

Being and Interbeing
Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver
April 13, 2025

APC Testimonial – Erin Nugent

My name is Erin Nugent, and my pronouns are she/her. I've been attending UUCV for the past seven years. While I have yet to officially become a member, that hasn't stopped me from volunteering my time or pledging annually. Today, I want to share why UUCV has become such an integral part of my life and the life of my family—and why supporting this community means so much to me.

For the first two years I attended UUCV, I sat in these chairs and cried most Sundays. That was because the words that were spoken from the pulpit and the songs that we sang together resonated deep inside me, helping me heal. For the first time, I had found a community where my core values mirrored those of the people around me. The impact of that connection was profound.

More than once, I've said, "Coming to this church on Sunday is like therapy for me." When my children were younger, I knew that they would be cared for while I was able to listen to sermons about overextending myself, trusting in those we love, and how being connected to others didn't mean giving up yourself. UUCV has been a catalyst for healing, giving me the space to process emotions, grow, and become a stronger, more connected version of myself.

This community has not only transformed my life, but it has also touched the lives of my children. They've participated in the Our Whole Lives program, religious education classes, haunted houses, Easter egg hunts, and so much more. At UUCV, my children have learned not just to be good people, but to embrace and celebrate the differences that make each of us unique. I'm so thankful to those volunteers who nurture the youngest among us, creating a space where all ages can grow, heal, and connect.

UUCV is not just a church—it's a vibrant, loving community where I've formed connections, contributed, and deepened my sense of belonging. When I pledge each year, it's not about the budget; it's about expressing my gratitude for a community that gives so much to me and my family. That is why, this year, I've chosen to raise my annual pledge for the second year in a row.

Thank you for letting me share my story and for being part of this incredible community.

Being and Interbeing© by Rev. Kathryn A. Bert

It's lovely to be back with all of you again. I had three Sundays off which I rarely give myself except during a summer month, but my family was celebrating a series of milestones, including my 60th birthday (which took place last June actually) but there were reasons we took the time this spring. I'm grateful to Bonnie Long and my two colleagues Leslie Becknell Marx and Danielle Garrett for preaching in my absence, and of course, the invaluable Worship Associates who hold it all together. Thank you.

Generosity and Interdependence have been the themes these weeks, the same weeks as our Annual Pledge Campaign, where we raise money like public radio. We raise about the same dollar amount as our local public radio station except instead of raising it from thousands of listeners, we have to ask under two hundred families to provide the money for next year's budget. Public radio has other funding sources. We do not. Well, rentals make up about 1% of our budget – there's a whopping 8% from other sources. So it's a bigger ask. And I'm grateful to all of you who have responded. Just letting us know whether you're able to give or not helps our volunteers who will try to follow up if you don't let us know. Our goal last year and this was to get responses from everyone. I'm happy to report that we are welcoming and including a more diverse congregation, which includes some people who are living on the edge and don't have discretionary income to support the church – but getting back to us and responding is a generosity everyone can give, regardless of their particular response or pledge amount. I'm also grateful for those who recognize that they are in a financial position to give for those who can't and who are able to raise their pledge amounts to help us reach our goals.

If you're in a chalice circle, or if you've been in a small group that's had a pledge connector visit these last few weeks, you may have been invited into a conversation about generosity beyond financial. Bonnie's sermon focused on strategies for being generous to one's self, for taking care of ourselves in this really difficult political and economic environment. Her reminder that cultivating and nurturing generosity toward ourselves will help us sustain the resistance for the long haul. We're no good out there if we haven't taken care of what's in here. That was her particular take on generosity, and I appreciate it.

Leslie told that wonderful story of the umbrella that is gifted forward and the portable sanctuary it provides – the idea that we don't know why it's raining, but we do know we can keep dry under this portable sanctuary. Just seems like such a good allegory for this time – it's storming out there, it's raining and the weather is hostile, but by sticking together, we can find shelter and sanctuary here.

And then last Sunday, Danielle set up my remarks really well with her discussion of the false dichotomy of Man vs. Nature theme we've inherited and eco-fascism. She said, and I quote:

"If we're going to solve the climate crisis, our solutions need to be multi-layered and involve everyone. We're not going to reduce overconsumption by operating from a place of fear and scarcity, hoarding and competing for resources. We're going to do it through living more cooperatively, through mutual aid and shared support. We're going to have to tap into wisdom we've spent too long ignoring, wisdom from indigenous communities about how to live in right relationship with the land, or wisdom from queer and black and brown communities who have experienced caring for each other and surviving and thriving in the face of immense challenges. And we're going to have to really listen to those who disagree with us and understand the circumstances and beliefs that keep people from seeing the reality of the climate crisis and getting engaged in this work. If we're going to have any hope at all of stopping or reversing the damage we're doing to our planet, we have to stay in deep, accountable, and loving relationships with one another."

Interdependence is our theme this month. While interdependence is a fact of our life – we are interrelated, we "inter-are" as Thich Nhat Hanh says, we aren't always aware of our interbeing and we don't always act as if our actions have consequences for others. We're not always aware of our interdependence. Being interrelated is not the same as being in deep, accountable and loving

relationships with one another, being deliberately relational. One is the fact of our existence, the other is a response to that fact.

