

What if we act as if we love the future?
Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver
April 19, 2026

Welcome to the Nineties Club Marnie Dey

Marnie Dey was born on April 17, 1936, in North Vancouver, British Columbia. She grew up during the Great Depression, a time of widespread hardship that shaped her lifelong outlook. From an early age, she learned that even in difficult circumstances, “one can always wait for a brighter day.” Her family emphasized the importance of hard work, perseverance, and appreciation for the people around you—values that guided her throughout her life.

Marnie graduated from the University of British Columbia in 1957. She began her teaching career at North Vancouver High School, where she taught for two years. She benefited from, and deeply appreciated, the strong community support for children through schools and extracurricular groups in North Vancouver.

Marnie married her first husband, Ross, a chemical engineer with Standard Oil. His career required frequent relocations. Their first son, Graham, was born in April 1964. The family later moved to Michigan, then to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where they lived for two years and welcomed their second son, John, in 1968. After returning to Michigan, they eventually moved to Portland, Oregon, in 1973.

Committed to furthering her impact in education, Marnie earned a master’s degree in Special Education from Portland State University. She returned to teaching in Portland, working with third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students, before going on to be an assistant principal and then principal. In each role, she brought her deep commitment to student growth, teacher support, and educational equity.

In 1992, Marnie’s first husband, Ross, died of cancer. She lived alone for several years before meeting Larry through Rotary Club, where they were both active members. Their shared service led to a deeper connection, and they began dating during their second year of volunteering together. They married on July 18, 1998. Marnie had been among the first women allowed to join Rotary, and she and Larry became the first couple from their club to marry. They honeymooned in Tahiti and visited six additional islands. Marnie retired in 2000, after which she and Larry enjoyed traveling together.

Together, Marnie and Larry have three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, who are an important part of their lives.

Marnie Dey’s life reflects a deep and enduring commitment to education, service, and community. From her early lessons during the Depression to her leadership in schools and volunteer organizations, she consistently found ways to uplift others and make a lasting difference.

Her photo is already on display in the foyer. We have brought the gifts which have become traditional for this ritual - flowers and cookies! Marnie, we are honored to have you among us, grateful for your presence and pleased to know you. We know that you have weathered all manner of challenge and difficulty in getting to this point, and have taken a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction over the years. You have paid the dues and meet the rigorous qualifications. We welcome you to the 90 club!

What if we act as if we love the future? © by Rev. Kathryn A. Bert

Bridge over Troubled Water (that the choir just sang) is a song which assumes our survival is collective and our fates intertwined: *I'm on your side when times get rough. If you need a friend, I'm sailing right behind.* That's one of the ways in this song works so well – a reminder that we are not alone.

The readings this morning were taken from the book by Anaya Elizabeth Johnson, “marine biologist, policy expert, writer, and Brooklyn native. She is co-founder of the non-profit think tank Urban Ocean Lab, co-editor of the bestselling climate anthology *All We Can Save*, and author of *What If We Get it Right?: Visions of Climate Futures*. She is in love with climate solutions.” I wanted to give you a taste of this last book, which is really inspiring. So I shared with you sections from the introduction and the conclusion. In the middle, Laura read a Climate Oath, crafted by Johnson and Oana Stănescu, a Romanian architect, curator, writer and educator based in New York and Berlin. She is co-founder of the Blueprints of Justice studio at MIT.

‘Do no harm.’ ..the need for a new Hippocratic Oath in the face of climate crisis was repeatedly suggested by the people Johnson interviewed for this book. So, she worked with Oana Stănescu to draft such an oath – the Climate Oath – as an opening to further conversation. They suggest we each draft our own. I thought I’d shape my remarks this morning around their Climate Oath, as – sort of like last week when I explored adrienne marie brown’s work– these are the theological bones that undergird our actions in the world.

“First, move from “I” to “we.” *I'm on your side when times get rough. If you need a friend, I'm sailing right behind.*

“We will expand our sense of interdependence.” JETPIG would remind us that I stands for interdependence. It is one of the values Unitarian Universalists hold up. (If you don’t know what I mean by JETPIG – here is the mascot we use – this pig with a jetpack on their back, powered by love. But basically, the name JETPIG is an acronym for words we use to describe our values. The I stands for interdependence.) Realize that just because I is the penultimate letter in JETPIG’s name, doesn’t mean it is second to last in importance. All the values are important, but I would say that this Interdependence is perhaps the most important – besides love, the fuel that drives the jetpack.

