

“Singing a Tradition That Lives”

Reflections by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull
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There was once a time when you had not yet tasted chocolate. There was once a time when you had not yet inhaled salt air. There was once a time when you had not yet heard music. There was once a time when you had not yet sung “Silent Night.” There was once a time when you not yet sung some of the songs that we’re singing this morning – earlier this morning.

Ours is a living tradition. We’re ever in search for truth and meaning. We encourage spiritual growth, which means movement and change, in our congregations. We light a chalice whose flame reflects the dynamism of our faith. The hymnal that we’ve used for the past fourteen years as Unitarian Universalists is called *Singing the Living Tradition*.

There are those Sundays when I burst into your comfort zone with a hymn that isn’t really so new, since it’s been more or less dormant in our otherwise familiar hymnal, but it’s new to you. Then I look out across these pews and catch on your faces confusion, bewilderment, alarm, sometimes even borderline annoyance. So where does that leave us?

This morning, we’re blending old and new, with help from our choir and our pianist, with inspiration from our choir and our pianist and a guest oboist, and with stories of how some of our hymns came into being. We’re tapping the riches of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the hymnal that holds so many hymns to which we’ve grown accustomed and so many hymns we’ve barely tried. We’re tapping the stories gathered by Jacqui James in *Between the Lines: Sources for Singing the Living Tradition*. We’re tapping the gems of *Singing the Journey: A Supplement to Singing the Living Tradition*.

Your favorite songs, your favorite hymns, were once brand new to you. Over time, they became familiar, your favorites even. How? Because you dared to sing them for the first time. Then you sang them a second time and a third time. You learned them, and many of them you learned to love.

I invite you. I encourage you, as we continue our service of singing a tradition that lives, to raise your voices. Wrong notes are welcome. High volume is welcome. Sing like you’ve never sung. Ours is a living tradition. Let’s sing a tradition that lives.

Sources:

Between the Lines: Sources for Singing the Living Tradition, Edited by Jacqui James, Second Edition, Skinner House Books, Boston, 1998.

Singing the Living Tradition, Beacon Press, Boston, Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993.

Singing the Journey: A Supplement to Singing the Living Tradition, Unitarian Universalist Association, Boston, 2005.