



DISCUSSION GUIDE | 2017-2018

# UUA Common Read: Daring Democracy

Book by Frances Moore Lappé & Adam Eichen  
Discussion Guide by Susan Lawrence

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# Introduction

Co-authors Frances M. Lappé (author of *Diet for a Small Planet*, first published in 1971) and Adam Eichen expose and document the “anti-democracy” movement, funded by big money, that has brought us to where we are today. They describe the loneliness and powerlessness that many experience when democratic ideals and systems are co-opted by self-interested, wealthy Americans. They demonstrate how, as a society, we have bought into a prevailing ideology which equates the freedoms of democracy with the “free choice” offered under capitalism.

Avoiding cynicism, *Daring Democracy* catalogues a growing network of justice organizations joining together to demand a government by, for, and of the people. On a variety of fronts—including voting rights, campaign finance, and the minimum wage—people are uniting for democracy reform. Advocates impassioned for racial justice, LGBTQ civil rights, environmental justice, health care access, and more are finding common cause in a new Democracy Movement.

A Unitarian Universalist discussion group has the opportunity to consider *Daring Democracy's* message in light of our faith's Principles. At times, it may seem the version of democracy we inhabit today chisels at our inherent worth and dignity, denies our right of conscience and access to democratic process, and mocks our sacred notion of interconnectedness and responsibility for one another. Do we agree with the authors' bleak assessment of our current democracy? Do we share their optimism and energy for change? Where do we go from here, each of us? Together?

## Using this Guide

The discussion guide is flexible. Adapt it to congregational, cluster, or district programming for adults of all ages and life stages; campus groups or young adult groups; youth groups, or cross-generational groups of adults and youth. Two formats are offered:

- A single 90-minute session
- Can be offered in two parts to accommodate a 45-minute Sunday forum format
- A series of three 90-minute sessions

Any session can be expanded by lengthening the time for conversation, discussion, and sharing.

While the guide asks facilitators to write questions on newsprint, [slides](#) are available to use instead if you have access to a computer and projector.



# Single-Session Version

## Goals

- Invite responses to the authors' assessment of our current democracy.
- Explore synergies between participants' political lives and their spiritual lives through a lens of Unitarian Universalist Principles.
- Invite participants to act from their Unitarian Universalist values in response to what they learn from the book.
- Identify ways to engage in the Democracy Movement nationally, locally, and in everyday life.

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Paper and pens or pencils
- Optional: Timepiece with seconds, and a chime
- Optional: Copies of *Singing the Journey*

## Preparation

- Set out the chalice.
- Write this covenant on newsprint, and set aside:
  - We each promise:
    - to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
    - to listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others.
    - to actively resist making assumptions about one another.
    - to be mindful of “speaking up and stepping back” to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak and to listen.
    - to respect the confidentiality of personal information and stories shared here.
- Write on newsprint, and post:
  - What surprised you in *Daring Democracy*?
  - What emotions did *Daring Democracy* spark in you? Why?

- Write on newsprint, and set aside:
  - What is your first memory of participating in democracy?
- Write on newsprint, and set aside:
  - How are you living out our first, fifth, and seventh Principles in the context of today's democracy? What prevents you from fully expressing each Principle?
- Optional: Write on newsprint and set aside the first, fifth, and seventh [UU Principles](#): (1) The inherent worth and dignity of every person; (5) The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large; (7) Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Note: The Principles appear in the front matter of *Singing the Living Tradition* and *Singing the Journey*.
- Optional: Prepare a handout or an email of the resources suggested in the final section.
- Optional: Recruit a song leader or accompanist.

## Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Say, "Our chalice lighting words are an invocation written by Heather K. Janules for a congregational annual meeting. They are posted on the UUA's online [Worship Web](#)." Then read:

*From the power of our memory and history,  
 With high hopes for the days that lie ahead,  
 We gather to craft the destiny we share with one another.  
 We gather with faith in the practice of democracy.  
 We gather with hearts and minds open  
 To the wisdom in every voice among us.  
 In our gathering,  
 May we dream and design a bold future.  
 May we bring our best selves to this service,  
 And may we dream these dreams  
 And do this work  
 With love.  
 Amen.*

Light the chalice.

## Introductions and Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)

Invite each person to introduce themselves briefly and share what brought them to this discussion. Post the covenant points you have written on newsprint. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on the newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement. If this group will have future meetings, keep this newsprint for next time.

## First Impressions (10 minutes)

Offer participants two or three minutes to reflect on the questions you have posted, and then ask them to share an initial response to the book. Ask participants to share one at a time, without interruption; say that it is fine to pass.

## Reflection and Sharing (20 minutes)

Post and read aloud: What is your first memory of participating in democracy?

