

Democracy--UUFVB Covenant Groups—November 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 this moment of silence ease your soul.

Opening Reading

“The fact that liberty depended on honest elections was of the utmost importance to the patriots who founded our nation and wrote the Constitution. They knew that corruption destroyed the prime requisite of constitutional liberty: an independent legislature free from any influence other than that of the people. Applying these principles to modern times, we can make the following conclusions: To be successful, representative government assumes that elections will be controlled by the citizenry at large, not by those who give the most money. Electors must believe that their vote counts. Elected officials must owe their allegiance to the people, not to their own wealth or to the wealth of interest groups that speak only for the selfish fringes of the whole community.” *(Barry Goldwater)*

Topic Exploration and Sharing

1. Power to the people. The entire point of a democracy is to place power in the hands of the people, thereby protecting their interests. Elected officials are given authority to make policy decisions, so people choose persons whom they believe will promote their positions. However, it is the responsibility of the citizenry to become informed on issues and to exercise their voting power.

- a. As trust in government has waned, civic awareness and participation has declined. Do you believe this statement? Do you think this trend can be reversed?
- b. Did you have a course in civics when you were in school? How important is civic education?

2. Limited powers with checks and balances. Public power is dispersed between three branches of government, legislative, executive, and judicial. However, each branch may be subject to the power of courts to declare actions to be contrary to the constitution and, therefore, null and void. Further, the due process of law and leadership succession through elections is meant to ensure limits on consolidation of power.

- a. How is the increasing politicization of the Supreme Court a threat to our traditional system of checks and balances?
- b. What are your thoughts on term limits?

3. Majority rule, minority protection. A majority group controls the decision-making process, but an influential individual can control the majority group. Because people are prone to make emotional decisions, a charismatic leader often can persuade the majority to vote a certain way, even if that ends up not being in the interests of the population as a whole. Also, a considerable amount of money can be leveraged to persuade voters to support an idea or cause, giving advantage to the wealthy and corporations.

- a. Describe your experiences being part of a minority / majority, or privileged/excluded group. How did American democracy work for you under those circumstances?

- b. Might you have any effect on modifying the power of charismatic leaders or their wealthy supporters to control elections? What if the charismatic leader were someone you admired?

4. Freedom of Expression. Freedom of expression, the free flow of information and of ideas, is critical to enable citizens to make informed decisions. Freedom of expression includes freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and freedom of thought. In countries where the government controls the press, religious organizations, or businesses, democracy cannot exist.

- a. Are you aware of it when media reflect a certain political viewpoint or provide unbalanced coverage of individuals or events? Do you choose to get your news from media outlets whose editorial comment closely resembles your point of view? Is this a good idea?
- b. How confident are you that you can separate fact from opinion, or attest to the truth of something you hear or read?

5. Principled participants. Certain traits of private character such as moral responsibility, self-discipline, and respect for individual worth and human dignity, are essential to the well-being of the society. Further, certain traits of public character such as civility, respect for law, civic mindedness, critical mindedness, persistence, and a willingness to negotiate and compromise are indispensable for the vitality of American constitutional democracy.

- a. How would you rate the levels of private and public character of our present representatives?
- b. Discuss inherent conflicts of values and principles: liberty and equality (liberty to exclude persons from private clubs *versus* the right of individuals to be treated equally); individual rights and the common good (liberty to smoke in public places *versus* protection of public health). Are there other conflicts you can describe?

6. Democracy in the Unitarian Universalist Faith

The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA) promotes democracy through its 5th Principle: The Right of Conscience and the Use of the Democratic Process Within Our Congregations and in Society at Large.”

- a. Have you been involved in actions addressing voting rights?
- b. How well is democracy practiced in the Vero Beach Fellowship? When majority rules on a major issue involving the Fellowship, how can we be more considerate of the rights and feelings of the minority?

Closing Readings

“Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.” (*Franklin D. Roosevelt*)

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