



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION

DEFUND FEAR

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR ANY UU CONGREGATION

UUA Common Read 2022

Defund Fear

Safety Without Policing, Prisons, and Punishment

Book by Zach Norris

Discussion Guide by Rev. Dr. Natalie Fenimore

Preface

As a religious educator and an ordained minister, I welcome *Defund Fear* as a resource for our Unitarian Universalist communities and congregations. It can energize and deepen our engagement with reform and abolition of the systems of policing and incarceration which so often result in painful, violent encounters in communities of color—and feed isolation and unearned privilege in dominant communities.

In my work with the UUA Commission on Institutional Change, we began with the belief that justice work is bound with our Unitarian Universalist theologies. And the work of becoming equitable, inclusive, and diverse within our congregations is justice work. With *Defund Fear*, Zach Norris invites us to practice this applied Unitarian Universalism as he shifts the public safety conversation away from fear, and toward care.

This Common Read invites us, as Unitarian Universalists, to respond to public safety in the U.S. through a lens of faith. By exposing the “punish first” public safety practices that surround us, Norris lays before us the traumatic and dehumanizing experiences of individuals and communities, especially those of color and marginalized identities. Our values and our deeply held beliefs call us into relationship with this suffering and into action to bring about accountability, repair, transformation, and wholeness.

It is important to recognize the challenge of this journey, from a culture of fear to a culture of care. In our society, most of us are complicit with a retribution-based system of policing and incarceration. However, as Unitarian Universalists, our Principles and values give us the capacity and desire to grow in relationships which seek to affirm, promote, and build the care-based Beloved Community. Through our deepening of relationships across experiences, we can build systems of accountability and mutual support and dismantle the system of policing and incarceration which holds us all hostage. We can repair the broken world and embrace a new model of care.

I wish you blessings for this life-affirming journey.

- Rev. Dr. Natalie Fenimore

Introduction

The UUA Common Read, launched in 2010, has never been just a book club. Common Read book selections mirror the pressing justice concerns of our time. The Common Read provides Unitarian Universalists with avenues for discussion, discernment, and action. With the Common Read for *Defund Fear* by Zach Norris, Unitarian Universalists are asked to confront a breadth of realities across the U.S. in terms of what “safety” means. The book invites engagement in all that we can do together to secure safety not just for some, but for all.

This guide is for any UU congregation or faith community. It offers a one-session, 90-minute gathering and the option of a deeper exploration in three 90-minute sessions. The sessions are designed to take place online (Zoom), with one religious professional or lay leader acting as facilitator and another taking a tech support role. Sessions may also, of course, occur in person. Groups meeting in person must arrange for a computer, large monitor/projector, and Internet connection in order to share media clips in each session.

The UUA Common Read of *Defund Fear* has multiple points of engagement. Before groups convene—or perhaps together, at an additional meeting—participants are encouraged to watch a [January, 2022 conversation with the author](#) where Norris engages with five UU religious professionals to explore the book’s call of faith to Unitarian Universalists. Further learning, discernment, and action are suggested (see “Next Moves for UUs” at the end of this document, also [posted online](#)). Some participants will want to do the [six-session, abolition-focused program](#) of study and action offered as part of this Common Read by the UUA’s Side with Love team.

It is hoped that this Common Read marks only a starting point for participants’ engagement with *Defund Fear* and its multifaceted invitation—political, personal, and religious—to our Unitarian Universalist movement and our people.

- Susan Dana Lawrence

Managing Editor, UUA Office for Lifespan Faith Engagement

Single-Session Version for Any Congregational Group

90 Minutes

Goals

- Invite responses to *Defund Fear: Safety without Policing, Prison, and Punishment* by Zach Norris
- Unpack the tension between fear-based and care-based society
- Guide individuals to locate themselves personally with an authentic sense of power, complicities, and responsibility
- Connect the book to the UUA intersectional mission priority of decriminalization
- Articulate Unitarian Universalist theologies and beliefs and connect them to past/current harm and the call and opportunities for transformation
- Invite a UU call to create, promote, live into care-based public safety system
- Consider paths to hope, healing, and resilience despite the challenges and the injustices of living in a white supremacy culture

Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- A copy of the book, *Defund Fear*

Preparation

- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.

- Send out the Zoom link at least one week prior to the scheduled date and again with a reminder the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type “*FACILITATOR” and the host type “*TECH” in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.
- Read the optional, 20-minute “Next Moves” activity that appears after the Closing for this session. It guides brainstorming and deep consideration of potential actions. You can use this activity to shape a subsequent meeting of this group. Or, offer participants the opportunity to take a short break after this session’s Closing and then engage about next moves while they are still together.
- Prepare a separate document (Word document or PowerPoint slides) with the suggested covenant guidelines so that you can copy/paste the text into the Chat or screen-share your document:

We each promise to:

 - Speak from our own experiences and perspectives. Use “I” statements.
 - Listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others.
 - Actively resist making assumptions about one another. Allow for space after each person has spoken so as to give time to process what has been shared.
 - Be mindful of “taking space and making space” to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak and to listen.
 - Expect and accept non-closure.
 - Respect the confidentiality of personal information and stories shared here.
 - Refrain from giving advice unless requested.
- Queue the video clips you will need for the session:

- Opening music, [“I’ll Take You There” sung by the Staple Singers](#)
- Video clip of Rev. Ranwa Hammamy ([Vimeo, 1:50](#)) from the recorded conversation between UU religious professionals and author Zach Norris.
- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [“I’ll Take You There”](#) playing as participants enter.

Session Plan

Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Say, “Our chalice lighting words are from bell hooks.” Share these words:

In our society we make much of love and say little about fear. Yet we are all terribly afraid most of the time. As a culture we are obsessed with the notion of safety. Yet we do not question why we live in states of extreme anxiety and dread. Fear is the primary force upholding structures of domination. It promotes the desire for separation, the desire not to be known. When we are taught that safety lies always with sameness, then difference of any kind will appear as a threat. When we choose to love we choose to move against fear – against alienation and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect – to find ourselves in the other.

Light the chalice.

Introductions and Creating a Covenant (5 minutes)

Invite each person to introduce themselves briefly with name, pronouns, where they are located (if online), and what brought them to this discussion. Remind participants to mute themselves before and after their turn.

You may wish to add this question to the check-in:

What things might you be holding onto in your heart that might make it difficult for you to be fully present in this moment? Is it something you can set down, even if you need to pick it back up when we're done? If you care to share, briefly include a sentence or two with your introduction, on what you will set down, or what will you continue to carry, during this time together. Please know that it is okay to just think about this and not share out loud with the group.

Once everyone has introduced themselves, present the document/slides with the covenant points or post them in the chat. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes in the chat or in the document/slide. Be mindful that folks on cell phones may not be able to see the notes in the chat. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to give a thumbs-up or signal agreement. If this group will have future meetings, keep these documents for next session(s).

First Impressions (10 minutes)

Invite the group to share something that stays with them after reading *Defund Fear* and, optionally, to share a personal memory of a feeling of safety. Say you will give them a moment to prepare and then you will ask them to speak one at a time, uninterrupted. Say

that when it is their turn, they may respond to either or both questions, and that it is fine to pass:

- What stays with you after reading *Defund Fear*?
- When is a time when you felt safe, and what conditions were present?

Give at least a minute for reflection. Then ask who would like to start. Offer a 15-second pause after each sharing, inviting participants to reflect on what each person has shared before the next person speaks.

Discussion and Sharing: FEAR and CRIME (25 minutes)

Share this quote from page 9 of *Defund Fear* by Zach Norris:

There are two ways to think about safety. There is a fear-based way and a care-based way. ...The fear-based model defines safety only in terms of being free from crime and criminals, which is limited, and limiting. This has resulted in a criminal legal system that holds close to seven million adult Americans in jail, in prison, in parole, or on probation.

Say:

Zach Norris begins his book by recounting a break-in at his home and a time when he was robbed at knifepoint (pages 1-3). We might imagine he is doing this to let us know that he has been a victim of crime and understands the emotional toll, the trauma, of victimization. He sets his book firmly in an understanding that fear is real – and also that fear can be manipulated.