Invite participants to take a moment to reflect on their own democratic life, its beginnings. Say that they may close their eyes, if they wish, while you guide their reflection. Then say:

When, where, and how did you first participate in democracy? When we think about democracy, we often think about voting, or maybe we think of something else. What was the first time you remember awareness that you were experiencing democracy? What messages from growing up in your family and community brought you to that experience?

You can ask participants to pair up, or reflect on their own with paper and pen if they prefer. Tell them they will have four minutes for reflection either on their own or with a partner (two minutes each), and then the option to share with the larger group.

You might sound a chime to begin the time of reflection. Let pairs know when two minutes have passed so they can switch speakers. After four minutes, regather the group and invite several volunteers to tell a brief version of their democracy story.

If you have time, use these questions to go more deeply into participants' stories:

- What obstacles were involved? What opportunities?
- What did you feel?

- Do you recall feeling heard? Unheard?
- What did you believe about the system? (Fair? Effective? Wonderful? Flawed? Confusing?)

Now invite participants to return to their partner (or pen and paper) to reflect on their democratic journey since the time of the story they recalled. How have their early messages and first experiences of democracy borne out? What has changed?

Sound a chime to begin, and again at two minutes so pairs can switch speakers. After four minutes, regather the group. Invite volunteers to comment.

## Optional Break, or 45-Minute Session Closing

You may wish to offer a break. Be mindful that any break will extend the 90-minute session that many minutes.

If this meeting is planned to last 45 minutes only and the group will regather at a later date to complete the discussion, skip to the Closing now. When you regather, repeat the chalice-lighting, repost and reaffirm the group's covenant agreement, and summarize the previous meeting (this one), before you resume the discussion from here.

## Discussion: Principled Democracy (25 minutes)

Say:

Let's talk about what's at stake with our democracy. The authors write, "Humans thrive best when the communities we create enable each of us, not just a privileged few, to experience a sense of power (that is, agency or simply knowing that our voices count), a sense that our lives have meaning beyond our own survival, and that we have a satisfying connection with others. Add those together, and what do you have? The essence of democracy" (page 102).

The authors are talking about our needs for personal agency, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose: These are spiritual needs. But how does our political life in today's democracy meet—or not meet—our spiritual needs? For Unitarian Universalists, our seven Principles offer a framework to examine how our daily lives, our actions, and maybe our inaction align with our deeply held faith values.



Post UU Principles one, five, and seven, or direct participants' attention to the Principles in one of the hymnbooks (they are listed in the front matter of both books). Invite volunteers to read each Principle aloud. Then say:

The authors explore (and we have mentioned in our earlier discussion) ways in which our democracy is not an ideal version, in fact has never been ideal. At times, democracy in practice fails to honor the inherent worth and dignity of all people. For some, it denies the right of conscience and access to democratic process. In its failings, it can mock our sacred notions of interconnectedness and responsibility for one another. In these ways, it calls into question our first, fifth, and seventh Principles, respectively.

Post the newsprint on which you have written these questions: How are you living out our first, fifth, and seventh Principles in the context of today's democracy? What barriers are there to fully expressing each Principle? Then say:

Let's consider what we have learned from the first chapters of *Daring Democracy* and our personal experiences as participants in democracy locally and nationally. Check in, as honestly as you can: How are you living out our first, fifth, and seventh Principles in the context of today's democracy? What barriers are there to fully expressing each Principle?

If you have a large group, form three smaller groups and assign a Principle to each group. Then bring the large group back together and ask each small group to briefly report. If you have fewer than 10 participants, work through all three Principles together.

## Democracy Spring (10 minutes)

Say:

The authors, Lappé and Eichen, are optimistic about healing and progress for our democracy. They observe people and groups with disparate concerns finding common cause and building coalitions, and they personally are part of this movement.

Now share these words from the website of Democracy Spring, the group that organized the march from Philadelphia to Washington, DC, that both Lappé and Eichen attended. Invite a volunteer to read, or read aloud yourself:

*The abolitionists, the women’s suffrage movement, the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the farmworkers movement: They all fought to achieve the liberty, justice, and dignity that are guaranteed to all Americans, but which have been withheld from so many.*

*But after generations of progress, our democracy is slipping backwards. The twin corruptions of big money in politics and voter suppression contradict our most deeply held beliefs and block progress on the most urgent moral crises of our time.*

*To fight back we need a mass movement of civil resistance that can create a political and moral crisis around the corruption of our democracy. We need a movement that can build power, shift the political weather, and push through fundamental reforms.*

Say, in these words or your own:

*Daring Democracy* documents how the wealthiest Americans, their corporations and think tanks, and an ideology of “brutal capitalism” keep a grasp on our government so that it cannot be “of, for, and by the people.” But then the book celebrates the energy and potential of the pro-democracy movement of which Democracy Spring is part—a growing movement of people working together: justice-seekers for racial equity, the environment, reproductive rights, and more who have discovered they have a common stake in recovering our democracy.

