, but also that we pay attention to ourselves acting—our inner world.

Recently we had a class on the writings of Henry David Thoreau, who is probably the great grandfather of the American simplicity movement. He opens his small book, *Walden*, written in 1854, with these words:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the

marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan- like as to put to rout all that was not life,

There is a paring down or cutting back involved in simplifying our lives with the intention of promoting what matters most. It works opposite to a pressure that many of us feel, to make our life better by adding more—a strategy that may *add* to happiness short term but *decrease* it over the long haul.

About twenty years ago, at the height of my productivity as a physician, the family was experiencing the pressure of two very active careers, three growing children, the PTA, congregational commitments, and two extended families in the area. There was too much going on. The release valve on the pressure cooker was just about to burst. We needed to do something, but what?

Well, like many people, we added something more with the misguided idea that it would add happiness to our lives. We drove to a favorite spot on the Washington Coast for the weekend, about four hours from Seattle with weekend traffic. We relaxed there and had fun. We forgot about the complexity of our lives and the demands of our stuff. We saw a small cabin for sale, and with visions of campfires and clambakes in our heads, we bought it. Walden, here we come!

How did we not see that the old place, built almost a hundred years ago, would provide a new set of demands on our time, our money, and our energy? For a few years we followed the dream until it became clear that it was only a dream. Ultimately, driving eight hours just to be there for the weekend proved ridiculous! Of course we couldn't do this. Getting rid of the demands of this albatross was our first major step toward simplifying our life. It was hard to do, because it meant giving up a very satisfying fantasy, but it was rewarding to do because it made us talk together about what was important in our lives now.

The changes that we make in our lives toward greater simplicity need not be so dramatic. Small changes are perhaps even more powerful as choices accumulate and clarity of direction and purpose emerge. If big changes are important in your future, in the name of simplicity, let the momentum toward them come from many small steps along the way.

As I began to see the value of simplicity in my own life, I began teaching classes at some of our Unitarian Universalist congregations on the art of simplifying one's life. I would do the classes in six sessions for two reasons. The first is that the multiple, complex dimensions of our lives, inner and outer, seem to me to fall out in six general areas. Thoughtful choices in each of those areas has a synergistic effect on the over-all simplification of our lives.

But the second reason for six sessions is even more important. Discerning how I want to make changes in my life is benefited by conversation in the context of supportive community. When I hear steps you've taken, I'm encouraged on my own path. I might even seek consultation from the group on steps that I'm considering. Moreover, one of the primary intentions of simple living, enriched relationships with other persons, is directly achieved in those conversations over a six-week period.

What are the six areas I consider essential when beginning to work with others in a small supportive group? I'll talk more about these in the Simplicity Study Circle workshop that will follow the coffee hour. I know of two facilitators who will offer open, on-going groups beginning in November for those who would find it meaningful.

1. The first area for me has to do with home economics. What is the relationship of my income and my expenditures? What do I buy to relieve the stress of working extra hard to pay all my bills? There is some discipline required here. One may consider writing down all expenses, no matter how seemingly trivial, to increase the awareness of our buying behavior. A second step is an honest look at real income—not the pseudo-income of cards or money from second mortgages. Finally we can establish a realistic and comfortable budget.
2. Out of the first session grows the second. Do I feel trapped by my job or my career? Am I really doing what I want to be doing in the world, or am I just staying with my current job to pay for the house, the cars, and other stuff that I've accumulated? If I *do* allow myself the opportunity to think about what work in this world would be most meaningful, how much money would that bring in? What cost cutting in my budget would it take to shift to that new work? Am I willing to give up some of what I have to really do the work in my

world that I feel called to? What support, from family, my Covenant Group, or my Fellowship can I access to take steps in this risky but exciting enterprise of simplifying and transforming my life?

3. Out of the second session emerges the third. There's all this stuff I've accumulated. Though I spend time taking care of the stuff, how often do I actually use it? Last summer I finally sold my hand-made sixteen-foot Western Red Cedar rowboat to a young man who takes it out on the Sound almost every day. It wasn't easy to let go of, but I feel great freedom not to have to take care of it. The simplicity theme about stuff is just this. Enjoy what you use. Let go of what you don't.
4. Again the fourth session comes out of the third. What strain does it put on the environment to have all this stuff? How might your other life choices affect the environment? Examples here are everywhere. If I drive my Mini at the actual speed limit, I use about two gallons less of gasoline each week. What household chemicals do I dump into my sink that will inevitably get into the environment? What containers that I buy cannot be recycled, so that they end up in a landfill? Even simple things. Should I leave the water running when I brush my teeth? Can I wash and re-use this plastic bag? For me the goal here isn't that my choices will save the world but rather that my choices are in harmony with the natural world, of which I am a part.
5. The fifth class comes naturally from the fourth. As I find a balanced way of living in happy harmony with my environment, how am I doing at balancing my life choices. Am I contributing in a balanced way to my career, my family, and my community? If not, where am I out of balance, and how can I adjust my priorities. One of the tools I've used here is a Venn diagram with the intersection of three circles. One circle is my work, one is my family, and one is my community. What actual hours per week am I investing in each of these three areas. At the center of the circles is a space that is common to all three fields of my life: my self. How am I doing in the care and feeding of that self? Do I exercise regularly? How do I manage stress? What does my diet or use of alcohol look like? Am

I happy with my life balance as it is? If not, am I willing to work with like-minded friends to make the needed changes?

6. The sixth class is a subset of the fifth. Am I taking time every day to settle into the simple center of my life? Do I take time to enjoy the silence and the spaces between the activities and events? Do I walk on the beach or in the forest? Do I smell the roses? Central to the sixth class is this question: what is your approach to meditation, and do you do it regularly? I remember one man who said that his meditation was walking on the beach, looking for agates. Every night, as he fell asleep, there he'd be again, walking on the beach, with agates shining in the evening sunlight.

You don't have to be with a group to make lasting choices toward simplicity, but it sure helps. A group can help you keep integrity with choices that you make, in ways that it's easy to slip on by yourself. As a group does its work over time, bonds of friendship make the work ever-deeper, ever-more personal, and ever-more effective. It needn't be a formal simplicity circle. Our own Covenant Circles or our families can provide a great environment for this personal and spiritual work.

This is *your* life. It's where *you've* landed, but is it where you want to be? What would you change to be happier? Simplicity, finally, is about those intimate and innocent feelings of delight and contentment that are the peak experiences of our lives. Playful time with loved ones. Quiet times in nature. Moments of fulfillment in all variety of ways. Getting to *simplicity* is about getting past some of the *complexity* that keeps getting in our way. It's about replacing old, unconscious habits with newer, more-intentional ones.

It's about creating freedom—for what matters most in *your* life.

May it be so.

Amen.

\* **Hymn #16, “’Tis a Gift to Be Simple”**

\* **Closing Song** (*twice*)

*Carry the flame of peace and love (2 X)*

*Until we meet again*

\* **Benediction**

\* Congregation standing, as it is comfortable to do so.

♥ *You may wish to light a candle before the service, to express a personal joy or sorrow, using the bowl in front of the pulpit.*

*Join us -*

*Next Sunday at 10:30 am*

*John Morgan Service - Rev. Davis*