Then, engage in a discussion, asking:

- Have you had a personal experience of crime or another threat to your security?
- Do you find yourself afraid of crime although you may not have been a victim yourself? What do you fear, and why?
- How does your personal identity relate to your level of fear? Is your personal identity more relevant in particular situations?

Allow 10 minutes for this part of the discussion, making sure to at least offer each of the questions.

Then, say that in *Defund Fear*, Norris challenges the policing, punishment, and prison system. He says it is built on a framework of fear, where society is manipulated into a fear of crime that keeps us from confronting systemic problems that truly make many people unsafe.

Say you will read a passage from the book, followed by some questions for reflection.

Read Norris's words:

From among all the things that actually harm us, a mere sliver is addressed by our criminal legal system – a term I prefer over “criminal justice system” because calling it a “justice system” inaccurately links it to justice, as well as fairness, healing, and safety.

...[W]hat really constitutes the worst threat to your family? Is it really crime? Or is it facing eviction because you can't make rent? Is it frequent hospital visits because you live near an oil refinery and your child has asthma, or because the water you drink is no longer safe? These daily realities are sometimes described as “cultural, political, and socioeconomic dynamics.” But they are as real as your heartbeat.

Offer the group several minutes to consider silently the following questions, focusing on one or two that resonate with them. Once you have shared the all questions, give two to three minutes for reflection or journaling. Ask aloud:

- Who benefits from the fear-based public safety system? Who loses?
- Can you articulate ways you might be manipulated to support a fear-based public safety system? One example might be the media's frequent spotlight on individual/personal crimes.
- Has our current public safety system given us an expectation of safety from crime in some areas/neighborhoods, while other areas are publicly labeled unsafe? What does that say about the people who live there?
- What are some ways that a framework of fear reinforces an us-versus-them way of seeing the world? Who is "us," and who is "them"?
- Consciously or unconsciously, do you accept, or believe, that some people are entitled to feel safe, and others are not? How does this fit with our UU Principle of interconnectedness? How does this relate to our Unitarian Universalist belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person?
- We must each accept that, to some degree, the current justice system belongs to each of us. What individual, personal choices do we make that are complicit with the fear-based system? Examples might be when we pay taxes that fund prisons or militarized police forces; when we make decisions on where to live, perhaps falling in line with segregated housing patterns; when we personally profile someone as threatening who is Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color (BIPOC); when we make assumptions or pass judgment on a person who has been incarcerated.

Invite any volunteers to share insights from their reflection. Allow 10 minutes for this part of the discussion.

Wrap up this section by saying:

We've talked about how the framework of fear holds up our justice system. Norris shows that its methods of policing, prisons, and punishment do not increase safety, but they *do* increase the deprivation, suspicion, and isolation already afflicting many communities, particularly communities of color. The system does

not provide for accountability and healing. It does not provide rehabilitation; it does not restore trust or even control crime. Norris tells us:

The framework of fear cannot lead to possibility and growth. It is antigrowth and antisocial. It's engineered to keep certain people down as opposed to lifting them up, when they most need support.

Discussion and Sharing: CRIMES and HARMS (15 minutes)

Say:

Norris uses stories throughout the book to illustrate how crimes pose less of a threat to most of us than do systemic harms. On pages 28-39, he names the sources of “Real Harms:” Capitalism, White Supremacy, Patriarchy, Violence, Trauma.

Let’s consider our personal experience of these harms, and how they impact our safety and the safety of others.

Invite the participants to reflect:

- Which of these touch your life directly? How do they reduce or increase your personal safety? Capitalism, White Supremacy, Patriarchy, Violence, Trauma

Then, lead a discussion on this question:

- Does maintaining these harms benefit you in any way? If so, does the benefit you receive disadvantage others?

Now say:

Norris tells the story of Durrell Feaster. Durrell was a handsome, biracial teenager who lived with his father, a hotel shoe care worker, after his parents divorced. Durrell was diagnosed with ADHD and at 14 began skipping school. When his father sought assistance for Durrell, the police sent Durrell to group home six

hours away. Durrell ran away from the group home and, with another boy, stole a car. This theft resulted in a three-year sentence to a youth correctional facility, including time in isolated confinement. This place was inaccessible by public transportation and Durrell's father was unable to visit. Durrell was found hanging, dead, in his cell at age 18.

These are the words of Durrell's father: "They killed my son. They treated him like an animal. He was not a hardcore criminal. He was a child. They killed his joy."

Norris says, "Things did not have to unfold like this, for Durrell or for so many other youngsters like him."

Then lead a discussion with these questions:

- What would a "safety net" for Durrell have looked like? How might it have caused a different outcome? (Examples: family support and counseling, educational intervention, truancy handled without police, local and accessible juvenile justice programs, no detention for non-violent juvenile offenses, ending isolated confinement...)
- Do you ever find yourself feeling or believing that Black and brown youth ARE more violent than white youth and SHOULD be treated strictly in order to prevent more serious criminal behavior in the future? If you are white, what might cause you to feel this way? If you are a person of color?

Optional Break for 90-minute Session

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

Discussion and Sharing (30 minutes): FAITH and CARE

Say:

Let's talk about what needs to be done, and why Unitarian Universalists in particular are called to this work.

Introduce the video clip of the Rev. Ranwa Hammamy, from the UUA Side with Love campaign. Say the clip is from a 70-minute panel discussion with Zach Norris and five UU religious professionals about this book.

[Play the clip \(1:50\)](#). Optional: Share the transcript in the Chat.

You know, there are so many things that... as we were talking about what keeps us safe, what helps us feel safe... it's a lot more than survival. And right now, the way that all of these systems are set up, whether it's our education system, our housing system, our health care systems, the ways in which our environment's being abused and in certain neighborhoods—people can't even survive. So, there's not even a question of do, can folks “feel safe,” because they can't even survive.

And then as a result, because of all the ways in which there is already a starting point, that is like, next square, negative 27... Now they can't even... they're going to be finding themselves caught up in a system that is already working against them when we're talking about policing...

We're not even giving people a starting chance. And I think, Zach, you bring this up beautifully in your book with the stories that you're sharing, and the many ways in which there could have been interventions. We're not even setting up people with that safety net. That safety net, that is... that's a must. I don't understand why we're not doing that. A safety net is a universalist idea. Everybody should be caught up in this care. And so... we don't have that yet. And I think... that is a

theological mandate for us, as Unitarian Universalists to advocate for something that catches everybody in a space of care.

Ask the group:

What resonates for you in Rev. Hammamy's comments? What comes up from your own faith as we dig into policing, prisons, and punishment—what they do, and what they don't do? As UUs, what does a broader understanding of public safety call us to do? What is religious for us about attending to the message of *Defund Fear*?

Lead a conversation.

Participants' key understandings of UU theology may differ without being "wrong," as UU theology casts an intentionally wide net. Point out, as needed:

- Unitarian Universalism has no creed, but rests on a covenant—the promises we make to one another so that we can be together in faith.
- We share covenanted Principles of which the first is the "inherent worth and dignity" of every being.
- Unitarianism's legacy includes using reason to arrive at just and fair ways.
- Universalism's legacy insists that salvation is for everyone; we are all holy beings, and no crime or punishment will make us more or less so.

Continue:

If, as people of faith, we reject the fear-based system, what are we called to do? Many Unitarian Universalists become involved with prison abolition. Others work to assist and accompany people who are incarcerated and their families.

Meanwhile, throughout the book, Norris argues that more safety for more of us can be achieved through accountability and care rather than punishment. He says the true challenge of safety is to dismantle these systemic harms. He writes:

Shifting the focus away from crimes to harms means we address actions, policies, and behaviors that are most harmful. Shifting focus would mean we look at

psychological harms, environmental damages, and social and economic suffering. Finally, it means that...we involve far more bodies than merely the law; the players include academics, policy-makers, community leaders, historians and community members who are involved in arenas such as public health, epidemiology, urban planning, and social policy.

Pause after this reading for a moment. Then, ask the group:

- What comes to mind if you consider safety in your (our) own community, not in terms of crimes, but in terms of what must be done to reduce harms?

Facilitate “popcorn” contributions.

Remind the group that Norris talks about initiatives where some communities are moving from fear-based to care-based systems.

