

Trust--UUFVB Covenant Groups—June 2016

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: A dictionary definition of trust: "Confidence, a reliance or resting of the mind on the integrity, voracity, justice, friendship, or other sound principles of a person or thing."

To place trust in something or someone often involves letting go of the past. We learn to distrust based on very real past experiences. The problem is we then apply those lessons to new situations which may or may not be worthy of our trust.

The poet Hafiz writes:

What
Do sad people have in
Common?
It seems
They have all built a shrine
To the past
And often go there
And do a strange wail and
Worship.
What is the beginning of
Happiness?
It is to stop being
So religious
Like
That.

Fear limits us. Trust allows us to go forward into new territory. The theologian Gordon Kauffman says (paraphrased): "If we could not trust anything, or anyone, we would not be able to get out of bed in the morning. We would be afraid that ground would not be there beneath our feet." (Maj-Britt Johnson, Community Church of Chapel Hill)

Topic Exploration

How and what we trust develops in stages. How far we develop is individually determined both by temperament and life experience. James Fowler, in his classic book, *Stages of Faith: the Psychology of Human Development*, posits that where we place our trust is the ultimate definition of our faith. He identifies six stages of Faith/Trust development.

1. **Stage One:** The Self-Absorbing Mirror—usually ages 2-7. Trust is placed in what a child sees and hears from parents or guardians.
2. **Stage Two:** The Literalist—Age 8 to adolescence. Trust is shifted from family and is now placed in stories and explanations that are understood literally. What is written is what is true.

3. Stage Three: The Loyalist—early adulthood. Trust is shifted from stories and explanations and is now placed in the need to belong to a group, and the need for approval. Contradictions in stories and beliefs might be seen, but the need for approval and belonging deadens that insight.
4. Stage Four: The Searcher—young adulthood or into mid-thirties or forties, *if ever*. The searcher no longer trusts the old authorities or the group. Now, the searchers trust their own need to search out new answers and create a new framework of meaning. Searchers examine their own experience to discover what is true in their personal lives.
5. Stage Five: The Seer—midlife, *if ever*. We stop the search for a new framework of meaning, and trust instead paradox, ambiguity, and uncertainty. We trust that clear answers can no longer be found.
6. Stage Six: The Universal Spirit. These persons trust completely the universality of all life. They are propelled by an inclusiveness of community, a radical commitment to social justice, and a selfless passion for a transformed world. Their insight is often not a choice, but a call from the Divine or from the demands of history.

Questions / Sharing

1. Most people visit the “shrine to the past” that Hafiz talks about at least once a day, most of us a lot more. In your life, during the times when you decide to stop being that kind of “religious,” and to step into new territory, in what or whom are you placing your trust?
2. What do you think of James Fowler’s premise that where we place our trust forms the basis of faith?
3. Where are you on the ladder of trust development? If you are close to someone whose level differs greatly from yours, describe how you bridge (or are unable to bridge) issues that arise from that difference.
4. What life circumstances might cause a person to get stuck in one of the earlier stages of trust development? Give examples.
5. What does it mean to be trustworthy?
6. Are you trustworthy? Can people put their faith in you?

Closing Reading

Trust man a little bit more,
believe that he can see truth, worth and beauty
more easily than the sunflower can find the sun.
Believe that there are no plants that do not put forth
buds and blossoms for the spring, that there is no
inner man whose beauty does not grow toward truth. (Chang Ming Ch’uan)

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