Lead a discussion with these questions:

- The authors meant to write a hopeful book. Do we share their optimism?
- How do we fit in?

## **What’s Next, and Closing (10 minutes)**

Invite the group to begin a conversation about actions to take individually or together. Offer one or both of these general goals:

- to better align our faith values and our political experience
- to engage with community or national partners in the movement to promote democracy

You might invite participants to self-select small groups to discuss one of these goals or a specific proposed action.

Share these opportunities with the group. If you have compiled these as a handout, distribute it now.

- Visit the website of the [Democracy Initiative](http://www.democracyinitiative.org) to identify national and local campaigns you can join. [www.democracyinitiative.org](http://www.democracyinitiative.org)
- Find further opportunities to study “The Corruption of Our Democracy,” the topic selected by the 2016 UUA General Assembly as a Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI) through 2020. The UUA website provides [materials](http://www.uua.org/action/process/csais/corruption-of-our-democracy) for pursuing a restoration of democracy. [www.uua.org/action/process/csais/corruption-of-our-democracy](http://www.uua.org/action/process/csais/corruption-of-our-democracy)
- Explore the website of [Move to Amend](http://movetoamend.org), a coalition of organizations and individuals “building a vibrant democracy that is genuinely accountable to the people, not corporate interests,” through legislative means. Online, find ways to support and promote a constitutional amendment to limit the influence of big money in politics. [movetoamend.org](http://movetoamend.org)
- Discover [Reclaim Our Democracy](http://www.reclaimourdemocracy.org), a group based at First Parish UU in Concord, Mass., that began working on the issues of escalating inequality and the corrupting influence of money in politics in 2014. [www.reclaimourdemocracy.org](http://www.reclaimourdemocracy.org)
- Learn more about the [Democracy Spring](http://www.democracyspring.org) coalition—the 2016 march and demonstration, and the ongoing movement.
  - The [website](http://www.democracyspring.org) describes Democracy Spring’s mission and the broad coalition of partners working together. [www.democracyspring.org](http://www.democracyspring.org)
  - Show the five-minute video [“UUs at Democracy Awakening”](http://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/uus-at-democracy-awakening) ([smallscreen.uua.org/videos/uus-at-democracy-awakening](http://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/uus-at-democracy-awakening)). The video shows the participation of more than 500 UUs in the launch of Democracy Spring and Democracy Awakening in April 2016.
- Investigate the increase, since the 2016 election, in first-time candidates for office. At this writing, many local and state races include new candidates unconnected with corporate money interests—particularly people of color, women, and LGBTQ candidates.
  - Starting in November 2017, the Electoral Justice Project of the Movement for Black Lives is deploying black political organizers and planning black-led town hall meetings across the country. [Read more](http://www.dailycaller.com/2017/10/16/black-liberation-group-releases-new-project-for-electoral-justice-for-black-people) in the Daily Caller online news service. [dailycaller.com/2017/10/16/black-liberation-group-releases-new-project-for-electoral-justice-for-black-people](http://www.dailycaller.com/2017/10/16/black-liberation-group-releases-new-project-for-electoral-justice-for-black-people)
  - A Slate article, [“Run for Office,”](http://www.slate.com/archive/2017/01/run-for-office) from January 2017 describes how the 2016 election has motivated new candidates from grassroots and marginalized communities. The article also offers links to many related ones.

[www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/cover\\_story/2017/01/how\\_to\\_run\\_for\\_office.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/cover_story/2017/01/how_to_run_for_office.html)

- Consider doing a voter registration drive, a time-honored way to promote democracy. The [League of Women Voters](#) offers a comprehensive tip sheet for organizing voter registration in local communities. It is important to understand federal, state, and local laws and procedures; check the website of the [Fair Elections Legal Network](#) and be sure to verify your understanding with local officials. [forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/tips-successful-voter-registration-drives](http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/tips-successful-voter-registration-drives), [fairelectionsnetwork.com/resources](http://fairelectionsnetwork.com/resources)

A group of seven or fewer participants can discuss next steps together. If you have more, have participants self-select groups of three to five to brainstorm further learning, coalition building, and action.

As you share ideas, assess the desire of the group to continue. Collect email addresses. If appropriate, invite individual participants to commit to specific actions and timelines.

Optional: Invite the group to sing “There’s a River Flowing in My Soul,” hymn 1007 in *Singing the Journey*.

Say, “Let us close with words from William Hastie, America’s first African American federal appellate judge, whom the authors quote in chapter 1: Democracy is ‘becoming, rather than being. It can easily be lost, but never is fully won. Its essence is eternal struggle.’”