Read this list. Be ready to refer participants to pages of the paperback book that discuss each in more depth:

- Support for children and families (pages 116-117)
- More educators of color, outdoor education programs, childcare allowance/subsidy, mental health services and trauma care, re-entry programs for post incarceration, decriminalize drugs, drug abuse treatment (pages 134-135)
- Campus support, housing as a right (pages 152-153)

Ask participants to consider how these apply in their community(ies). Where are these interventions needed? Where are they being done, and by whom? Engage participants to elaborate about specific interventions that do or could exist in their community(ies). Take notes, or have a volunteer take notes, so that ideas for action will be available to the group to explore later.

Then ask:

- How does our action to support these interventions help to fulfill UU faith or Principles? How does it demonstrate our faithful call?

If needed, display [a listing](#) or [a graphic](#) of the UU Principles.

Closing (5 min.)

Thank participants for sharing this time together. Invite them into continued conversation, learning, and action. Does the group want to meet again?

Share that the UUA provides many ways to continue engaging the concepts in *Defund Fear* and their faith mandate for Unitarian Universalists. Point the group to the document, “Defund Fear: Next Moves for UUs.” It appears at the end of this discussion guide and is [posted online](#); post the link in the Chat or email the document to participants now.

Mention that the UUA Side with Love team provides a [six-week curriculum](#) that takes the questions of *Defund Fear* deeper and provides opportunities to join the movement for prison abolition.

Invite participants to share a closing word or phrase about what they are taking away from reading *Defund Fear* and this discussion.

To close, share [these words by Rev. Erika A. Hewitt](#) adapted from the [UUA Worship Web](#):

The Chalice, as a symbol of Unitarian Universalism, arose as a beacon of hope in an atmosphere of tyranny.

The Chalice arose as a sign of promise that the marginalized would neither be forgotten nor ignored, because they are beloved and precious from the perspective of the Holy.

This morning [afternoon/evening], we remember all of the people who have been told explicitly—or implicitly, through police violence or government policy; through

dehumanization; that they're anything less than whole; anything less than beloved.

As we each light or extinguish a chalice in our homes, may we make of our lives a beacon: a symbol of our promise to draw the circle wide; a sign that we will not rest until "all" means all.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

Optional: Next Moves (20 min.)

This activity guides the group to brainstorm individual and collective actions the group can take to create or join initiatives for a care-based system for safety. It is suggested that groups use the first ten minutes to generate and explore ideas and the second half to plan concrete next moves.

Remind the group of their discussion, just before the Closing of their Common Read session, on how communities can move from fear-based to care-based systems for safety. Remind the group of ways they said their support can be an expression of their Unitarian Universalist faith. Use any notes that were taken during that discussion.

Guide the group to connect care-based intervention ideas to needs and programs in their local community. What care-based interventions exist, and what others might be needed? Who is already doing or planning them? What might be a respectful entry point for individuals or the group to engage and support?

Work with ideas from the group's previous discussion and, as needed, suggestions for action from this list:

- Advocate to reform/change the carceral system: ending mass incarceration, bail reform, de-militarize policing
- Support school reform for under-resourced communities
- Make relationships with formerly incarcerated persons

- Understand and monitor policing in your area
- Build multiracial, multicultural alliances/relationships
- Examine/audit ways in which your congregation or covenanted UU community supports the fear-based safety system

Use the second half of your time to move into planning for one or two specific actions. Work as a whole group or break out into small groups by interest in specific recommendations.

Encourage small groups to assign actions to move their intentions forward.

If this activity is happening in its own meeting time:

- Reconvene the large group to share the decisions made and actions planned.
- Provide Closing words, such as these words by the Rev. Dr. Natalie Fenimore, from the 2021 UU Service of the Living Tradition:

We do not have to be without fear to be courageous. Perhaps we can only truly be courageous when we are truthful about what we are afraid of... Can we speak the truth of our fears and embrace faithful transformation?

-

Three-Session Version for Any Congregational Group

Goals

- Invite responses to *Defund Fear: Safety without Policing, Prison, and Punishment* by Zach Norris
- Unpack the tension between fear-based and care-based society
- Guide individuals to locate themselves personally with an authentic sense of power, complicities, and responsibility
- Connect the book to the UUA intersectional mission priority of decriminalization
- Articulate Unitarian Universalist theologies and beliefs and connect them to past/current harm and the call and opportunities for transformation
- Invite a UU call to create, promote, live into care-based public safety system
- Consider paths to hope, healing, and resilience despite the challenges and the injustices of living in a white supremacy culture

Session 1 / Any Group: **FEAR**

Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Document with text of suggested covenant guidelines to screen-share or post in Chat
- A copy of the book, *Defund Fear*

Preparation

- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.
- Send out the Zoom link at least one week prior to the scheduled date and again with a reminder the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type “*FACILITATOR” and the host type “*TECH” in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.
- Prepare a separate document with the suggested covenant guidelines so that you can copy/paste the text into the Chat or screen-share your document:
We each promise to:
 - Speak from our own experiences and perspectives. Use “I” statements.

- Listen generously to the experiences and perspectives of others.
- Actively resist making assumptions about one another. Allow for space after each person has spoken so as to give time to process what has been shared.
- Be mindful of “taking space and making space” to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak and to listen.
- Expect and accept non-closure.
- Respect the confidentiality of personal information and stories shared here.
- Refrain from giving advice unless requested.
- Queue the video clips you will need for the session:
 - Opening music, [“I’ll Take You There” sung by the Staple Singers](#)
 - Video or slide of a UU flaming chalice, such as [this one posted on YouTube](#) by the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY
- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [“I’ll Take You There”](#) playing as participants enter.
- Optional: Be prepared to use breakout rooms for discussion.

Session Plan

Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Say, “Our chalice lighting words are from bell hooks” and share these words:

In our society we make much of love and say little about fear. Yet we are all terribly afraid most of the time. As a culture we are obsessed with the notion of safety. Yet we do not question why we live in states of extreme anxiety and dread. Fear is the primary force upholding structures of domination. It promotes the desire for separation, the desire not to be known. When we are taught that safety lies always with sameness, then difference of any kind will appear as a threat. When we choose

to love we choose to move against fear – against alienation and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect – to find ourselves in the other.

Light the chalice.

Introductions and Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)

Invite each person to introduce themselves briefly. Remind others to mute themselves before and after their turn. Ask them to share where they are from or where they are located, if participants are not known to one another, and what brought them to this discussion.

You may wish to add this question to the check-in:

What things might you be holding onto in your heart that might make it difficult for you to be fully present in this moment? Is it something you can set down, even if you need to pick it back up when we're done? ***Is there something which you will carry with you into this time together?*** If you care to share, briefly include a sentence or two with your introduction, on what you will set down ***or continue to carry with you*** during this time together. Please know that it is okay to just think on this and not share out loud to the group.

Once everyone has introduced themselves, present the document/slides with the covenant points or post them in the chat. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes in the chat or in the document/slide. Be mindful that folks on cell phones may not be able to see the notes in the chat. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to thumbs up or signal agreement. If this group will have future meetings, keep these documents for next session(s).

First Impressions (15 minutes)

Ask, “What stays with you after reading *Defund Fear*?” Invite participants to share an initial response to the book. Tell the group approximately how long each person will have at this time and assure them there will be time for more conversation later. Ask them to speak one at a time, without interruption; say that it is fine to pass. Offer a 15-second pause after each sharing, inviting participants to reflect on each sharing before the next person speaks.

Discussion and Sharing: ACKNOWLEDGING FEAR (15 minutes)

Say:

Zach Norris begins his book by recounting a break-in at his home and a time when he was robbed at knife point (pages 1-3). We might imagine he is doing this to let us know that he has been a victim of crime and understands the emotional toll, the trauma of victimization. He sets his book firmly in an understanding that fear is real – and that fear can be manipulated.

Engage participants in a discussion, asking:

- Have you had a personal experience of crime or a threat to your safety?
- Do you find yourself afraid of crime although you have not been a victim yourself? Why?
- Where do our fears really come from? Can you articulate ways your fear/our fear is manipulated to support a fear-based public safety system? [Mention the preponderance of crime-related stories in the media, including mainstream news, social media, and television drama.]

