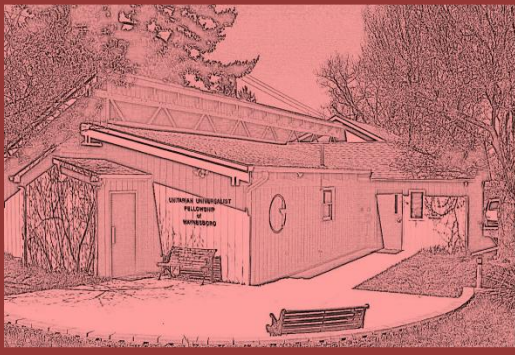




The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist
Fellowship of Waynesboro

Voting as Ritual: A Sacred Act of Love and Interdependence

By Ben Blankenship

As a political psychologist, I study voting: why people show up, what shapes their choices, and how personality and identities intertwine in the ballot box. While pursuing my doctorate at The University of Michigan (Go Blue!), I learned to run statistical models, read psychological theory, and quantify political ideology and behavior. However, some of the most meaningful lessons I've learned about voting did not come from the classroom, but came from my mom's kitchen table in Mesa, Arizona.

For her, voting was more than just a civic duty; it was an act of hope and love. I remember the focus in her voice as she explained the issues of the day to me, as well as the slow, intentional sealing of the ballot envelope—much in the same way she sealed her weekly church offerings in envelopes stamped with our Methodist congregation's logo. As a rebellious teenager, I remember asking her one time why she even bothered voting; she is a Democrat, and we lived in **bright red** Mesa, home to one of the largest populations of the LDS faith, outside of Salt Lake City. Without blinking an eye, she said something like: "I don't vote because I think we will win; I vote to show that I care." Looking back, I realize that this wasn't just an exercise in civic duty. It was a *ritual*.

Rituals help us mark what matters. Lighting a chalice. Saying a blessing. Holding silence. These acts slow us down, center our values, and remind us that we belong to something larger. They turn ordinary acts and objects into

something extraordinary and sacred. I believe the same can be true of voting, if we make the intention.

In our fast-paced, polarized world, we don't often treat the act of voting in this way. It's easy to see it as a chore, a checkbox, or one of many last-minute errands for the day. But what if we reclaimed the deeper sense of meaning that voting can hold? What if we treated it not only as a civic duty, but as a spiritual practice?

Ritualizing voting may also help with one of the biggest political issues of our time: **political polarization**. Indeed, [scientific studies](#) consistently show that many of us are motivated to vote, not necessarily because we are *for* something, but because we are *against* something or someone else (i.e., the other party's candidates/initiatives). But maybe ritualizing voting could help move us away from this toxic dynamic? When we pause to vote with intention, grounded in love rather than fear, we are probably less likely to see our ballots as weapons against the other side, and more likely to treat them as acts of **love, pluralism, justice, and interdependence**. I'm not naive though; lighting a candle won't erase our real political differences, but perhaps it can help remind us that, at its core, democracy is a *covenant* to each other.

Ritualizing voting doesn't require incense or special robes (although, you're welcome to wear those to the voting booth, if you wish...just don't forget your ID!). It could mean lighting a candle before you fill out your ballot at home. It could mean reflecting on your ancestors who were not able to vote; some of us have more recent

ancestors than others. It could mean saying the names of loved ones, whispering a hope for the future, or taking a few centering breaths. Regardless, stop, reflect, and vote with love and intention.

So this election season, let us slow down. Light a candle. Whisper a name. Take a breath. Vote like it's a blessing.

Because it is.

Our member Ben Blankenship is an Associate Professor of Psychology at James Madison University. His research examines the role of personality and social identity in political engagement.

UUs in the Community

Volunteering is a regular activity for many of our members on behalf of our Fellowship and also in response to community needs. Here are a few of the community service organizations on the receiving end of volunteer efforts by our members. Let the [newsletter](#) know of your volunteer efforts for future issues.



At the [Community Composting Station](#) hosted by Shenandoah Green in Staunton, volunteers assist customers in dropping off their compostable food waste and answer their questions. Community members may bring their compostables to the

composting station free of charge. Composting helps to reduce the production of greenhouse gasses, which contribute to climate change. This photo of volunteer Kristin Maxwell was taken by regular customer Linda Shallash, who offered her hat to Kristin on a hot sunny day.



At the [Verona Community Food Pantry](#), several of our members have regular volunteer duties in addition to the Fifth Tuesdays, when UUFW provides all of the manpower. Madeleine

Dupre started as a UUFW volunteer and quickly became a regular on Mondays and Thursdays, helping to unload and sort the incoming food donations. This past September, Madeleine was named to the Pantry's Board of Directors. Rey Patterson and Florence Ferguson are also regular pantry volunteers.



At the [River City Bread Basket of the Life Works Project](#) in Waynesboro, volunteers help provide access to healthy, nutritious food in a client-choice food pantry located in the "heart of a food desert."

Our members who volunteer regularly include Sharon Van Name and Victor Monti (pictured), Mike Drumheller, Renee Herrell, Ed Piper and Kristin and Stephen Maxwell. Members AJ and Adrienne Young were instrumental in the creation of the Life Works Project.

Member News

Sylvia Woodworth is home recovering from knee-replacement surgery at Augusta Health. She has appreciated meals through the Caring Network, as well as your visits and emails.

Bob Norvell also spent a night in the hospital this week after back surgery. He is at home and recovering well. When contacted recently, he was preparing to go out for a short walk!