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

# Three-Session Version

## Goals

- Invite responses to the authors' assessment of our current democracy.
- Explore connections, overlap, and synergies between participants' political and spiritual lives through a lens of Unitarian Universalist Principles.
- Unpack the concept of “brutal capitalism” and identify its impacts.
- Consider the power of a democracy movement to aggregate and advance justice-seeking across diverse fronts, including antiracism, economic equity, and environmental and climate change.
- Identify ways to engage in the Democracy Movement nationally, locally, and in everyday life.
- Invite participants to act from their Unitarian Universalist values in response to what they learn from the book.

# Session 1: A Democratic Ideal

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Paper and pens or pencils
- Optional: Computer with Internet access and a large monitor
- Optional: Copies of *Singing the Journey*

## Preparation

- Set out the chalice.
- Write this covenant on newsprint, and set aside:
  - We each promise:
    - to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
    - to listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others.
    - to actively resist making assumptions about one another.
    - to be mindful of “speaking up and stepping back” to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak and to listen.
    - to respect the confidentiality of personal information and stories shared here.
- Write on newsprint, and post:
  - What surprised you in *Daring Democracy*?
  - What emotions did *Daring Democracy* spark in you? Why?
- Write on newsprint, and set aside:
  - Is the fair market really fair?
- Optional: Recruit a song leader or accompanist.

## Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Say, “Our chalice lighting words were written by Heather K. Janules as an invocation for a congregational annual meeting. They are posted on the UUA’s online [Worship Web](#).” Then read:

*From the power of our memory and history,  
With high hopes for the days that lie ahead,  
We gather to craft the destiny we share with one another.  
We gather with faith in the practice of democracy.  
We gather with hearts and minds open  
To the wisdom in every voice among us.  
In our gathering,  
May we dream and design a bold future.  
May we bring our best selves to this service,  
And may we dream these dreams  
And do this work  
With love.  
Amen.*

Light the chalice.

## **Introductions and Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)**

Invite each person to introduce themselves briefly and share what brought them to this discussion. Post the covenant points you have written on newsprint and propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on the newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement. If this group will meet again, keep this newsprint for next time.

## **First Impressions (10 minutes)**

Offer participants two or three minutes to reflect on the questions you have posted, and then ask them to share an initial response to the book. Ask participants to share one at a time, without interruption; say that it is fine to pass.

## **Discussion: A Realistic View (20 minutes)**

After everyone who wishes to has spoken, say:

Our chalice lighting makes lofty associations with democracy. For example, the idea that we craft a destiny we share together, and the notion that every voice among us has wisdom. Is this vision realistic? Idealistic? Has such a democracy ever existed?

Reread phrases from the chalice lighting and use these questions to prompt discussion:

- What is ideal democracy?
- Do all Americans seem to share a democratic ideal?
- Let's talk about the democracy we are living in. What is the gap between the philosophical ideal and the real?

Invite the group to name specific policies and practices in our democracy today that suggest our version is corrupt or insufficient. Prompt with examples in *Daring Democracy*, such as redistricting, restrictive voting laws, the policy-making influence of corporate-funded think tanks and lobbyists, and corporate control over the narrative via media. Point out themes that emerge, such as corporate interests making decisions rather than voters; power resting with elites and in practice denied to people of color, people in poverty, immigrants, etc. However, do not spend too much time on details. Wrap up by saying something like:

Lappé and Eichen believe we pay a spiritual price to exist in the form of democracy we inhabit today. They believe that restoring our power, our dignity, and our sense of connection and belonging is possible only by healing our democracy, and that it is something we must do together.

## Optional Break

You may wish to offer a break. Be mindful that a break will extend the 90-minute session.

## Discussion: Free Markets vs. Free People (20 minutes)

Say:

To talk about our democracy and its contemporary problems, we need to talk about capitalism. In the 1980s, Frances Moore Lappé debated the economist Milton Friedman, a well-known proponent of free-market capitalism. In the book, she remembers, "Having long worried about how his concept of 'freedom' had been used in our culture ... I was nervous.... In a big auditorium on campus, Friedman reinforced his thesis that the market



serves freedom by enabling people to make choices based on their values.... If that's true, I said, the market serves human freedom only on one condition: that people have purchasing power to express their values in the market."

Say something like:

Lappé and Eichen say that, today, an ideology of "brutal capitalism" has taken hold. It allows wealthy interests to usurp our democratic rights, which in turn helps to keep wealth and power in the hands of a smaller and smaller group of elites.

Post the newsprint on which you have written "Is the fair market really fair?"

Say:

Lappé is suggesting that although we tout the "free" part of "free enterprise," the system actually ensures that some of us are not free. When or how have you experienced brutality in free-market capitalism? When have you noticed your freedom of choice, or someone else's, being restricted because of money?

Invite participants to reflect on their own experiences with freedom, choices, and money. You may want to provide paper and writing implements. You might prompt with examples such as skipping preventive health care or not being able to afford a treatment because of its cost. Some participants may find it easier to find examples from current events, such as the disparities in disaster relief depending on where an event occurs and who is affected.