Say that it is important to note ways our perceptions of fear and of safety are tied to the identities we hold and the roles we occupy in society. Invite the group to “check in”

silently and consider how the following aspects of self and life apply to them. Read these aloud slowly:

Your race. Your sex. Your gender.

Your age. Any disabilities you live with, visible or invisible to others.

Your socio-economic class. Your employment status. The amount and type of schooling you've had.

Where you geographically are from and where you live now.

Whether or not you are a partner, a parent.

Then, ask participants to reflect quietly as you ask:

- If you feel more likely to be victimized because of your race, gender, gender-identity, or social location, how is your behavior affected – how do you move in the world? Once you came to a realization about danger associated with your, or your children's, skin color or social location, was there anything you began doing differently as a result?
- If you believe that your race, gender, gender-identity, social location can protect you from crime, how is your behavior affected – how do you move in the world? Once you came to a realization about a greater sense of safety associated with your, or your child's skin color or social location, was there anything you began doing differently – or did you realize ways in which you had taken things for granted?

Invite any who choose to share insights from their reflection.

Discussion and Sharing: OTHERING – Who is Afraid of What? (15 minutes)

Say:

Our public safety system is a fear-based and not a care-based system. Norris explains how the framework of fear creates an us-versus-them way of seeing the world. If we are afraid of each other or of “other” communities then, perhaps, we

will not do the work of considering a different system: a care-based public safety system.

Norris writes:

Powerful entities conceal the most pervasive and persistent harms, instead scapegoating and dehumanizing entire communities, calling them thieves and thugs, welfare queens and wastrels. When we allow those architects of anxiety to distract us from real threats, we decrease our societal capacity to hold them – and their policies and institutions – accountable for the things that actually threaten and harm us. (page 4)

Invite participants to consider ways that they have been alarmed or distracted by the “Architects of Anxiety” around them. Ask them to name some of the “architects:” politicians, anyone who promotes stereotypes may be some of the answers. Ask them who would want to build fear, and why? Are there ways you have been manipulated to support a fear-based public safety system? [You might prompt by mentioning phrases from the news such as “tough on crime” and “super predators” or noting how media spotlights individual/personal crimes.]

Remind participants not to comment on the reflections of others but to simply listen and hold each other’s words. Encourage 15 seconds or so of silence between speakers. Do not rush participants. Let them fully share.

Next, offer the group several minutes to consider silently the following questions and then, if they wish, to share from their reflection. Ask:

- Who benefits from a fear-based public safety system? Who loses?
- We are all familiar with our society’s patterns of policing, prisons, and punishment; we know that communities and people of color are disproportionately involved. How does this reflect the framework of fear? Do we hold an expectation of safety from crime in some areas/neighborhoods

while other areas are publicly labeled unsafe? What does that say about the people who live in either area or neighborhood?

- What are some ways that a framework of fear reinforces an us-versus-them way of seeing the world? Who is “us,” and who is “them”? What results from the divisions this framework creates?

Optional Break for 90-minute Session

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

Exercise: PUSHING PAST FEAR TO SEEK WHOLENESS (20 minutes)

Say you will now lead the group in an exercise. Its goal is to help participants push past fear into a place of wholeness.

Introduce this passage from page 59 of the paperback version of *Defund Fear*.

It's helpful to remember that, intractable though they may seem, society-wide systems and cultures are composed of individual choices that humans made along the way. That means that we can make different choices now to achieve different outcomes.

Then say:

Norris goes on to offer some ideas for choices and change. One is from John Powell, a professor of law, African American studies, and ethnic studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Norris writes:

John Powell believes the systematic exclusion that occurs with “othering” can be combated with “belonging” or strategic inclusion: the expansion of the concept of “we” in lieu of an Us v Them view.

Norris goes on:

Another inspiration for change is the indigenous worldview, which calls for balance and wholeness, rather than division and dehumanization.

We are going to have a meditative moment to visualize moving our fears from the center of our lives. We will ask that our community of faith hold our fears and help us to let them go.

Although we'll do this exercise together, it's important to remember that our fears are not all the same. Because of our culture of both over- and under-policing of individuals and communities of color, many people in those communities have fears of unjust treatment by the public safety system. Individuals who are white may have fears that the public safety system cannot protect them from crime, or from communities of color. Some white people may fear a loss of dominance and protected status in policing.

These and other realities exist. These are realities. They are not calls to guilt, shame, comparison or hierarchy of pain. This is an opportunity to reflect on those who have different experiences from our own.

Tell the group you are about to share a video of a Flaming Chalice that will give them a point of focus for this meditation. Say:

Find a seated or standing position that feels good for your body that allows you to just relax and be present to your feelings. Turn off your camera to others if that works for you.

Play [the Flaming Chalice video](#). (If you have chosen a video with sound, do not play the sound.) Say:

Here is the familiar Flaming Chalice of Unitarian Universalism. Consider its two parts: The cup, bowl or chalice, that can hold, carry, contain. The fire, or flame, that can burn, consume, give light.

Pause. Then say:

Now, I invite you to search inside for your fears. Visualize them. Give each fear a name.

Pause again, then say:

Each of us has our own fears. There is no need to share what they are, only to acknowledge that they exist. Now, one fear at a time, visualize putting them in our chalice.

Some of our fears will be consumed in the fire. Others will be held in the cup. Consider where your fears went. Visualize them being more distant from you.

Offer up to a minute of silence while the Flaming Chalice video continues to play. Then, ask:

- How did it feel to acknowledge your fears? Did you visualize anything unexpected, or challenging? Empowering or freeing?

Invite volunteers to share.

Say:

Based on the exercise we've just done, what would it mean to dismantle the framework of fear that holds up our public safety system? Consider, if this framework were to fall, might it bring down the system of policing, punishment and prison with it? What can we, as Unitarian Universalists, offer to society at large? What might we do or create, in place of a framework of fear, to bring more safety to more of us?

Say:

With *Defund Fear*, Zach Norris urges us to move from the framework of fear to communities of care if we truly want public safety. We will dig deeper next time we meet to consider what this means, and how Unitarian Universalism calls us to move into this change. For a UU-flavored hint as to where we might go in faith together, listen to these words from Kristen Harper's Skinner House book, *Divine Darkness*. In this quote, a divine being speaks her wisdom.

Share this quote:

“Spread compassion. Build caring communities. Cross barriers. Tear down prisons. Lay on this precious earth. Do not let your fears divide you from my being. Heaven is not easy. It is not found in death.”

End this section by saying, “May we find peace and safety in our common humanity.”

Closing (5 minutes)

Say:

And now as we close, I would like to share with you the following words by the Rev. Dr. Natalie Fenimore, from the 2021 UU Service of the Living Tradition:

We do not have to be without fear to be courageous. Perhaps we can only truly be courageous when we are truthful about what we are afraid of... Can we speak the truth of our fears and embrace faithful transformation?

Remind the group that this is the first of three meetings. Confirm the day, date, time for the next meeting and make sure everyone has registered to obtain the Zoom link for Session 2. Save the covenant that the participants affirmed so the group can review it at the start of the next meeting.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

Session 2 / Any Group: **CRIMES AND HARMIS**

Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Covenant from Session 1
- A copy of the book, *Defund Fear*

Preparation

- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.
- Send out the Zoom link at least one week prior to the scheduled date and again with a reminder the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type “FACILITATOR” and the host type “TECH” in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.
- Prepare to screen-share or post in the Chat the covenant from Session 1.
- Prepare a separate document with the lyrics of “Take Me to the Alley” so that you can post them in the Chat when you share the song:
Well, they gild their houses in preparation for the king. And they line the sidewalks

with every sort of shiny thing. They will be surprised when they hear him say, “Take me to the alley. Take me to the afflicted ones. Take me to the lonely ones that somehow lost their way.” Let them hear me say, ‘I am your friend. Come sit at my table. Rest here in my garden. You will have a pardon.’”

- Queue the video clips you will need for the session:
 - Opening music, [“Take Me to the Alley” by Gregory Porter](#)
- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [“Take Me to the Alley” by Gregory Porter](#) playing as participants enter.
- Optional: Review some of the people’s personal stories Norris shares in *Defund Fear* so you can remind the group about them: Allen and Durrell (page 99); Marlena and James (page 118); Anita’s story (page 136)
- Optional: Prepare to set up breakout rooms for pairs or triads to discuss Complicity.

