

## Beliefs—UUFVB Covenant Groups—October 2015

### 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

Some beliefs are like walled gardens. They encourage exclusiveness, and the feeling of being especially privileged.

*Other beliefs are expansive and lead the way into wider and deeper sympathies.*

Some beliefs are like shadows, clouding children's days with fears of unknown calamities.

*Other beliefs are like sunshine, blessing children with the warmth of happiness.*

Some beliefs are divisive, separating the saved from the unsaved, friends from enemies.

*Other beliefs are bonds in a world community, where sincere differences beautify the pattern.*

(Reading #657, first half, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Sophia Lyon Fahs)

#### Topic Exploration

We early on recognize chemical impulses that we interpret as true needs, then we absorb social conventions that we internalize as belief-structures. From this base we construct our beliefs about reality and govern our behavior accordingly. But what we call real, or what we think of as a given, is actually constructed, it's part of our fabricated world view. (adapted from *Spiral Dynamics* by Don Beck)

Emory University Psychologist Drew Weston: "Human beings seek information and draw conclusions based on what we believe to be true. In other words, we start not from information, but from belief. Research indicates that, given the alternatives, we draw conclusions based on how we think we'll FEEL if one conclusion or the other turns out to be true." Weston calls this a "design flaw of the human brain."

"In considering a new idea or position, we need to question our initial assumptions, particularly our own." the Rev. Maureen Killoran reminds us, "But identifying assumptions behind any argument requires the endangered arts of taking time, paying attention, and being certain of the validity of the facts or the values or the information on which we base our conclusions. On which we base our lives." (UUFVB sermon 1/24/10)

#### Questions / Sharing

Our lives unfold with a sensitive dependence on initial conditions. By unconsciously absorbing ideas and attitudes from parents, teachers, religious and political leaders, we arrive at a default belief in a particular world view.

1. How would you describe the beliefs that form the framework for your "default" world view? Has that framework served you well throughout your life?

Consciously adopting new beliefs can make your life amazing. Randomly or unconsciously adopting beliefs can make your life hell. When you actively seek out powerful beliefs, you can design a life that other people think is only for savants and outliers. If only they knew that the beliefs that shape your life are more like clothes you can try on or take off at anytime. The difference with beliefs is that the

“store” you get beliefs from is free and virtually unlimited. Your only confinement is your willingness to relax your assumptions and remain curious. (adapted from a blog on belief)

2. How and why did you consciously change a belief? How willing are you to challenge your beliefs and see what happens?

3. We must be careful who our teachers are. We particularly need to protect ourselves from the barrage of incoming information from television programs, advertising and news bites. How do we tell the difference between opinion and fact, reality and fiction, and adapt our belief systems accordingly?

4. The cumulative layers of religious belief are ancient myth, oral history, and metaphor mortared together by numerous translations, political expediency, and profitable salesmanship. These layers need to be decoded. (Sheila Harty, *Absolute Nothingness and the Absence of Meaning*, a theological essay, 2011.) How do we approach the effort to “decode”?

### **Closing Reading**

Some beliefs are like blinders, shutting off the power to choose one’s own direction.

*Other beliefs are like gateways opening wide vistas for exploration.*

Some beliefs weaken a person’s selfhood. They blight the growth of resourcefulness.

*Other beliefs nurture self-confidence and enrich the feeling of personal worth.*

Some beliefs are rigid, like the body of death, impotent in a changing world.

*Other beliefs are pliable, like the young sapling, ever growing with the upward thrust of life.*

(Reading #657, second half, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Sophia Lyon Fahs)

“We are a religious community. And the whole point of a religious community is to help us ground our beliefs in our values, and from those values-based beliefs, to take action—to put our passion into action for the healing and transformation of our world.” (the Rev. Maureen Killoran, in a sermon Jan. 24, 2010, at UUFVB)

### **Check- out and reflection on today’s session**

#### **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**