After several minutes, invite those who wish to briefly share their reflections. Suggest that the group's reflections may combine to form a good description of what Lappé and Eichen call "brutal capitalism."

## Democracy Spring (15 minutes)

Say:

The authors, Lappé and Eichen, are optimistic about healing and progress for our democracy. They observe people and groups with disparate concerns finding common cause and building coalitions. They personally are part of this combined movement.

Now share these words from the website of Democracy Spring, the group that organized the march from Philadelphia to Washington, DC, that Lappé and Eichen attended. You may wish to ask a volunteer to read:

*The abolitionists, the women’s suffrage movement, the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the farmworkers movement: They all fought to achieve the liberty, justice, and dignity that are guaranteed to all Americans, but which have been withheld from so many.*

*But after generations of progress, our democracy is slipping backwards. The twin corruptions of big money in politics and voter suppression contradict our most deeply held beliefs and block progress on the most urgent moral crises of our time.*

*To fight back we need a mass movement of civil resistance that can create a political and moral crisis around the corruption of our democracy. We need a movement that can build power, shift the political weather, and push through fundamental reforms.*

Say, in these words or your own:

*Daring Democracy* documents how the wealthiest Americans, their corporations and think tanks, and an ideology of “brutal capitalism” keep a grasp on our government so that it cannot be “of, for, and by the people.” But then the book celebrates the energy and potential of the pro-democracy movement of which Democracy Spring is part—a growing movement of people working together: justice-seekers for racial equity, the environment, reproductive rights, and more who have discovered they have a common stake in recovering our democracy.

Lead a discussion with these questions:

- The authors meant to write a hopeful book. Do we share their optimism?
- How do we fit in?

Optional: Show the five-minute video [“UUs at Democracy Awakening”](https://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/uus-at-democracy-awakening) ([smallscreen.uua.org/videos/uus-at-democracy-awakening](https://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/uus-at-democracy-awakening)). Explain that the video shows more than 500 UUs participating in the launch of Democracy Spring and Democracy Awakening in April 2016.

## What’s Next, and Closing (10 minutes)

Invite the group to begin a conversation about actions (large or small, public or private) that we can take to better align our faith values and our political experience. Ask them to consider how to

engage individually, together, as a congregation, or with community or national partners in the movement to promote democracy.

Remind the group that this is the first of three meetings. Say that discussion of next steps will get more specific each time the group meets, culminating in plans to act as a group if the participants so choose.

Tell the group:

Beginning on page 152, Lappé and Eichen suggest ways to create conversation and build action for democracy reform. I'm going to read the suggestions aloud. Take note of ideas that occur to you for something we are doing or could do here, in our community or congregation. Then we can discuss feasibility and potential partners. Maybe there will be some avenues to explore on our own between now and the next time we meet.

Read aloud, pausing after each item:

- Celebrate democracy.
- Become a hub for multiplying power and building community.
- Together, get voices of citizens heard. Submit letters to the editor and op-eds to news outlets.
- Become a citizen lobbyist, both by phone and in personal visits.
- If you are an employer, offer your staff paid time to fulfill their roles as citizens.
- Organize highly visible citizen deliberations to choose the best long-term strategies, priorities, and immediate actions.
- Create inviting, intimate spaces for sharing stories.
- Create new public spaces for community talk, "People's Corners."
- Make a personal, shared pledge to act.

Ask participants what came up for them. If you know of congregational or community actions that have occurred or are being planned, describe how they fulfill the authors' suggestions.

Confirm the day, date, time, and place when the group will reconvene for Session 2. Make sure to set aside the covenant that the participants affirmed so you can post and quickly review it at the start of the next meeting.

Optional: Invite the group to sing "There's a River Flowing in My Soul," hymn 1007 in *Singing the Journey*.

Say, "Let us close with words from William Hastie, America's first African American federal appellate judge, whom the authors quote in chapter 1: Democracy is 'becoming, rather than being. It can easily be lost, but never is fully won. Its essence is eternal struggle.'"

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

# Session 2: Principled Democracy

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Covenant from Session 1
- Optional: Timepiece with seconds, and a chime

## Preparation

- Post the covenant from Session 1.
- Set out the chalice.
- Write on newsprint, and set aside:
  - What is your first memory of participating in democracy?
- Write on newsprint, and set aside:
  - How are you living out our first, fifth, and seventh Principles in the context of today's democracy? What barriers keep you from fully expressing each Principle? What are actions—large or small, public or private—you might take to better align your political life and your religious practice?
- Optional: List on newsprint and set aside the first, fifth, and seventh [UU Principles](#): (1) The inherent worth and dignity of every person; (5) The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large; (7) Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Note: The Principles appear in the front matter of *Singing the Living Tradition* and *Singing the Journey*.