Session Plan

Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Introduce chalice lighting words from the book *BLUU Notes: An Anthology of Love, Justice, and Liberation*, edited by Takiyah Nur Amin and Mykal Slack. Share these words, written by Viola Abbitt:

Toward a Place of Wholeness

We are Unitarian Universalists. When we lift up our (7) Principles, some of us think of them as a form of theology – but they are more important to our collective than that: they do not tell us what we should believe; they tell us how we should be. They tell us how we should act in the larger world and with each other. We are

brought here today by the fact that Unitarian Universalism had fallen short of the image that was presented to the world and to many of those who embraced our religion. But we are also brought here today by the truth that Unitarian Universalism has shifted course to move toward a place of wholeness: a place that has perhaps never existed for us as a denomination. It has been a long and sometimes unforgiving road to today. But we are here today because we are mindful of that past and we have hope for the future. We want the practice of this faith to be a fulfilling manifestation of its promise. Open your hearts. Seek new ways of understanding.

Say:

Come, let us worship together.

Check-In (10 minutes)

Invite participants to re-introduce themselves and, if they wish, briefly describe anything they may need to set aside in order to be fully present during this session. Also, you can ask the group to reflect on anything that may have come up since the last gathering.

Review the covenant from Session 1.

Discussion and Sharing (15 minutes): Policing, Punishment, and Children

Say:

Communities of color are both over- and under-policed. A community can have an excess of aggressive or militarized policing, yet receive little in the way of support or protection from police. The dominant culture justifies this treatment by perpetuating a narrative of certain communities as “breeding grounds” for crime and criminals. This supposed vicious cycle of crime is part of the framework of fear Norris describes.

Norris reminds us of a moment in recent U.S. history that helped secure this inequity in our society. He recalls one speech that coined a new phrase:

“They are often the kinds of kids that are called ‘superpredators’. No conscience, no empathy. We can talk about why they ended up that way but first we have to bring them to heel.” First Lady Hilary Clinton was addressing a crowd at a college in New Hampshire, campaigning for her husband’s reelection and praising the “tough-on-crime” bill he’d just signed two years prior. Indeed, she used the expression “bring them to heel,” which is generally used to refer to a dog.

Say:

It must be pointed out that these so-called “super predators” were children. Punishment and incarceration of children—over-policing—with a lack of protection and support for them—which some may call under-policing—are still a norm in communities of color. This comes up in many of the individuals’ stories in *Defund Fear*. Norris mentions, also, our history of Indian Boarding Schools, Japanese Internment Camps, and African Enslavement. We can add the caging of immigrant children at the southern U.S. border. Our system is willing to demonize and dehumanize children as we feed our framework of fear.

Before we go forward, let’s take a moment of silence to recall the historic and present victims, especially the youngest, of systematic dehumanization.

Allow one or two minutes for silent reflection. Then, engage a discussion, asking:

- Do you remember the term “super predator”? How did you feel, or how do you feel now, about applying such a label to children?
- What role does criminalizing children play in our public safety system? Why do so many Americans find it acceptable to separate immigrant families at the border? Why do we support juvenile correction institutions whose function is to isolate children from family and community, sometimes in solitary confinement? Do we believe a corrective punishment is necessary, or helpful?

Invite any volunteers to share insights from their reflection. Then ask:

- What do you think happens later in life to children who experience policing, punishment and prison? What might be the ripple effect on their communities?
- If you have had opportunities to raise, teach, or look after children, how have you used punishment? Why?

Discussion and Sharing: CRIMES and HARMS (15 minutes)

Say:

It is true that there is crime and there are criminals. In fact, communities of color and under-resourced communities are disproportionately victimized by crime. And Norris offers better ways we can better address crime than the “punish first” approach we have now. But first he asks us to turn our focus to systemic harms that ravage the same communities that are most affected by crime and most subject to policing, prisons, and punishment.

Norris writes:

Believe me, I understand the desire to keep your home and family safe. I want my family to be safe as much as you do. But safe from who and from what? Who are the most dangerous threats to your family? Are they people in faraway lands, in the “inner cities,” or people right next door? Are they people you know, from within your country, your community, or even your family? And what really constitutes the worst threat to your family? Is it really crime? Or is it facing eviction because you can’t make rent? Is it frequent hospital visits because you live near an oil refinery and your child has asthma, or because the water you drink is no longer safe? These daily realities are sometimes described as “cultural, political, and socioeconomic dynamics”. But they are as real as your heartbeat. (page 3-4)

Say:

On pages 28-39, he names the sources of “Real Harms:” Capitalism, White Supremacy, Patriarchy, Violence, Trauma. Norris says these systemic problems make many people unsafe.

Say:

Let’s consider our personal experience of these harms. How do they impact our safety and the safety of others?

Say you will offer a few questions to help reflection. Say that participants will be invited to share, after reflection, if they wish. Read these questions:

- Do any of these touch your life directly? What specific harms have you, or people you know, suffered due to capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, violence, or trauma?
- Have any of these affected your personal safety? How?
- For some of us, it’s possible that capitalism, white supremacy, or patriarchy actually make us feel MORE safe. If this is true for you, take a moment to reflect why that is. Consider whether your feeling of safety might depend on someone else feeling less safe.

Offer a few moments before the first speaker to allow folks to collect their thoughts, which will help them be fully present when others are speaking. You can mention that recalling experiences of harm may be difficult or triggering for some folks and remind the group that anyone may choose to pass and not share. Encourage 15 seconds or so of silence after each participant. Be ready to remind participants not to comment on the contributions of others but to simply listen and hold each other’s words. Do not rush participants. Let them fully share.

Lead a discussion:

- What are your thoughts on shifting the conversation on public safety from crimes to harms?

- Is it possible that these “big” systemic issues seem impossible to “fix” or change?

Optional Break for 90-minute Session

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

Durrell’s Story: What If...? (30 minutes)

Say:

Defund Fear contains several stories that serve to highlight the ways that individuals move through a fear based public safety system. The stories also show systemic harms operate to close off opportunities and keep people down.

- Allen and Durrell (page 99)
- Marlena and James (page 118)
- Anita’s story (page 136)

Have participants briefly share any recollections and insights from these narratives. Then say:

Norris shares stories that individuals generously shared with him, so that readers can better understand how the fear-based public safety system impacts real people. Even if we have not had similar experiences ourselves, we must remember that we are all connected. We must not see ourselves as distant from or disconnected from these stories.

Now invite the group to look more closely at the story of Durrell Feaster that Durrell’s father, Allen, shared with Norris. Say:

Let’s receive this story as a safety failure of the system we live with today, and an opportunity to imagine a different way.

Share as much of the following as needed, depending on how much the group has already recalled about Durrell:

Durrell was a handsome, biracial teenager who lived with his father, Allen, a hotel shoe care worker, after his parents divorced. Durrell was diagnosed with ADHD and at 14 began skipping school. When his father sought assistance for Durrell, the police sent Durrell to group home, six hours away. Durrell ran away from the group home and, with another boy, stole a car. This theft, a crime, resulted in a three-year sentence to a youth correctional facility. This place was inaccessible by public transportation and Allen was unable to visit. Durrell was found hanging, dead, in his cell at age 18.

These are the words of Durrell's father, Allen: "They killed my son. They treated him like an animal. He was not a hardcore criminal. He was a child. They killed his joy."

Say:

Norris says, "Things did not have to unfold like this, for Durrell or for so many other youngsters like him."

Then lead a discussion with these questions:

- What if the system had been focused on support and care, rather than correction and punishment? Allen sought help with Durrell, and police disconnected Durrell from his family and community. What would a caring intervention have looked like? (Examples: family support and counseling, educational intervention, truancy handled without police, local and accessible juvenile justice programs, no detention for non-violent juvenile offenses, ending isolated confinement...)
- What do you know, or what have you experienced, around police and courts' handling of youth misbehavior or the treatment of juveniles in the criminal legal system? Are you aware of ways that BIPOC and white juveniles are treated

differently? (For example, historically, Black and brown youth using illegal drugs have typically been punished as criminals, while white youth are seen as addicts, in need of medical care.)

