

Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the Unitarian Church of Calgary  
Volume 3 Issue 1 • January 2016

## ***What Does It Mean to Be a People of Resilience?***

When did we decide that resilience was a solo endeavour?

It's not that we ever consciously decided that this was the case. It's just what we've been taught. The dominant culture around us may be well intended, but it takes us down the wrong path. "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps," it says. "You're stronger than you think." "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." This is how resilience is most often framed: It's all about our individual mental toughness and inner strength.

Unitarianism sometimes plays into this heroic form of resilience. We reject the idea that human beings are depraved, broken, and weak. Instead, we champion the view that we are strong—not just inherently worthy, but also inherently resourceful. We have, at times, promoted a "You can do it!" theology. And yet at our best, we are more nuanced. When it comes to resilience, our "saving message" has always been, "You can do it, and you do not have to do it on your own!"

There is a common metaphor about resilience; the one about being a tree that is willing to lean and bend, rather than hold tight in place and break. As Unitarians, we take a different approach to this strategy of leaning. Yes, be willing to lean back and forth, we say. But most importantly, be willing to lean in—and on—each other! It is a reminder that resilience has a lot to do with what is inside of us, but it has even more to do with what is between us. The true path of resilience is the path of connection. We are called to be a people of resilience, not just a person of resilience.

We survive our pain by knowing it is shared. We continue to walk through the dark only when we sense we are not alone. Internal grit only gets us so far; empathy, assurance, and love from others carries us the rest of the way. Resilience has everything to do with the water within which we swim, and the web of connections that surround us.

So, this month, let us look around as much as we look within. Let us get the idea of resilience as a solo project out of our heads and hearts. Our covenantal theology asserts that we belong to each other. So let us remember that our resilience also belongs to and depends on each other.

May this be a year of resilience for us all!

### **January Services: Sundays 10:30am**

January 3rd  
The Crests and Troughs of Resilience

January 10th  
The Quest for Resilience

January 17th  
In Stephan Stephansson's Footsteps

January 24th  
A Home Away from Home: Refugees  
and Resilience

January 31st  
Stories of Resilience

## Upcoming Services

*\*All services are Sunday mornings at 10:30am\**

**Sunday, January 3, 2016**

### The Crests and Troughs of Resilience

Resilience can be complicated; it isn't easy to come by, and goes hand-in-hand with difficult life events and circumstances. And yet it can be incredibly meaningful and beautiful. In this service, we'll explore the highs and lows of resilience in our lives.

Presenter: Rev Carly Gaylor

Music: Jane Perry, Music Director

**Sunday, January 10, 2016**

### The Quest for Resilience

At a time when liberal religious participation is waning, many of our congregations are searching for ways to become resilient in the face of change. How are we equipping ourselves, and what do we hope to find?

Presenter: Rev Carly Gaylor

Music: Jane Perry, Music Director with UUphonia

**Sunday, January 17, 2016**

### In Stephan Stephansson's Footsteps

Resilient ideas spring anew from generation to generation.

Tracing Icelandic social justice traditions, from the famous 20th century poet through to his great-grandson Alberta troubadour Bill Bourne.

Service Leaders: Hazel Corcoran and Penney Kome

Guest speaker and musician: Bill Bourne.

**Sunday, January 24, 2016**

### A Home Away from Home: Refugees and Resilience

It takes enormous resilience to survive the refugee experience and start a new life in a new home. Conversely, having a home contributes greatly to resilience.

Presenter: the UCC Refugee Sponsorship Committee, working to sponsor an Iraqi family.

Music: Jane Perry, Music Director with Multi-generational Choir and ChorVida chamber choir.

**Sunday, January 31, 2016**

### Stories of Resilience

We are not alone in our struggles, and experiences of resilience – or lack thereof. In this Multi-Generational service, we'll share our own stories of resilience along with those of others around the world.

Presenter: Rev Carly Gaylor

Music: Jane Perry, Music Director with UUphonia



## January's Spiritual Exercises

### Option A: List 'Em

We are more resilient than we realize. We have more resiliency tricks up our sleeves than we often give ourselves credit for. This month let's be a bit more aware of and intentional about these resiliency strategies that regularly restore us and keep us sane.

Here's your assignment: Carve out some time this month to make a list of your TOP FIVE resiliency practices and habits. Here are some examples:

- Getting enough sleep
- Getting some exercise
- Creating external order – taking a day to clean and organize the house
- Managing my eating and drinking
- Meditating three mornings a week
  
- Once-a-week email Sabbath – i.e. do not check email one day a week
- Family dinners, with family gratitude prayer
- Spending time with animals
- Knitting
- Watching “The Mercer Report”

After you list your top 5, organize them according to these questions:

Which resiliency practice/habit is “saving” you right now?

