

**UCC Chalice Circles — May 2026**  
**Survival Is Not a Wasteland. It Is a Dance Party.**

**Chalice Lighting**

We are not alone. We are this flame, ancient as the stars, new as the vulnerable spark.  
We are not alone.  
We are this chalice, rimmed by the spiral dance of searching.  
We are not alone.  
We are the light soaring, the shadow deepening, the dance between them.  
We are not alone. —Michael DeVernon Boblett

**Optional Video**

Alvin Ailey “Wade in the Water” from *Revelations*, performed at Jacob’s Pillow, June 1988, one minute:  
<https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/ailey-ii/wade-in-the-water-from-revelations/>

**or Optional Dance Exercise**

Mirror: Please modify these instructions to include the abilities of everyone in the group, and skip the exercise if needed. Explain that participation is optional and people can opt in. Break the group into duos or trios. Within each small group, quickly decide on a leader and a follower, then someone starts some music. (A suggestion—find Eva Cassidy’s version of “Wade in the Water,” 4 minutes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-hKDYQ6F54>). Each follower tries to mirror the leader’s movements. If this is difficult for some participants, use touch with permission between the participants to mirror one another’s movements. Eventually, switch roles, or allow the roles to become fluid. Mix up the groups and do the exercise again.

**Check-in**

Without crosstalk or interruption, please check in with the group, describing where you are in your life now, noticing what needs to be shared in order to be fully present in our circle.

**Reading 1**

Dance asserts presence and refuses dehumanization. Every flexed foot, every percussive step, every contraction carries the weight of history and the promise of a future where Black bodies are seen, valued, and free. Alvin Ailey’s *Revelations* is not just a performance—it is a reclamation of space. Rennie Harris’ work in hip hop is not just choreography—it is cultural documentation. Today’s Black dancers are not just artists—they are archivists, revolutionaries, and healers.

For Black dancers, community is not optional—it is survival. ... The Africanist aesthetic in dance inherently carries a narrative of resilience and defiance. Activist and philosopher Angela Davis similarly reminds us that communal artistic practices are essential for surviving systemic inequities. Black dance has always been a space of collective healing—whether in the nightclub, the church, the street, or the studio.

In a world where Black dancers are often isolated within predominantly white institutions, this sense of community is revolutionary. When Black dancers gather, they create more than choreography; they create belonging, affirmation, and power. — Gregory King, “Black Dance as Activism, Resistance and Healing,” “Dance Magazine” (dancemagazine.com)

**Reading 2**

"How can we sing songs of justice in a strange land?"

A lot of us are living in a world where this is a strange land. When you live daily with oppression, you live in a strange land. When you live in a situation that's overwhelming, you live in a strange land. How can we sing songs in a strange land? How can we sing songs of triumph in a strange land? How can we sing songs of victory in a strange land? How can we sing songs of justice in a strange land?

Don't look in the wrong direction.

We've got to look in the right direction — not backwards — forward! Don't look north, don't look south, don't look east, don't look west. Look up! Up above my head, I hear music in the air. What kind of music? I made another day's journey and I'm so glad. Look up! Pharaoh's army drowned in the midst of the Red Sea. Look up! Pharaoh who? Pharaoh Mussolini. Pharaoh Stalin. Pharaoh Pol Pot. Pharaoh George Wallace. Pharaoh Lester Maddox. All of them gone. Pharaoh's armies will drown in the midst! Look up!

Keep the instruments that brought you from that place to this one.

Because of the tormentors, because of the oppressor, because of the Pharaoh, they hung their harps in the willows and in the poplars. They got rid of the very stuff that brought them even to that point. I come from a cultural setting that says the same stuff that brought you will carry you on. They got rid of the harps! What? The harps would have reminded them: I am strong. I am invincible ... I made another day's journey and I'm glad. In spite of my depression, in spite of my loneliness, I'm so glad to be alive. If they had brought the harps they would remember. You better hold on to what brought you.

You better hold on. Don't throw the harps in the tree. Don't throw it away. You hold on what brought you. If you are a Pagan, and Paganism has brought you, you better hold on. If you are a Buddhist, and the teachings of the Buddha have strengthened you and brought you, you better hold on. If you are a Muslim, and the teachings of the Quran have made you stronger and better, you better hold on. If you are Jewish, you better look at the Torah again, you better understand the Talmud, you better hold on to the stuff that brought you. My prophecy is, it's going to get worse before it gets better, and we're going to need all of us to gain the victory. Hold on to what brought you. Sing songs of justice in a strange land. — Rev C. W. Dawson, Sept 18, 2022 Sermon, UCC

### **Reading 3**

"I became alive once more. At the dances I was one of the most untiring and gayest. One evening a cousin of Sasha, a young boy, took me aside. With a grave face, as if he were about to announce the death of a dear comrade, he whispered to me that it did not behoove an agitator to dance. Certainly not with such reckless abandon, anyway. It was undignified for one who was on the way to become a force in the ... movement. My frivolity would only hurt the Cause. — Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*

"If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution." — Often misattributed to Emma Goldman

### **Questions to Consider**

1. How do you feel about "singing songs in a strange land" – bringing joy to struggles or difficult situations? Is this hard for you to imagine, or is this a skill you feel you can develop?
2. Dance can be a performance, but can also be personal, meditative, experiential and expressive – even transformative. What is your experience with dance and how it makes you feel?
3. How do you feel about celebrating when faced with a world full of oppression and injustice?
4. How can we be the archivists, revolutionaries, and healers of our time, while dancing during the revolution?

### **Sitting in Silence**

We will sit in silence for 5 minutes. Take this time to center yourself and reflect on the readings, questions, and theme, considering what you would like to share with the group.

### **Sharing/Deep Listening**

Please listen deeply to others and share from your own experience and thoughts on the readings, questions, or theme without crosstalk or interruption. Please ensure everyone gets an equal opportunity to participate.

### **Second Sharing/Crosstalk**

As time allows, after listening to others, do you have additional thoughts to share?

**Check-Out**

How are you feeling now, as you leave our circle? What are you taking with you? How can we best support you in the weeks ahead?

**Extinguishing the Chalice**

Do a dance of freedom and liberation

Reminding us that

We are whole and holy

We are loved beyond all measure.

—Jami Yandle