- Do you ever find yourself feeling or believing that Black and brown youth ARE more violent than white youth and SHOULD be treated strictly in order to prevent more serious criminal behavior in the future? If you are white, what might cause you to feel this way? If you are a person of color?
- Have you had experiences like those in the narratives in *Defund Fear*?
- Consider, for yourself, “What is my connection to the stories told and the harms named? Where am I in these stories? How am I complicit in events that happened in the lives of Allen, Durrell, and others?”

Now direct the group to bring a Unitarian Universalist lens to Allen and Durrell’s story and the other stories shared in *Defund Fear*. Say:

Although Unitarian Universalists have diverse theological beliefs and practices, we are a people of faith held together in covenant. We speak often of a Beloved Community we aspire to that includes everyone, that values everyone equally, where we are each responsible to the whole. We make promises—stated in our Principles—based on how we want to behave toward one another. When we break our promises, when we fall out of covenant, we have processes to hold one another accountable, to come back together. We believe that no one should be judged by their worst mistake. We understand that we all matter and are all connected.

Ask if anyone would like to comment on the description of UU faith you have given. Does it resonate for them? What might they add?

Ask:

- What would it be like if our public safety system and criminal legal system were grounded in and faithful to Unitarian Universalist religious beliefs?

Invite the group to listen to the song they heard upon entering this session. It is “Take Me to the Alley” (6:25) written and sung by Gregory Porter. Paste the song lyrics into the Chat:

*Well, they gild their houses in preparation for the King.
And they line the sidewalks with every sort of shiny thing.
But they will be surprised when they hear him say,
“Take me to the alley. Take me to the afflicted ones.
Take me to the lonely ones that somehow lost their way.
Let them hear me say, ‘I am your friend. Come sit at my table.
Rest here in my garden. You will have a pardon.’”*

Share the song.

When the song ends, invite responses with these questions;

- How does this song reflect the world we might make, based on communities of care rather than fear?
- Do you know someone in need of a pardon? Are you in need of a pardon?
- When a crime is committed or a harm has been done, is a pardon a resolution? What more does *Defund Fear* ask? What more does Unitarian Universalism ask?

Discussion: COMPLICITY (10 minutes)

Say:

Our fear-based public safety system with its concentration on crimes and reluctance to dismantle harms does not exist apart from our individual lives. Each of us may be victimized by this system or benefit from it. Some are both victim and beneficiary.

It is important that feelings of guilt or shame do not turn us away from possible complicity in the system.

Depending on the size of your group and the time you have remaining in this session, you may lead a whole group discussion or form small groups (i.e., offer breakout rooms) for participants to share in pairs or triads.

Offer these prompt questions and invite participants to reflect and respond to any of the questions:

- Where do you notice our fear-based public safety system creating an “us vs. them” scenario, in which safety seems to be a scarce commodity?
- Who is “us” and who is “them”? Who benefits?
- Do you hold an expectation of safety in some areas/neighborhoods? Do you consider other places “inherently” unsafe? If so, what does that say about your view of the people living there?
- Consciously or unconsciously, do you accept, or believe, that some people are entitled to feel safe and others are not? How does this fit with our UU Principle of interconnectedness? How does this relate to our Unitarian Universalist belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person?
- We must each accept that, to some degree, the current justice system belongs to each of us. What individual, personal choices do we make that are complicit with the fear-based system? Examples might be when we pay taxes that fund prisons or militarized police forces; when we make decisions on where to live, perhaps falling in line with segregated housing patterns; when we personally profile someone as threatening who is Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color (BIPOC); when we make assumptions about or pass judgment on a person who has been incarcerated or their family.

What's Next/Closing (5 minutes)

Say:

As we close this session, let's acknowledge it is difficult to hear the painful narratives of people's harm from our fear-based public safety system. It is also difficult to know ourselves to be complicit in this system. We can continue to acknowledge these feelings and yet we must move forward. We are called to envision and help to build a care-based public safety system that better aligns with our Unitarian Universalist Principles.

Mention that within Unitarian Universalism, Side with Love works for abolition of the fear-based public safety system, abolition of mass incarceration, abolition of militarized policing, abolition of solitary confinement:

UUA Side with Love seeks to dismantle harmful structures and build the Beloved Community. Go to the Side with Love website and join in their work – personally and with your congregation.

Say, "We will close with words from the Universalist minister, Clifton Lee Scott." Share these words:

Let me keep the doors of my mind open for the possible knock of some vagrant truth. Let me swing wide the shuttered windows of my heart that perchance some winged messenger of love light upon my sill.

Remind the group that this is the first of three meetings. Confirm the day, date, time for the next meeting and make sure everyone has registered to obtain the Zoom link for Session 2. Save the covenant that the participants affirmed so the group can review it at the start of the next meeting.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

Session 3 / Any Group: ***BUILDING THE COMMUNITY OF CARE***

Materials

- Chalice or candle and lighter, or LED battery-operated candle
- Covenant from Session 1
- A copy of the book, *Defund Fear*

Preparation

- Make sure a Zoom room is scheduled at least one week prior to meeting. If possible, provide a room that has captions enabled.
- Set up a registration process to ensure security of your session. It can be as simple as inviting interested people to email an individual for the Zoom link. Do not post the Zoom link publicly.
- Send out the Zoom link at least one week prior to the scheduled date and again with a reminder the day before. Include email and telephone contact information in case anyone has difficulty accessing the Zoom room.
- Assign a facilitator and a host. The facilitator will conduct the session(s) and the host will play any videos, post slides, etc. and help participants with troubleshooting. When the session begins, have the facilitator type “FACILITATOR” and the host type “TECH” in front of their name so participants can easily identify them.
- Prepare to screen-share or post in the Chat the covenant from Session 1.
- Queue the video clips you will need for the session:
 - Opening music, [“I’ll Take You There” sung by the Staple Singers](#)

- Video clip of the Rev. Jason Lydon ([Vimeo, 1:32](#)), from the January 2022 recorded conversation between UU religious professionals and author Zach Norris.
- Video clip of Carey McDonald ([Vimeo, 1:20](#)) from the January 2022 recorded conversation between UU religious professionals and author Zach Norris.
- Optional: Closing music, [“Filled with Loving Kindness”](#) (Hymn 1031 in *Singing the Journey*), presented by families and music director of First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee
- Set the chalice near where you will lead your Zoom session.
- Open the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start, so the session can begin on time. Have [“I’ll Take You There”](#) playing as participants enter.
- Optional: Be prepared to use breakout rooms for discussion.

Session Plan

Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Tell the group you have two opening readings. The first is from Zach Norris, writing in *Defund Fear*. Read:

Safety is not tied to our capacity to watch our neighbors, but rather based on our capacity to truly look out for one another. There is no doubt in my mind that we are safer when we act together than when we let ourselves be divided.

Then share words from Alice Walker’s book, *The Temple of My Familiar*, entitled “The Gospel According to Shug:”

Helped are those who love all the colors of all the human beings, as they love all the colors of the animals and plants; none of their children, nor any of their ancestors, nor any parts of themselves, shall be hidden from them.

Helped are those who love the lesbian, the gay, the straight, as they love the sun, the moon, and the stars. None of their children, nor any of their ancestors, nor any parts of themselves, shall be hidden from them.

Helped are those who love the broken and the whole; none of their children, nor any of their ancestors, nor any parts of themselves shall be hidden from them.

Light the chalice.

Check-In (10 minutes)

Invite participants to re-introduce themselves and, if they wish, briefly describe anything they may need to set aside in order to be fully present during this session. Also, you can ask the group to reflect on and share anything that may have come up since the last gathering.

Review the covenant from Session 1.

Discussion: Democracy at Stake (10 minutes)

Say:

Toward the end of *Defund Fear*, Zach Norris shares some hopes he was holding at the time he wrote the book. At that time, an increase in community organizations was correlating with a decrease in crime. There was bipartisan support for ending mass incarceration. Norris wondered:

Would we finally recognize that public safety starts with resources and

relationships? Would we figure out more satisfactory ways of holding people accountable for their actions and for healing our communities?