Which one have you let slide and need to start doing more of again?

Which one was given to you by someone else? Which was a gift?

Which one did you discover on your own?

Which do you need to pass on to someone in your life? Who could benefit from sharing in this strategy? Might you invite them to do it with you?

Come to your group ready to share your insights from this exercise.

## Option B: Tap Into Your Resilient Past

Therapists and spiritual directors tell us that one of the best ways to bring resiliency back into our lives is to revisit a time in our life when we were successfully resilient. This month take some time to revisit and honour a time when your powers of resiliency were at their peak. There are many ways to honour this period of your life: write the story down, ask a close friend to be a witness and listen to you retell the story, bring in a picture to your group that captures that moment in time, wear clothes or even the hairstyle from that period, play a song connected with the event over and over this month, or be bold and get a tattoo to permanently keep that time in your life close.

## Option C: Play That Resilient Tune

We all know it works: That perfect song played at the perfect time that gives us the strength to hold on, keep going, and struggle back toward joy. This month, find that perfect song and play it until it bounces you back. Consider bringing it to your group to share.

## Option D: Get Into The Resilience Game

In her TED Talk, Jess McGonigal talks about the game she developed, SuperBetter, to help herself and others heal after trauma or injuries. Play the game this month (even though it costs \$5) and come to your group ready to share what you discovered.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/jane\\_mcgonigal\\_the\\_game\\_that\\_can\\_give\\_you\\_10\\_extra\\_years\\_of\\_life](http://www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_the_game_that_can_give_you_10_extra_years_of_life)

## Option E: Test Your Resilience

Use one of these tests of resilience and find out your score. What did the questions unearth for you? What are some answers you'd like to see change? Come to your group with your results and your readiness to share about the process.

<http://www.resiliencescale.com/your-resilience/test-your-resilience/>



## For Inspiration

Resilience (n.) the power or ability to return to the original form, position, etc., after being bent, compressed, or stretched. The ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like. Synonyms: elasticity, buoyancy, flexibility, pliancy, adaptability.

You drown not by falling into a river but by staying submerged in it. –Paul Coelho

When I stand before thee at the day's end, thou shalt see my scars and know that I had my wounds and also my healing. - Rabindranath Tagore

I am not what happened to me. I am what I choose to become. - Carl Jung

I'm not sure if resilience is ever achieved alone. Experience allows us to learn from example. But if we have someone who loves us—I don't mean who indulges us, but who loves us enough to be on our side—then it's easier to grow resilience, to grow belief in self, to grow self-esteem. And it's self-esteem that allows a person to stand up." - Maya Angelou

The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.  
Nelson Mandela

It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it. – Lena Horne

It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change... - Charles Darwin

Resilience: the capacity of a system to tolerate disturbance without collapsing; to withstand shocks; to rebuild itself when necessary and to improve itself where possible. - Breathing Facade ( Eco-friendly Pavilion, Milan Expo 2015 )  
Nemesi & Partners

Resilience means you experience, you feel, you fail, you hurt. You fall. But, you keep going. - Yasmin Mogahed

When your eyes are tired  
the world is tired also.  
When your vision has gone  
no part of the world can find you.  
Time to go into the dark  
where the night has eyes  
to recognize its own.  
There you can be sure you are  
not beyond love.  
The dark will be your womb  
tonight.  
The night will give you a horizon further  
than you can see.  
You must learn one thing.  
The world was made to be free in.  
Give up all the other worlds  
except the one to which you belong.  
Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet  
confinement of your aloneness  
to learn  
anything or anyone  
that does not bring you alive is  
too small for you.

Sweet Darkness" – David Whyte

# REFLECTIONS

# RESILIENCE

Resilience (the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks). - “Resilience, Adaptability and Transformability in Social-ecological Systems” Brian Walker, C. S. Holling, Stephen R. Carpenter, and Ann Kinzig, - Ecology and Society, vol. 9, no. 2

## Characteristics of Resilience:

- Internal locus of control
- Strong sense of commitment to self
- Sense of meaningfulness
- Ability to view change/stress as a challenge
- Engaging the support of others
- Secure attachments to others
- Personal or collective goals

- Self-efficacy
- Sense of humor
- Strong self-esteem
- Action-oriented approach
- Ability to perceive the strengthening effect of stress
- Ability to adapt to change
- Ability to use past successes to confront current challenges
- Patience
- Tolerance of negative affect
- Optimism

“Assessment of Resilience in the Aftermath of Trauma”

Kathryn M. Connor, M.D., Journal of



You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. Please remember that your difficulties do not define you. They simply strengthen your ability to overcome.

- Maya Angelou

The one thing you can't take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one's freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance.

