

I Pledge My Allegiance to Interdependence, Rev. Laura Smidzik

Linda and I bought season tickets to the first season of the PWHL—the professional women’s hockey league. Linda was raised playing and watching sports. My family watched some of the Superbowl and sometimes we watched the Olympics but that was it. So, attending sporting events is a more recent experience that I came to in my early adulthood with Linda. I love going to women’s sports events. They remind me that the world *is* changing and I get teary-eyed at every hockey game when the camera scans the crowd and highlights images of *extremely exuberant* teams of young girls in their hockey jerseys up on the jumbotron in the center of the arena. The energy in that space is unmatched by anything else in my daily life!

There is a feeling of community at women’s sporting events. There are lots of families and kids and my guess is that a lot less alcohol is consumed so their crowds are predominantly sober, kind, and enthusiastic without being overbearing. When I brought my friend Rev. Kate Tucker to a Lynx game she was struck by how communal it is as we cheer and jeer in tandem. One of my least favorite parts of sporting events is the opening when players line up, the lights dim, we are all asked to stand and remove our hats and listen to the national anthem. I feel uncomfortable because I dislike the mixing of sports and national pride. An Atlantic magazine article calls it “The Problem with Mandatory Patriotism in Sports” saying, “pro leagues shouldn’t strong-arm teams into playing ‘The Star-Spangled Banner.’”

It is not that I am anti-American, it is just that I dream of a world without borders. I bought into the song “This land is made for you and me” in the broadest possible sense of that phrase. Capitalism, nationalism, and protectionism are all tangled up in one. It makes us close ourselves off to others and fall too easily into an “us” and “them” dichotomy.

When I read the words of Robin Wall Kimmer from *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* I felt myself take a deep breath and an internal “yes!” Kimmer says:

What would it be like to be raised on gratitude, to speak to the natural world as a member of the democracy of the species, to raise a pledge of interdependence? No declarations of political loyalty are required, just a response to a repeated question: “Can we agree to be grateful for all that is given?”

I long to be in a country where we leave the Star Spangled banner and the image of “our flag” still standing behind and replace it with a pledge of interdependence forever reminding us that we need one another. Political loyalty has been used in times of unity, but far too often as a means of oppression, marginalization, and division. As we focus on the theme reflecting a core UU value of interdependence this month, I hope we can find openings in our hearts and imagination that help build connections to one another, people outside of our congregation, and the sacred earth *that sustains us*.