But for Norris, the Trump era resurrected the power of fear. He writes:

Trump and his revolving cast of Justice Department officials have doubled down on policies of othering. They have taken Us. vs. Them and made it national policy.

Later, Norris writes:

Among the most fundamental differences between democracy and fascism is the vision of how we get to safety. Under fascist ideology, safety is achieved through the separation of people seen as superior beings from those who are viewed as less than human.

Ask:

- Do you agree that our current public safety methods resemble fascism? Does this concern you?
- Is there any hope for policies and practices that focus on the common good in a way that includes EVERYONE? How will we get there?

Allow participants to share their thoughts. Say this session will move into strategies. Do not spend more than 10 minutes on this discussion.

Reflection and Planning: ROADS TO REAL SAFETY (15 minutes)

Say:

In concluding the book, Norris makes a powerful statement (page 159). He writes:

Real safety happens when we bridge the divides and build relationships with each other, overcoming suspicion and distrust. Real safety comes from strategic, smart investments—meaning resources directed toward our stability and well-being. Real safety addresses the harms that the current system is failing to tackle, and holds people accountable for those harms

while still holding them in community. Real safety results from reinstating full humanity and agency for everyone who has been dehumanized and traumatized, so they can participate fully in society. If we are able to transform our old system and create a culture of caring and healing in its place, we may have an actual shot at creating real democracy for the first time.

Say:

There are many mandates for change in what he says here. As people of faith, what exactly are we called to do? There are many pathways, internal work and external work, and there are infinite religious reasons for becoming involved.

Introduce the video clip of the Rev. Jason Lydon, who serves at Second Unitarian Church in Chicago and founded the organization, Black and Pink. Say the clip is from a 70-minute panel discussion about this book recorded in January 2022 with Zach Norris and UU religious professionals.

Play the clip (1:54). Optional: Share the transcript in the Chat.

I know we're a non-doctrinal faith and yet my UU loves, my beloveds. I want us to reflect together on exactly this question of punishment. Because I think our faith has really something pretty powerful here.

Our legacy of our faith, our universalist side, that tells us that there is no hell for us to fear after death. That God or the divine or the universe is so loving that there is no hell after this life. That every, that punishment is not salvific, that we are saved and we are transformed by a relationship, by love, by community, by care. And that after death we are free from hell. Well, we put that into dialogue with our humanist side of who we are and then that needs to be just as true during life as it is during death.

That all we say over and over again: All we need to know of heaven and hell, we could know right here on this planet that we are living on today. And so if we know

as human beings that punishment is not salvific, that we need to destroy all of the Hells that exist on this earth in order for our universalism to be authentically lived into, then abolishing the prison industrial complex is an essential aspect of Unitarian Universalism. And it becomes a requirement of our faith.

Continue:

Many Unitarian Universalists, like Rev. Lydon, are involved with prison abolition. Others, including the UU Church of the Larger Fellowship's "Worthy Now" prison ministry, work on programs to assist and accompany people who are incarcerated and their families. Some help provide restorative justice practices in their communities or congregations. Others may focus on creating and supporting communities of care, focusing on what can be done to reduce harms in communities most affected.

Invite participants to reflect, and share if they wish: What sort of work for Real Safety calls to you?

Optional Break for 90-minute Session

Check in with participants to see if a five-minute bio break is needed.

Preparing for Change: Actions Large and Small (20 minutes)

Say:

Sometimes the issues around us seem so big that we doubt whether we can influence change. We sometimes fear that our own lives will be disrupted by attempts to make change or actual change and that this will return us to a state of confusion and fear. There may be personal sacrifices, feelings of guilt, shame, complicity which freeze or complicate our actions. And there are realities that change takes time.

Introduce the video clip of the Carey McDonald, UUA Executive Vice President. Say the clip is from a 70-minute panel discussion between Zach Norris and UU religious professionals about this book.

Play the clip (1:20). Optional: Share the transcript in the Chat.

So I think the ability of us as religious people to understand the long arc of this work, and how much time and how many generations of trauma and oppression have created the public policies that we have right now that create the ghetto. That create the prison industrial complex. And holding like it—it's not that we're going to adopt the mentorship program and then next year all the murders will stop and the violence will fall away, right? And so it's like sustaining that work at the same time, the long, the long arc of the work at the same time that we're doing the restoration and answering the needs right in front of us.

Like holding both of those things at the same time, it I think takes a lot of spiritual strength in order to be able to do that over time. So I think that's one of the places where we as religious people can be, can lean into our prophetic imperative and help hold that.

Lead a discussion:

- How do you, and how do we, wrestle with feelings of complicity in the fear-based public safety system? What actions can we take to bring change and still hold ourselves accountable?
- What do you think about incremental change? What can be changed first, or right away?
- What do you think about an abolitionist stance? What more do you want to learn about the prison abolition movement?
- How do we “lean into a prophetic imperative” while knowing that dismantling fear-based public safety may be idealistic, or at least a very long haul?

Name some of the opportunities Norris introduces for bringing care and support to communities. Read the following list and invite the group to consider which apply in their community(ies). Be ready to refer participants to pages of the paperback book that discuss each in more depth:

- Pages 116-117: support for children and families
- Pages 134 – 135: more educators of color, outdoor education programs, childcare allowance/subsidy, mental health services and trauma care, re-entry programs for post incarceration, decriminalize drugs, drug abuse treatment
- Pages 152-153: campus support, housing as a right

Ask volunteers what came to mind. Engage participants to elaborate on ways these interventions do or could exist in their community(ies). Then ask:

- How does acting on these ideas help to fulfill UU faith or Principles?

Creating a Practice of Care (20 minutes)

Share this ministry from Rev. Dr. Natalie Fenimore (author of this guide):

Given our Unitarian Universalist Principles and commitment to justice work, we may already believe that our UU Congregations and Covenanted Communities are already doing the work of creating communities of care. But Zach Norris shows us that there is clearly more to be done, that we can do more, if we want to make fundamental change from a society of fear based to a society of care-based solutions to conflicts and harms. So let's talk about what it means to move toward this community of care – to PRACTICE care – as individuals and in our communities.

Often we are told that it is alright to make mistakes – I don't like to encourage the belief/attitude that we need not take care in our actions, because we can cause harm. Nor do I want to encourage the belief that we should do nothing, out of a fear of not doing it perfectly. I like to say instead that it is alright to begin without knowing how to do a thing and to learn as we practice doing that thing. We are a community of practice. We are not just always making mistakes. We are practicing. We are practicing how to get better at doing the work and ministry of justice. All our life we are practicing how to be better Unitarian Universalists, how to be better human beings.

Our practicing may mean that the changes that need to be made to create a community of care will not all happen perfectly or all at once. Some of us may proceed toward abolition of a fear-based public safety system not all at

once but incrementally. We should keep in mind both incremental and abolitionist actions, at home and in the communities we belong to.

Now invite the group to design their own “practice.” Ask them to collaborate on a list of ways that they or their UU congregation/community might “practice” building, or being part of building, a care-based public safety system. Ask a volunteer to take notes on suggested practices.

Prompt with the following examples and invite participants to recall stories of community care that Norris shared in *Defund Fear*:

- External actions: campaign against prison industrial complex; advocate to reform/change the carceral system (ending mass incarceration, bail reform, de-militarize policing, act to abolish solitary confinement); understand and monitor policing in your area (influence police-community relations; monitor policing budgets; advocate for better mental health care services); make relationships with formerly incarcerated persons; support restorative practices and elimination of school resource officers in schools and support school reform and improvement for under-resourced communities
- Internal actions for the congregation: hiring practices that do not discriminate against the formerly incarcerated, offer a community space, provide housing, assist with food insecurity; examine/audit ways in which your congregation or covenanted UU community supports the fear-based safety system; build multiracial, multicultural alliances/relationships

Spend no more than 10 minutes on this brainstorming. Pivot the conversation to point the group toward specific actions based on the suggestions they have come up with. Remind the group that it is important to learn what needs exist in a space and what strategies are already in play, before offering potential partners your solution.

If you have time, move into planning for one or two specific actions. Work as a whole group or break out into small groups by interest in specific recommendations.