## Chalice Lighting (10 minutes)

Say, "Our chalice lighting words are adapted from words by Gregory David Miller posted on the UUA's online [Worship Web](#)."

Light the chalice, and read:

*This fire is a reminder of the light within us all;  
the yearning for freedom,*

*the longing for truth,  
the flame of intuition,  
the torch of conscience.*

*We dedicate [this gathering] to the remembrance of this Holy Light.*

## Check-In (10 minutes)

Invite participants to reintroduce themselves and, if they wish, briefly tell about a way *Daring Democracy* came up for them since the group last met.

Review the covenant from Session 1.

## Reflection and Sharing (25 minutes)

Post and read aloud: What is your first memory of participating in democracy?

Invite participants to take a moment to reflect on their own democratic life and its beginnings. Say that they may close their eyes, if they wish, while you guide their reflection. Then say:

When, where, and how did you first participate in democracy? When we think about democracy, we often think about voting, or maybe we think of something else. What was the first time you remember awareness that you were experiencing democracy? What messages from growing up in your family and community brought you to that experience?

You can ask participants to pair up, or reflect on their own with paper and pen if they prefer. Tell them they will have four minutes for reflection (two minutes each, if they are working with a partner), and then the option to share with the larger group.

You might sound a chime to begin the time of reflection. Let pairs know when two minutes have passed so they can switch speakers. After four minutes, regather the group and invite several volunteers to tell a brief version of their democracy story.

If you have time, use these questions to go more deeply into participants' stories:

- What obstacles were involved? What opportunities?
- What did you feel?
- Do you recall feeling heard? Unheard?

- What did you believe about the system? (Fair? Effective? Wonderful? Flawed? Confusing?)

Now invite participants to return to their partner (or pen and paper) to reflect on their democratic journey since the time of the story they recalled. How have their early messages and first experiences of democracy borne out? What has changed?

Sound a chime to begin, and again at two minutes so pairs can switch speakers. After four minutes, regather the group. Invite volunteers to comment.

## Optional Break

You may wish to offer a break. Be mindful that any break will extend the 90-minute session that many minutes.

## Discussion: Principled Democracy (35 minutes)

Say:

We have talked a bit about our personal encounters with democracy. Now let's talk about why it matters, not only politically but spiritually—what's at stake. The authors write, "Humans thrive best when the communities we create enable each of us, not just a privileged few, to experience a sense of power (that is, agency or simply knowing that our voices count), a sense that our lives have meaning beyond our own survival, and that we have a satisfying connection with others. Add those together, and what do you have? The essence of democracy" (page 102).

The authors are talking about needs we have for personal agency, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose: These are spiritual needs. But how does our political life in today's democracy meet—or not meet—our spiritual needs? For Unitarian Universalists, our seven Principles offer a framework to examine how our daily lives, our actions, and maybe our inaction align with our deeply held faith values.

Post UU Principles one, five, and seven, or direct participants' attention to the Principles in one of the hymnbooks (they are listed in the front matter of both books). Invite volunteers to read each Principle aloud. Then say:

The authors explore (and we have mentioned in our earlier discussion) ways in which our democracy is not an ideal version, in fact has never been ideal. At times, democracy in practice fails to honor the inherent worth and dignity of all people. For some, it denies the right of conscience and access to democratic process. In its failings, it can mock our sacred notions of interconnectedness and responsibility for one another. In these ways, it calls into question our first, fifth, and seventh Principles.

Post the newsprint on which you have written these questions: How are you living out our first, fifth, and seventh Principles in the context of today's democracy? What barriers keep you from fully expressing each Principle? What are actions—large or small, public or private—you might take to better align your political life and your religious practice?

Say:

Let's consider what we have learned from the first chapters of *Daring Democracy* and our personal experiences as participants in democracy locally and nationally. Check in, as honestly as you can: How are you living out our first, fifth, and seventh Principles in the context of today's democracy? What barriers keep you from fully expressing each Principle? What are actions—large or small, public or private—you might take to better align your political life and your religious practice?

If you have a large group, form three smaller groups and assign a Principle to each group. Then bring the large group back together and ask each small group to briefly report. If you have fewer than 10 participants, work through all three Principles together.

## What's Next, and Closing (10 minutes)

Say:

We have explored how our spirit as well as our political power can thrive or die, depending on the health of our democracy. We know there are legislative and public actions we can pursue. When we return for our third and final meeting on [day, date, time, and place], we will consider ways to join the pro-democracy movement. For now, as we close this gathering, what practices could we begin, to move toward healing?

Lead a "popcorn"-style large group discussion in which participants call out their ideas. Post blank newsprint and record (or have a volunteer record) ideas succinctly on it. You may prompt with suggestions like "make sure all my family members are registered to vote," "find out voter



registration and active voter rates in my community,” “question news sources,” etc. Be sure to invite self-care suggestions, such as “take a break from NPR or Facebook.”

