

Compassion—June 2014

UUFVB Covenant Groups

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community, and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Reading

Compassion is not an abstraction but a sharing of our own and others' pain and joy, says Matthew Fox. The root of the word compassion (Latin: cum patior) means to suffer with; to share solidarity with. Compassion is not sentiment, but making justice and doing works of mercy. Fox says, "No correlation exists between religion and compassion in contemporary society." Compassion is "a spirituality and a way of living and walking through life. It is a way we treat all there is in life—ourselves, our imaginations and dreams, our neighbors, our enemies, our air, our water, our earth, our animals, our death, our space and our time." (Matthew Fox, *A Spirituality Named Compassion*)

Topic Exploration

A Spirituality Named Compassion is the title of a book by a former priest named Matthew Fox. Fox was born in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1940. He entered the Roman Catholic Church's Dominican order in 1967. He received master's degrees in both philosophy and theology from the Aquinas Institute of Theology and later a Ph.D. in spirituality from the *Institut Catholique de Paris*. Then he began teaching in Catholic universities. He began straying from Catholic orthodox theology and in 1983, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI, ordered a two year investigation into his teaching and writing by the Church. The Church found in Fox's favor. Fox's position is that the meaning of compassion has been forgotten and distorted. He says it is togetherness and sharing and relieving the pain of others. Some scholars say that this outlook is close to that first taught by Jesus. Cardinal Ratzinger rejected the findings. In 1988 Fox wrote a public letter to Cardinal Ratzinger entitled, "Is the Catholic Church Today a Dysfunctional Family?" Cardinal Ratzinger forbade Fox to teach or lecture for a year. In 1993, Fox was expelled from the Dominican Order.

Questions / Sharing

1. Fox says that compassion is not pity, but is action, is a way of life. How do you express compassion towards yourself and others?
2. Fox claims that compassion is important to wounded and oppressed peoples. It is not condescension to the poor, the weak, the oppressed. It acknowledges their rights. Compassion is passionate and caring. It is not ascetic detachment or abstract contemplation. He says we need to make working and living situations more compassionate, economic systems..and the relationship of first and third world peoples more compassionate." How can we do this?

3. Compassion seeks to know and to understand the interconnections of all things. We are dependent on the animals, the plants, the rainforest, the rain and the sun and other people. Compassion alone can save us and our planet, Fox claims. How does compassion for others and our environment lead you to environmental action?
4. According to Fox, compassion “is the heart of the Divinity...the best name for God is Compassion.” Is compassion a major component of the world’s leading religions? Fox says it is not. Discuss. Does this mean, “Do unto others as you would have the do unto you”?
5. Some claim that the more you know about people and their lives, the easier it is to have compassion. Do you agree? Give examples from your own life.

Check-out and reflection on today’s session

Closing Reading

“Compassion is the ultimate and most meaningful embodiment of emotional maturity. It is through compassion that a person achieves the highest peak and deepest reach in his or her search for self-fulfillment.” --Arthur Jersild, *The Psychology of Adolescence*

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping