

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
**Highs and Lows at Thanksgiving**

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**Chalice lighting.**

Excerpt from Singing the Living Tradition #515. We Lift Up Our Hearts in Thanks

For the sun and the dawn  
Which we did not create;

For the moon and the evening  
Which we did not make;

For food which we plant  
But cannot grow;

For friends and loved ones  
We have not earned and cannot buy;

...  
Gifts of life and love and friendship  
We lift up our hearts in thanks this day.

Richard M. Fewkes

**Check in.**

**Topic Overview**

Thanksgiving is coming this week. It is the start of the holiday season. During the holidays, there can be intense emotions and situations. During this time, we can look forward to moments and also feel the weight of obligations.

**Discussion questions**

Everyone will have a chance to briefly share their thought. Feel free to pass. We will go around the room. We can then discuss as a group.

- What is something that you like/enjoy about the holiday season (Nov/Dec) – especially Thanksgiving time?
- Is there anyone that you are looking forward to connecting with during the holiday season?

## **Reading 1**

Unitarian Universalists helped start Thanksgiving. Now they have second thoughts. - The Washington Post Washington Post November 23, 2016

Many of the churches established by the Pilgrims and other early colonists in New England eventually became Unitarian Universalist churches.

"Thanksgiving is a holiday that many families celebrate without awareness of the pain that causes our First Nation neighbors we live among. ..." said Laura Wagner, one of the proponents of the rethink-Thanksgiving resolution that Unitarian Universalists voted for in June 2016.

During the holiday season, we often share space with people who have differing viewpoints about politics (Republic/Democrat), current events (Palestine/Israel), and worldview (Climate change, Covid).

**Discussion Question is:** Are there situations, discussions, or people that concerns you or brings you anxiety about the holiday season?

We will go around the room. Each person can briefly share. Feel free to pass. We will then have an open discussion.

## **Reading 2**

How to navigate tough conversations at the holidays | PBS NewsHour PBS Nov 22, 2022

Food, family ... and friction. Thanksgiving gatherings can be filled with great joy and connection, but they can also devolve into arguments...

To cope with – and strategize for – potential strife at your Thanksgiving table, PBS NewsHour digital anchor Nicole Ellis spoke with Columbia University psychology professor Peter Coleman to get his best tips for anxious feast-goers.

"It's possible just to start the dinner by saying, 'I love you all and I'm so glad you're here and I'm glad we're connected with each other. And in the past, we've gotten into some rough conversations. If possible, let's agree to respect each other today,'" Coleman said.

Setting up ground rules doesn't have to be formal, he said, but should be upfront, so that if conversations start going into tense territory, "you can use that as leverage to bring the conversation back in line."

Coleman also recommends that if you anticipate that a difficult personal topic might be unavoidable – like a breakup, loss of a job or a guest who doesn't accept an aspect of your life – consider proactively raising the subject in private before you've all gathered. That way, he said, issues can be addressed early without others interfering.

## **Open Discussion about coping with difficult situations during the holidays.**

- What are some thoughts about ways to cope with difficult situations during the holidays?