Offer these closing words:

As Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, “Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are ... the voters of this country.” May it be so.

Thank participants. Extinguish the chalice.

# Session 3: Finding One Another

## Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Covenant from Session 1

## Preparation

- Post the covenant from Session 1.
- Set out the chalice.
- Write on newsprint, and set aside:
  - Who might be your partners in daring democracy, even unlikely ones?
  - How could we find or approach potential partners?
- Optional: Prepare a handout or an email listing the resources suggested in the What's Next? activity.

## Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Say, "Our chalice lighting is a quotation from Che Guevara." Light the chalice, and read:

*"If you tremble with indignation at every injustice then you are a comrade of mine."*

Add:

This is our third meeting, so some commitment is already evident! Later we will plan some concrete actions to meet our spiritual and political needs.

## Check-In (10 minutes)

Invite participants to reintroduce themselves and, if they wish, briefly tell about a way *Daring Democracy* came up for them since the group last met.

Review the covenant from Session 1.

## Finding One Another (30 minutes)

Suggest that a theme of *Daring Democracy* is the extraordinary power of ordinary people joining together. The Democracy Movement has been called a “movement of movements” which attracts and needs a wide range of stakeholders. Ask participants for examples of coalitions in the movement and explore the common goals of coalition partners. To prompt discussion, mention the Moral Mondays movement spearheaded by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber in North Carolina. In *Daring Democracy*'s section on Moral Mondays, an activist named Clinton Wright recalls:

*I remember the first time ... hearing Reverend Barber and the messaging of fusion politics. As a queer person going to a black, indigenously led, grassroots coalition, hearing a minister talk about the intersections of LGBTQ equality and mass incarceration, the fight for black lives, religious freedom, health care, inequality, food insecurity, and immigration reform, it was the first time I felt like all of my identities were represented ... the wholeness of my person as an activist and as a human....*

*That is the true power of fusion politics.... It's empowering in a way that is indescribable unless you've been there to be a part of it.*

Say:

The authors illustrate partnerships in the movement through the story of their getting to know one another and deciding to write this book. Let's hear about it from them.

Invite two volunteers to read, as Lappé and Eichen, these excerpts from the book's introduction:

[Frances Moore Lappé]

*The year is 1966 and the war in Vietnam is raging. I'm fresh out of college and see US military actions in Southeast Asia as evidence of something deeply amiss here at home.... I know that to go deep I have to dig in somewhere specific. So why not on hunger?*

[Adam Eichen]

*On the morning of November 17, 2011, the two-month anniversary of Occupy, I throw myself into the political maelstrom. I arrive in Zuccotti Park around 6:30 a.m.*

[Lappé]

*Within less than a decade I am summing up my core message this way: hunger is not caused by a scarcity of food but by a scarcity of democracy.... The zeitgeist of the 1960s lifted me up, enabling me to feel part of something big, even historic—a movement*

*across all “issues” with people who believed that together we could make the world a better place. I never felt alone.*

[Eichen]

*My stomach clutches, and I want to turn back and go home. Feeling an affinity with the movement and to the history that was waiting to be made, I don't.... I become fixated on why our society is incapable of alleviating suffering, of addressing the problems we collectively face.*

[Lappé]

*So, in 2015, I land in Mexico City to attend the world's first conference on how to get money out of the control of so-called democracies. Waiting in the rain for the airport bus, I strike up a conversation with a young American named Adam.*

[Eichen]

*After three years organizing with Democracy Matters, my commitment to democracy reform solidifies. I am invited to attend a conference in Mexico City on international money in politics.... Little do I know I will meet the legendary Frances Moore Lappé, beginning what will become a virtually nonstop conversation about democracy.*

Remind the group of a transcendent moment the authors describe in chapter 8, The Thrill of Democracy (pages 144-45). Having met at the Mexico City conference, the two had spent many hours of the Democracy Spring march together:

*In the final moments of our march from Philly to DC, we approach the Capitol as cars honk and people wave from stoops.... All of us in unison are chanting our favorite call and response—Whose democracy? Our democracy! ... Suddenly ahead of us the Capitol dome comes into focus. First, we feel a chill, then tears begin to flow. We can almost feel the new synapses cracking in our brains: “Our Democracy?”—Really? Yes, ours!*

Then say:

Like Lappé and Eichen on the Democracy Spring march, we have drawn together here, sharing our concerns about our democracy. While our particular justice passions or priorities may differ, we may have together caught the authors' urgency to join with others and take action. Let's look at how we each got here, and consider the potential in connecting with others in this movement of movements, going forward.

What particular justice issue fuels your interest in daring democracy?

Give participants a moment to consider this question. Then go around the circle asking volunteers to briefly share their responses (of course, they may pass if they prefer).