It is so clear to me that the effective response to the political and economic chaos being created is to stick together, form and sustain those deep, accountable and loving relationships. It's when we're divided we get lost in the storm, but together, we form that shelter and sanctuary where we can rebuild our strength and power and resist eco-fascism and just plain old fascism and all the systems of supremacy – racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism – the full spectrum of bias and hate. Social problems and the kyriarchy of oppressions are inescapably connected to environmental devastation. Kyriarchy is a new word for me, but refers to the interlocking set of cultural, economic and legal rules and systems that work to keep multiple groups oppressed for the benefit of a ruling group or class.

I mentioned that I've been gone the last three Sundays. For two of them, I was in Italy, a place I fell in love with two years ago when you granted me sabbatical, and I traveled there for the first time. This time, I returned with 11 members of my family, so excited I was to share the experience with them.

But I have to say that I had a more critical eye this time around. I love history and Western culture and walking through the Uffizi Gallery in Florence with its collection of art from the Middle Ages to the High Renaissance was breathtaking. They call it on their website "a living testament to a golden era that shaped Western culture." So, of course, this is where so much of our "white supremacy culture" began – and looking at this incredible art that defined beauty, one can see how whiteness and youth and physical health and maleness – Lord! I've never seen so many penises on display in my life! – how these qualities were valued and handed down to us and privileged above all else.

This is a statue of Hercules slaying the Centaur Nessus that survived Roman times into the late 16th century as headless body of the Centaur and was then reconstructed.

This is where those interlocking set of cultural, economic and legal rules and systems originate that work to keep multiple groups oppressed for the benefit of a ruling group or class. I was so torn – love the beauty of it all and hate the repercussions down the centuries.....

Michelangelo's David isn't in the Uffizi Gallery, but we saw him as well, and doesn't his body just epitomize the power of whiteness, maleness, youth, and physical beauty?

Contrast his beauty with the beauty of the older woman in front in this one. (I show a photo of me standing in front of the David)

Your reaction to the two different bodies might give you pause, as it does me.

I'm going to skip now from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment which along with the Reformation all had major impact on the development of Western culture and thought.

You may be familiar with philosopher, René Decartes, who said *cogito, ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am. I am a person because I can think inside my own head. It was a novel concept at the time. It also laid the groundwork for hyper-individualism.

There is another guiding concept about who we are—this one ancient. It is the Pan-African philosophy called *Ubuntu*, which says that: *I am, because we are.*

The first one views individuals as autonomous and independent, capable of social interaction. The second views individuals through social practices and reciprocal relationships.

The first one is actually problematic – I may be a person who can think but those thoughts were handed down to me from my family and culture and others. In fact, I wouldn't be able to think if I hadn't been raised by a community. When we mistake our thoughts for our personhood and take our thoughts too seriously, this is when we become inflexible and maintain that monocultural mindset, unable to distinguish our beliefs about the world from the world itself.

I am because we are celebrates our interdependence and is why Danielle last Sunday kept referring to our need to learn the “wisdom from indigenous communities about how to live in right relationship with the land, and wisdom from queer and black and brown communities who have experienced caring for each other and surviving and thriving in the face of immense challenges.”

South African Bishop and theologian, Desmond Tutu, said, “A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.”

Being interdependent is not the same as being in deep, accountable and loving relationships with one another, being deliberately relational. One is the fact of our existence, the other is a response to that fact.

Language is generative – that is, we create language and language is created because we are in relationship with others and need to communicate with them. It is ever-changing because our relationships are changing and our ideas are changing and we want to communicate new things in new ways.

That's why I'm so fond of Thich Nhat Hanh's language of interbeing, and recently heard this great term in Spanish, *nosotroficación*. It's not a word you'll find in a Spanish English dictionary, at least not yet, but is understood the same way you might understand it if I were to say “we-ification.”

Here's my best story to describe the we-ification of a situation. Getting off the bus in Honduras. I was living in the capital city, Tegucigalpa. I had a small apartment up on a hill and I had to take the bus to the very last stop on the hill and then walk to my place.

Now, the reason I had been moved to Tegucigalpa was because I had been assaulted in the village where I lived my first year – the village I talked about in March when I shared my Peace Corps experience. It was a big part of my experience, but I don't always share it, especially because I loved the people there so much and I know sexual assault happens everywhere. It seemed ironic that they moved me because the man who raped me wasn't even from the village and the village felt much safer overall than the big capital city of Tegucigalpa. Nevertheless, this background helps you understand my situation. Many men don't understand how vulnerable some women feel walking alone at night in a big city – but the violence is real and many of us are scared. So, I take the bus up the hill and then I have to walk to my apartment. About 6 women get off the bus at this stop and we walk together. The men get off the bus and walk alone, but the women stick together. It is an unspoken agreement, but basically we walk in a group as the individuals peel off to their homes, the group continues to the next home, and the next and

so on, until I'm safely returned to my apartment. Nosotroficación. Nosotros mean "we" and that walk has been we-ified.

This is what we need now: La nosotroficación.

It's not enough that we are interdependent, we need be deliberately relational. We need to acknowledge our interbeing and know how our actions affect others. We need to be in deep, accountable and loving relationships with one another. This is a radical act in this individualistic culture. This is what will save us, in my humble opinion.

So, I thank you again for responding to the pledge drive this year. Your response is an act of deliberate relationality. Your response affects volunteers and staff and this community. We gather here together to be that shelter and sanctuary in the storm – because it's rough out there, and you shouldn't walk alone.