

Ethics--- UUFVB Covenant Groups--- January 2018

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?

Centering: Find a stillness, hold a stillness, let the moment of silence ease your soul.

Opening Readings

If there is no God, everything is permissible. (*Fyodor Dostoyevsky*)

The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. (*UU Minister Theodore Parker*)

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. (*Samuel Johnson*)

Introductory Questions

- A. What was the first ethical teaching you learned from your parents?
- B. Describe an ethical question that disturbs you.
- C. Describe an ethical principal by which you try to live.

Topic Exploration

Richard S. Gilbert says, "Religion is a core of meanings and values out of which one lives one's life. Ethical principles and moral behavior grow naturally from the soil of a person's religious beliefs. Ethics is simply the way in which we treat people."

Some agree that our current moral state could be described by Walter Harrington's cynical essay, "Has Truth Gone Out of Style?" It appeared in 1988 in the *Washington Post*.

"Expediency...whatever sells, is the final test...This is what modern people have sadly concluded: Greed is the universal motive, sincerity is a pose, honesty is for chumps, altruism is selfishness with a neurotic twist, and morality is for kids and saints and fools."

Questions/Sharing

1. Does the end justify the means? Parents inadvertently find marijuana while looking through their teenager's dresser drawer. Although they suspected that their child was using drugs, they are deeply conflicted about using evidence obtained through a breach of privacy to confront their child.

Does the end justify the means in this instance?

Does parental concern for a young person's welfare override respect for privacy?

What if the child is 18? What if it's your 30-year-old brother? Is it all the same?

2. It is sometimes said that UU's believe in the "10 Suggestions" rather than the Ten Commandments. What do you think? What assumptions about UU's underlie this belief?

One perceptive UU child said of her Christian friend, "Cindy has Jesus to help her be good, but I have to be good all by myself." Comment.

3. Do you find ethics mostly situational (dependent on the circumstances) or do you believe there is some sort of universal moral code? Does that code vary with time, place, and circumstance? For example, is murder ever justified?
4. Can a universal moral code exist without a belief in God? If not God, what might form the basis of such a code? (reason, inner knowing, the law?)
5. Is it ethical if you do the *right* thing for the *wrong* reason? For example, give generously to charity to make yourself look good? What other examples occur to you?
6. What do you do when your values conflict? Give examples.

Closing Reading

It is hard to escape the tyranny of childhood, reward and punishment. ...In the next step we turn to God and feel that somehow we deserve our own misfortune. ..People must finally come to the place in their maturity which makes them do the good thing because it is good. Not because it is a command, even a divine command, but because the good deed, the good thought, the good life, is in itself good. When this is our awareness, then the whole matter of reward and punishment, approval and disapproval becomes strangely irrelevant. Shall I be good because of some reward, because the virtuous act pays dividends? No! I shall be good because it is good. (*Howard Thurman*)

Check-out and Reflection on Today's Session

How were your needs for connection and spiritual growth met by this session? Do you feel your voice was heard?

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