Offer two or three minutes of quiet time for participants to turn inward. Say that re-orienting ourselves from a fear-based way of living to one focused on communities of care can be an act of faith, a faith practice. Invite participants to reflect, and possibly journal, about ways to begin such a practice.

CLOSING (10 minutes)

Thank participants for sharing this time together. Invite them into continued conversation, learning, and action. Does the group want to meet again?

Share the document [“Defund Fear: Next Moves for UUs.”](#) It appears at the end of this discussion guide and is [posted online](#). Post the link in the Chat or email the document to participants. Mention that the UUA Side with Love team provides a six-week curriculum to take the questions of *Defund Fear* deeper and become involved with the movement for prison abolition.

Invite participants to share a closing word or phrase about what they are taking away from reading *Defund Fear* and this discussion.

Option 1: Closing music

Invite the group to listen to Hymn 1031 from the teal hymn book, *Singing the Journey*. If you wish, share the words and invite participants to sing along:

*May I be filled with loving kindness. May I be well. May I be peaceful and at ease.
May I be whole.*

*May you be filled with loving kindness. May you be well. May you be peaceful and
at ease. May you be whole.*

*May we be filled with loving kindness. May we be well. May we be peaceful and at
ease. May we be whole.*

Play the video. When it concludes, ask the participants to reflect on this song:

- How does this message align with our UU theologies/Principles?
- How does this song reflect a care-based community?
- Do you need loving kindness? How can you give loving kindness to another?

Say, “And now may we continue to move towards justice while still allowing our spirits to flow with the joys we find in life.”

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

Option 2: Closing reading

Share this piece, “Portal,” by Emily Wright-Magoon from *Shelter in This Place*.

Has this ever happened to you? You move from where you are to go get something in the next room. Maybe you’re looking for the TV remote or about to make a snack. You walk through the doorway and suddenly you have completely forgotten what you were looking for.

Psychologists call this the doorway effect. Walking through open doors, crossing a threshold, resets the memory to make room for the creation of a new episode.

We are currently passing through many doorways. We are facing a pandemic unseen I any of our lifetimes. We are deepening our reckoning with our country’s history of slavery and colonization, of white supremacy and the devaluing of Black and brown lives. In your personal life, you may also be moving across a threshold, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, a diagnosis, a searching question...

The key concept in the doorway effect is to make room. As we move over the threshold, that reset jars us, making space to leave behind our outworn ideas and practices and birth something new.

But that possibility is only available to us if we are open to it. Change is something that happens to us. But transition and transformation – those are internal and relational. Unless we make room for something new, unless we allow ourselves to be reoriented, no real change happens. We just find the remote and go back to our show.

To cross that threshold ready for transformation, what in us – in our lives, in our relationships, in our world – needs to shift?

Let us cross this threshold ready to reckon with our country's legacy of brutality and white supremacy, ready to rumble with deep change, ready to radically reorient our world into a place where interdependence is not taken for granted or squandered.

Don't just grab the remote. Let's move through the portal instead.

Say, "And now may we continue to move towards justice while still allowing our spirits to flow with the joys we find in life."

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

Defund Fear: Next Moves for UUs

A Unitarian Universalist religious mandate to “defund fear” can have a variety of effective expressions. The following suggestions offer entry points to action for individuals or UU groups.

Re-imagine “safety”

Bring an awakened sense of “safety” to your congregational practices. Read [“Alternatives to Calling the Police”](#) in the UUA Safe Congregations Handbook: “We know that much of what we’ve been taught about [safety](#) is shaped by systems of oppression telling us who to be afraid of. And we know that real [community protection](#) does not criminalize us or our neighbors.”

[Night Out for Safety and Liberation](#) is an annual event begun in 2013 by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights in Oakland, CA. It takes place on the first Tuesday of August to “redefine and re-imagine what public safety means for our communities.” Check out [resources for any community](#) to host their own event and watch for the hashtag #SafetyIs.

UUs and the prison abolition movement

For an introduction to the prison abolition movement and a portal to activism with the UU Side with Love campaign, do the [six-session, abolition-focused program](#) of study and action offered, as part of this Common Read, by the UUA’s [Side with Love](#) team.

On the website of the [UU Prison Ministry of Illinois](#), watch or read the transcript of a panel moderated by Rev. Jason Lydon, “Abolitionist Theologies: Religious

Resistance to Policing and Prisons” from August, 2020. UUPMI partners across the state, working to transform institutions and support people harmed by the prison industrial complex.

Though not a UU-specific tool, the "[If You're New to Abolition](#)" study guide is a great resource for folks struggling with the move from "reform" to "abolish."

Explore the origins of today’s systemic racism in policing and mass incarceration and learn about Black-led movements resisting it:

- [“Unfinished Business“](#) is a four-part study program offered by Side with Love, based on the 2019 documentary, *Reconstruction: America After the Civil War*, narrated by Henry Louis Gates Jr. Each one hour and 45 minute session includes segments from the film and discussion led by Dr. Charlene Sinclair, the founding director of the Center for Race, Religion, and Economic Democracy.
- The award-winning documentary *13th*, directed by Ava DuVernay, tracks today’s wildly disproportionate mass incarceration of Black people back to the Constitutional amendment that undid slavery but allowed free use of incarcerated people for labor.

Connect with people in prison

Get involved with the [Worthy Now Prison Ministry](#) of the UU Church of the Larger Fellowship: “Worthy Now invites people on both sides of prison walls into beloved community. We declare that all persons are worthy of love, respect, and support — not at some future time when we are better people — but as we are **right now**.” You can:

- Become a pen pal: make a one-on-one letter-writing connection with a Unitarian Universalist living in prison

- Engage your faith community in a prison ministry partnership for direct service to people who are incarcerated
- Bring a Worthy Now UU worship service to your congregation
- Take classes on topics such as the prison industrial complex, anti-racism/anti-oppression, and compassionate communication

Black & Pink National is a prison abolitionist organization dedicated to abolishing the criminal punishment system and liberating LGBTQIA2S+ people and people living with HIV/AIDS who are affected by that system through advocacy, support, and organizing. Since 2005, a [national pen-pal program](#) matches incarcerated members with free-world people to correspond, build relationships, and participate in harm reduction and affirmation.

Help to build communities of care

Seek opportunities to put communities of care into practice locally. Existing projects may welcome your involvement or support. What community-led organizations are working on youth mentorship or restorative justice programs? coordinating investment in Black- or BIPOC-owned businesses? collectively maintaining a garden, green space, or recreational area? Fund or work with programs that directly fight the deprivation, isolation, and other harm communities experience in Norris's "framework of fear."

[YES! magazine](#) (online and in print) is a rich source of inspiration and guidance for community initiatives to combat systemic harm on a local level. For example,

read [“Where a Free Meal for Food-Insecure Families Is Just a Text Away”](#) (Feb. 2022).

There are local and national organizations that support people who are incarcerated or recently released and their families. Find out how you can support their work. Many are also advocates for prison abolition. Most will accept donations and some offer learning and/or volunteer opportunities. Some are:

- [Ella Baker Center for Human Rights](#) (Oakland, CA). “We are named after Ella Baker, a brilliant, Black hero of the civil rights movement. Following in her footsteps, we organize with Black, Brown, and low-income people to shift resources away from prisons and punishment, and towards opportunities that make our communities safe, healthy, and strong.”
- [Families for Justice as Healing](#) (Boston, MA). ““The approach we take to our work is ReImagining Communities. ...Formerly incarcerated women have the solutions and expertise to address the root causes of incarceration. We are leading work to shift resources away from the criminal punishment system and into Black and Brown communities so we can have housing, healthcare, education, economic development, and community-led organizations.”
- [Vera](#) (national; multi-city). “Vera was founded in 1961 to advocate for alternatives to money bail in New York City. Today, we are a national organization with offices in Brooklyn, NY; Los Angeles, CA; New Orleans, LA; and Washington, DC. These offices are home to Vera’s place-based initiatives, which serve the unique purpose of harnessing our strengths and assets to invest locally in dismantling the systems that punish and harm and building the institutions that deliver safety and justice.”

- [The Marshall Project](#) (national) is a nonprofit news organization covering the U.S. criminal justice system. It provides in-depth, timely information about supports and lack thereof for people affected by incarceration. Subscribe to stay informed.