“We will rein in our sense of individualism.” Mainstream American culture is pretty big on “individualism” – and really, we get in trouble with those -isms.

Individuality is good, but individualism is a distorted understanding of where the individual begins and ends. Individualism, celebrating self-reliance, fosters the myth that we do exist apart and alone and can rely on oneself, denying the reality that none of us can survive alone, that we are connected to others, and influence and are influenced by the groups to which we belong. Reining in our sense of individualism is good for the planet, good for our neighbors, and good for ourselves. The more we recognize our interdependence, the more we will consider the needs of others to whom we are connected.

This reminds me of Frederic Muir’s 2012 Berry Street Essay called *From iChurch to Beloved Community: Ecclesiology and Justice*. What he means by ichurch is a church where individuals put their needs first over and above the needs of others. Beloved Community is, of course, the opposite – a vision in which

all people share in the wealth of the earth. We reconcile our needs with the needs of others and make decisions promoting the common good.

April is Neurodiversity Celebration Month and I want to thank the volunteers who put up information about neurodiversity on the bulletin board in the foyer. In an ichurch, we would probably ignore neurological differences since they affect fewer of us. In Beloved community, however, we try to include everyone. This leads to strange compromises in our liturgy – such as the morning greeting in which you are invited to engage in completely opposite behaviors – either close your eyes and focus on your breath, or greet your neighbor visually or with a word. But those options are there, so that everyone might find a moment of centering that suits them – either focusing on the self and the breath, or grounding yourself in community by looking at or greeting others. We’re not inviting you to do both. You choose, and hopefully you will choose the one that feels best to you.

We will ask, “What should we do, together?” Then, of course, we seek to find collective action, things we can do together. At church, these are activities carried out by the Green Team, the Maplewood Mosely Community Garden, the Litter Pickers and more. But the list is endless of things we can do together to help save the planet. I’ll get to more later on in this sermon.

“Survival is collective, our fates are intertwined.”

“Second, do no harm. – this is like the Hippocratic oath, but about the Earth.

“We will restore and heal, not pollute and deplete.” One of my favorite interviews and chapters in this book was with Leah Penniman, a self-proclaimed “Black Kreyol farmer, mother, soil nerd, author, and food justice activist who founded Soul Fire Farm with the mission to end racism in the food system and reclaim our ancestral connection to land. She facilitates food sovereignty programs including farmer trainings, food distribution, and organizing toward equity in the food system.” Here she is talking about seeds as metaphors:

“Our ancestral grandmothers in West Africa were surrounded by war, kidnapping, enslavement—and finally were forced into these transatlantic slave ships with no report-backs. And amidst this chaos and this horror they somehow found the audacity to gather up the seeds they’d been saving for generations—their okra, molokhia, Levant cotton, black rice, melon, Amara kale, basil—and braided these seeds into their hair as insurance, because they believed against odds in a future on soil. They were braiding hope into their hair. They believed that their descendants would exist to inherit the seed. The seed was this precious legacy representing generations of selective breeding and microclimate adaptation and cultural cohesion. This was what they brought and passed on, and what we have inherited and have a duty to steward for our future generations.”

I love the chapters on farming and how re-embracing the practices of regenerative agriculture will nurture healthy soil. This interview with Leah Penniman follows an interview with Brian Donahue, a farmer and environmental historian in Gill, Massachusetts where he raises pastured beef and pork, pumpkins and timber on Bascom Hollow Farm. He follows the history of New England farming from the regenerative indigenous practices, through the arrival of the Puritans and decimation of the land, to attempts at restoring it. He spent three years working with a regional network of organizations to

create something called a New England Food Vision, where they are imagining how to grow more of New England's food closer to home, while regenerating the soil and keeping sufficient forest land.

"We will regenerate ecosystems and our own resolve." Says the Climate Oath.

"We will live lightly, as part of the Earth."

"Accountability, generosity, and sweetness."

"Third, less is more." This is so counter-cultural, counter to American dominant/dominance culture where more is always more, and yet it is more which is killing us and our planet. Less is really more, if we wish to sustain life on the planet.

"We will expand our creativity and contract our consumerism." I like this pairing of expanding our creativity as we contract our consumerism, because it does just take a little creativity to repurpose the things we already have to suit the more we think we need.

"We will conserve, and distinguish between needing and wanting." One of the great benefits of our recycling shed and recycling in general is that it forces us to look at every item we've bought, the packaging it is in, and deal with it.