- Viktor E. Frankl

Laughter and tears are both responses to frustration and exhaustion. I myself prefer to laugh, since there is less cleaning up to do afterward. - Kurt Vonnegut

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

-Teddy Roosevelt

We all have these moments when the rose loses its colour for some reason, or the music no longer stirs us, or the sweet, gentle soul across from us no longer seems to soften our heart.

To move in and out of meaning is as natural as moving in and out of light because clouds form and dissipate... It reminds me of a man who built a home on a cliff by the sea, only to have a month-long fog roll in. He cursed the place and moved away, but a week after he'd gone, the fog cleared. Being human, we all have fogs roll in around our heart, and often, our lives depend on the quiet courage to wait for them to clear.

-Mark Nepo

"A Rainy Morning" - Ted Kooser

A young woman in a wheelchair, wearing a black nylon poncho spattered with rain, is pushing herself through the morning.

You have seen how pianists sometimes bend forward to strike the keys, then lift their hands, draw back to rest, then lean again to strike just as the chord fades.

Such is the way this woman strikes at the wheels, then lifts her long white fingers, letting them float, then bends again to strike just as the chair slows, as if into a silence. So expertly she plays the chords of this difficult music she has mastered, her wet face beautiful in its concentration, while the wind turns the pages of rain.

## Resources

### Articles on Resilience

Ten Ways to Become More Resilient, Kendra Cherry

<http://psychology.about.com/od/crisiscounseling/tp/become-more-resilient.htm>

Raising Resilient Nonconformists, Michelle Richards

<http://blogs.uuworld.org/parenting/2010/08/09/raising-resilient-nonconformists/>

How to Bounce Back from Failure: 7 Habits of Highly Resilient People, Carolyn Gregoire

<http://www.dailygood.org/story/618/how-to-bounce-back-from-failure-carolyn-gregoire/>

The Heart of Urban Resilience, Leo Hollis

<http://www.shareable.net/blog/the-heart-of-urban-resilience-is-trust-not-technology>

Handle with Care: A Conversation with Maya Angelou <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept13/vol71/num01/Handle-with-Care@-A-Conversation-with-Maya-Angelou.aspx>

### Videos and Online Resources on Resilience

The Game That Can Give You 10 Extra Years of Life

Jane McGonigal discusses how she created a game after a trauma to help people heal better. [http://www.ted.com/talks/jane\\_mcgonigal\\_the\\_game\\_that\\_can\\_give\\_you\\_10\\_extra\\_years\\_of\\_life](http://www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_the_game_that_can_give_you_10_extra_years_of_life)

The Power of Vulnerability

Brené Brown shows the link between shame, vulnerability, and resiliency in this moving talk.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability)

Resilience & Putting The Pieces Back Together

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CvExk1TVM0>

Resilience: More Than What is Inside Us

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHyv\\_LFXkVU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHyv_LFXkVU)

12 Step Program to Get Through a Breakup

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trWgx7YoZyk&feature=youtu.be>

Resilience and Health The secret of making your day harder! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whPuRLil4c0>



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Resilience and Health The secret of making your day harder!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whPuRLiI4cO>

## Books on Resilience

Brené Brown, Daring Greatly

Charles Eisenstein, The More Beautiful World

Our Heart Knows is Possible

Malcolm Gladwell, David and Goliath:

Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling  
Giants

Gunter Grass, The Tin Drum

Paul Rogat Loeb, The Impossible Will Take a  
Little While: A Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time

of Fear Excerpt here: <http://>

[www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/  
excerpts.php?id=14402](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/excerpts.php?id=14402)

Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, Coming Back to  
Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that  
Reconnects Us

Gloria Naylor, Bailey's Café

Alice Walker, The Color Purple

Sharon Welch, A Feminist Ethic of Risk

Margaret Wheatley, Perseverance

## Movies on Resilience

12 Years a Slave

A Beautiful Mind

Beasts of the Southern Wild

Silver Linings Playbook

Erin Brockovich

Freedom Writers

I Am Nebraska

Gone with the Wind

The Pianist

Precious

Selma

Short Term 12

Catching Fire (Second movie of The Hunger

Games trilogy)

Steel Magnolias

Shawshank Redemption

Hotel Rwanda

The Wrestler

## Questions to Live With

You are encouraged to engage these questions in advance of your group meeting and find the one that “hooks” you most. Then let it take you on an adventure. Live with it for the entire month. Allow it to break into—and break open—your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your Theme-Based Listening Circle (TLC) meeting prepared to share that experience with your group.