Now post the newsprint you have prepared and lead the group to reflect on these questions:

- Who might be your partners in daring democracy, even unlikely ones, perhaps of a different generation, class, or ethnicity? Perhaps people impassioned about a different justice issue than you? Whom that you have met? Whom that you would like to meet?
- How could we find or approach potential partners? How will we articulate the reasons a democracy movement draws us together?

## Optional Break

You may wish to offer a break. Be mindful that any break will extend the 90-minute session that many minutes.

## What's Next? (40 minutes)

Invite the group to begin a conversation about actions to take individually or together. Offer one or both of these general goals:

- to better align our faith values and our political experience
- to engage with community or national partners in the movement to promote democracy

You might invite participants to self-select small groups to discuss one of these goals or a specific proposed action.

Share these opportunities with the group. If you have compiled these as a handout, distribute it now.

- Visit the website of the [Democracy Initiative](http://www.democracyinitiative.org) to identify national and local campaigns you can join. [www.democracyinitiative.org](http://www.democracyinitiative.org)
- Find further opportunities to study “The Corruption of Our Democracy,” the topic selected by the 2016 UUA General Assembly as a Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI) through 2020. The UUA website provides [materials](http://www.uua.org/action/process/csais/corruption-of-our-democracy) for pursuing a restoration of democracy. [www.uua.org/action/process/csais/corruption-of-our-democracy](http://www.uua.org/action/process/csais/corruption-of-our-democracy)
- Explore the website of [Move to Amend](http://www.move-to-amend.org), a coalition of organizations and individuals “building a vibrant democracy that is genuinely accountable to the people, not corporate

- interests,” through legislative means. Online, find ways to support and promote a constitutional amendment to limit the influence of big money in politics. [movetoamend.org](http://movetoamend.org)
- Discover [Reclaim Our Democracy](http://Reclaim Our Democracy), a group based at First Parish UU in Concord, Mass., that began working on the issues of escalating inequality and the corrupting influence of money in politics in 2014. [www.reclaimourdemocracy.org](http://www.reclaimourdemocracy.org)
  - Learn more about the [Democracy Spring](http://Democracy Spring) coalition—the 2016 march and demonstration, and the ongoing movement.
    - The [website](http://website) describes Democracy Spring’s mission and the broad coalition of partners working together. [www.democracyspring.org](http://www.democracyspring.org)
    - Show the five-minute video “[UUs at Democracy Awakening](http://UUs at Democracy Awakening)” ([smallscreen.uua.org/videos/uus-at-democracy-awakening](http://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/uus-at-democracy-awakening)). The video shows the participation of more than 500 UUs in the launch of Democracy Spring and Democracy Awakening in April 2016.
  - Investigate the increase, since the 2016 election, in first-time candidates for office. At this writing, many local and state races include new candidates unconnected with corporate money interests—particularly people of color, women, and LGBTQ candidates.
    - Starting in November 2017, the Electoral Justice Project of the Movement for Black Lives is deploying black political organizers and planning black-led town hall meetings across the country. [Read more](http://Read more) in the Daily Caller online news service. [dailycaller.com/2017/10/16/black-liberation-group-releases-new-project-for-electoral-justice-for-black-people](http://dailycaller.com/2017/10/16/black-liberation-group-releases-new-project-for-electoral-justice-for-black-people)
    - A Slate article, “[Run for Office](http://Run for Office),” from January 2017 describes how the 2016 election has motivated new candidates from grassroots and marginalized communities. The article also offers links to many related ones. [www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/cover\\_story/2017/01/how\\_to\\_run\\_for\\_office.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/cover_story/2017/01/how_to_run_for_office.html)
  - Consider doing a voter registration drive, a time-honored way to promote democracy. The [League of Women Voters](http://League of Women Voters) offers a comprehensive tip sheet for organizing voter registration in local communities. It is important to understand federal, state, and local laws and procedures; check the website of the [Fair Elections Legal Network](http://Fair Elections Legal Network) and be sure to verify your understanding with local officials. [forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/tips-successful-voter-registration-drives](http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/tips-successful-voter-registration-drives), [fairelectionsnetwork.com/resources](http://fairelectionsnetwork.com/resources)

A group of seven or fewer participants can discuss next steps together. If you have more, have participants self-select groups of three to five to brainstorm further learning, coalition building, and action.

As you share ideas, assess the desire of the group to continue. Collect email addresses. If appropriate, invite individual participants to commit to specific actions and timelines.

## Closing (5 minutes)

Optional: Invite the group to sing “There’s a River Flowing in My Soul,” hymn 1007 in *Singing the Journey*.

Say, “Let us close with these words Frances Moore Lappé shared in a presentation at the UUA Boston office in September 2017.” Then read:

*In such a time that we share with you, the opposite of evil is no longer goodness. The opposite of evil is courage. Goodness without courage is not good enough.*

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.