Living in a remote village in Honduras, as I did, while serving in the Peace Corps, I really learned to contend with the garbage we humans produce. There was no garbage infrastructure, no garbage truck coming through to take away my trash. There were really no good solutions for dealing with the things humans manufacture, the plastics, the glass, the cardboard... my neighbors threw it in the ocean. I buried it. But there was no good solution, except conservation and distinguishing between needing and wanting. Did I really need this thing that came in this hard-on-the-earth packaging?

I still remember the story told by a fellow Peace Corps volunteer who lived in the Comayagua region of Honduras. He was tired of burying his trash. His neighbors just threw it on the ground and he would paint this picture of the hot wind blowing garbage around all day. So one time, at a hard moment, when life seems too difficult to navigate in a second language on foreign soil with no rules, as he finished a jar of peanut butter one morning, he simply threw it out his window. About an hour later he heard this horrific squeal, like a pig being slaughtered, only it was a pig running around his yard with a peanut butter jar stuck on their snout – I don't know how you can make a squealing noise with a jar on your snout, but that was his story. He spent half the day chasing that pig to get the jar off his snout and bury it in the ground, which was the best solution in a world of no good options.

"We will be gentle with our own imperfections and others'." And, of course, when there is no good solution, we must be gentle with ourselves for the solutions we do find.

"There is such a thing as enough. Basta."

"Possibility exists. This is a world of our making." It says in their Climate Oath.

Of course, most of us don't feel like it is a world of our making. It feels like we inherited a bum deal and that there is little we can do to change it. However, the best aspect of this book is the wide variety of people Johnson interviews in so many different areas, with so many concrete steps they are taking. I have to say, as a soon to be retired person, I was particularly moved by the chapter where she interviewed Bill McKibbin, founder of the organization called The Third Act which organizes "people

who are in their third act of life, people who are probably retired, are in their sixties or seventies or eighties and wanting to make sure they do their part to leave behind a habitable planet.” “Fossils against Fossil Fuels” is a banner they’ve carried in protests against banks which invest in fossil fuels.

McKibbon says “Put simply, at the moment the easy supply of money from the banking system to Big Oil drives the ongoing climate crisis. Capitalism is straight up behaving like a suicide machine.”

And Johnson asks him, “What would it look like if we rewired this ‘suicide machine’ to be part of the process of healing ecosystems and supporting life?” and he provides all kinds of very boring, very unsexy answers. He says,

“One of the things we need are lots of people willing to do quite dull work... We’ve been training people up in particular to try and work on public utility commissions in different states because they’re extremely important and unbelievably dull... /The/ public utility commission’s role should be to represent the public in its dealings with utilities in setting rates, in making policy about what kind of power plants they’re going to build, and so on. That’s what they were originally set up to do and that’s what they should be doing. But of course, almost universally they’ve been captured by the utilities that they theoretically regulate. And one of the biggest reasons for that is no one pays attention. No one goes to their meetings. No one covers them in the newspaper.”

And so he’s training older folks, who can take their knitting and crossword puzzles to the meetings and pay attention. I love it. Truly, there is a part to play for everyone in this book and on this planet.

“We can remake it, remix it, restore it, rebalance it.” The Oath says, **“The path of least resistance is only one of many paths.”**

It is the path of least resistance to continue to celebrate individualism and act as if we are self-sufficient, to believe that my survival has nothing to do with yours. It is the path of least resistance to continue this extractive economy and deplete our soil and our resources for personal gain. It is the path of least resistance continue to buy more, more, more to keep the economy “strong” without regard to the impact on the Earth and our survival. But, the path of least resistance is only one of many paths. We are in a moment of history in which more resistance is required. That resistance takes work, but is our only option.

I will be part of getting it right.

We will be part of getting it right.

Oana Stănescu and Anaya Elizabeth Johnson suggest that each of us create an Earth Oath, based on the Hippocratic oath to do no harm. What would yours contain? The original Hippocratic oath begins with swearing to the healing gods. They chose to swear to the elements of life of Earth they hold most dear.

This is a tried and true strategy of beginning with what we are most grateful for. They begin,

“On the majesty of turquoise seas, and fireflies, and aspen trees, On the honor of our parents, our ancestors, and humans-to-come, On the wonders of laughter and sunshine, I make these devotions to climate solutions for my community and for our magnificent planet:”

I might quote Peter Mayer and say,

“I give thanks to the waves upholding me,
hail the great winds urging me on,

“greet the infinite sea before me,
sing the sky my sailor’s song:”

I invite you to name in your heart the part of the Earth and your existence upon it for which you are most grateful...