1. Are you ready to take the next step? One definition of resilience is the ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, pressed, bent, etc.
2. Where are you in the journey of resilience? Starting to feel pulled? Already significantly bent? Stretched and worried about snapping? Slowly returning to form? Gratefully back? What one thing do you need from those around you (friends, family, congregation) to move you on to the next step?
3. What does having a “resilient faith” mean to you? Does it mean finding your way back to a previously held belief by seeing it anew? Does it mean finding a way to trust and love life again? Or does it mean being able to move on from what was - i.e. have the adaptability to grow and evolve into new forms of faith? What is life trying to teach you right now about the importance of a resilient faith?
4. Is holding on getting in the way of your resilience? Many of us remember Kenny Rogers’ famous line: “You got to know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em, know when to walk away, and when to run...” Resilience is about the ability to return. Hard to do that when you’re not willing to let go of what’s got you stuck.
5. How resilient are you when it comes to anger? Anger and resentment regularly bend us out of shape. Righteous anger tempts us to stay twisted. Is the call of resiliency inviting you this month to return to a less resentful form?
6. How resilient are you when it comes to forgiveness? When others wound or offend you, how easily do you bounce back to connection? How easily do you let them off the hook? Is the call of resiliency inviting you this month to figure out why you so desperately hold on to your grudges?
7. Do you wish your family was more resilient?
8. Who is your resilience hero and are you honouring them? Who taught you the most about resilience? A person close to you or a public figure? Did their resilience rub off on you? Does it need to?

## What Works to Support Children's Wellbeing and Resilience.

By Jenny Hooper Child as found on <https://whatchildrenneedtobehappy.wordpress.com/2015/04/27/what-works-to-support-childrens-wellbeing-and-resilience/>

Wellbeing and resilience are not skills you are born with, nor can they be handed on by wise advice, they are skills which have to be learned. Here are 9 strategies which will help to build the competence and self-knowledge to maintain their wellbeing.

**Look at the world through the child's eyes** to be aware of both how they feel and what practical skills and thinking strategies are needed to manage a situation successfully. What will work best for them?

**Set realistic expectations** based on both what suits the child and what their age and stage of development will allow. Children can be ahead in some areas and less so in others. Aim not to set expectations which are possible but not too big a stretch.

**Warmth and rapport** are the top qualities which influence others and sustain relationships. Think Connect rather than Correct. A child looks for positive and constructive feedback to let them know how they are progressing.

**Circles of support.** There is a saying that it takes a village to raise a child. This is true not only for the child but also for adults who are responsible for the child's welfare. You need others to turn to who can step in at a practical level or just listen and let you let off steam.

**Focus on building strengths.** People who feel competent are more likely to be confident. The greater the child's competence the more likely they are to cope with what they find challenging. What strengths can be used to make any changes needed? .

**Create strong boundaries** which keep a child within their zone of competence. Firm boundaries are like scaffolding, providing support until a child demonstrates sufficient knowledge, skills and maturity to handle that situation independently.

**Provide lots of supported practice.** Most children now grow up in small families and spend their days in school with others the same age. Think about what might broaden their experience and provide good role models.

**Accept mistakes.** Progress rarely goes in a straight line. When things don't go according to plan we can either become frustrated and demotivated or we can explore what this tells us to inform what we do next. A growth mindset helps a child live with mistakes and profit from them.

**Celebrate success.** When you focus on what is happening right now rather than any lengthy "to do list" you start to notice what is going well and what you can savour and feel grateful for. Young people need to develop the habit of being in the moment and appreciating what is happening around them and what they are capable of contributing, too much negativity is draining.

## Looking Ahead Themes for 2016 *What does it mean to be a people of...*

February – **Reconciliation**  
March – **Renewal**  
April – **Revelation**  
May – **Tradition**  
June – **Revelry**

### **Theme Based Listening Circles (TLCs)**

You are invited to deepen your experience of the monthly theme by participating in a facilitated small group. These groups meet once a month, usually in the later part of the month to allow time to be with the theme, at various times and places in the city. If you are interested in a group, either as a facilitator or participant, please send an inquiry [tlc@unitarianscalgary.org](mailto:tlc@unitarianscalgary.org)

Current times and places include:

4th Wednesday – 1:00 – 3:00

4th Friday – 10:00-12:00 - Unitarian Church of Calgary

4th Sunday noon – 2:00 - Unitarian Church of Calgary

Many thanks to the Soul Matters Theme-Based collaborative and Canadian Theme-Based Unitarian congregations for sharing much of the content used here. This is a group effort. Your submissions of your ideas of readings, stories, videos, visual images, questions, and spiritual exercises for each month's topic are most welcome. While not everything will make it into this collection, it is useful for our worship team and our group facilitators. You can send submissions for February's topic of "Reconciliation" by February 10 to [tlc@unitariancalgary.org](mailto:tlc@unitariancalgary.org).



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