

Beyond the Partisan Divide—UUFVB Covenant Groups—December 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: Read responsively:

All too often, we pace the geometries of our walled gardens,
Believing we are traversing the whole of creation.
With spirits of discovery, let us uncover the mysteries nested in our routines,
With the eagerness of children, let us seek out the secrets unfolding in our peripheral vision.
Let us behold each fellow creature with reverence;
Let us greet each day with praise and thanksgiving.
For life is a gift of incomprehensible magnitude;
Our lives are voyages with unknowable destinations.
Along the way, let us meet, kiss, challenge, and support one another,
Let us fashion a network of mutuality and extend it into the larger world.
In these ways, we forge lives of goodness and beauty;
In these ways, we know the life of prayer. **(the Rev John Gibb Millspaugh)**

Topic Exploration

Ecclesiology is, more or less, a rather fancy word for “the purpose of the church.” As Unitarian Universalists, we trace our ecclesiology back to the 16th Century when the Protestant Reformation took the whole concept of church and turned it upside down. Our forebearers were a part of the most radical wings of that reformation, the people who challenged the whole concept of church hierarchy. It was our forebearers who insisted that the core of our gathering is not obedience to external temporal authority, but a commitment to a way of being together in relationship to God, a God experienced not only in isolation, but in community. At the core of these communities was a covenant, a promise between people and the spirit that connects them in ways that transcend their isolation.

A covenant is not a promise made by oneself. It’s made in community. It’s made between people, among mighty forces, pointing toward a purpose that unites them even and especially in the face of their diversity of opinion, of theology, of belief. At our core, we are a relational group committed to making promises. And that means a promise that there is room for different voices. There is room for disagreement. There is room for challenge and honesty and actual non-sectarianism of both the political and theological varieties.

In spite of all of our incompleteness, our fraying goodwill, we are made whole by the wide-open welcome to which we all are called and by the promises we must continually make. The purpose of the

church is to make and live out a promise which says that those unlike me, politically or otherwise, are fully as human and as worthy of respect as I am. That's the kind of community we are called to create, one in which we may not only tolerate, but indeed grow to deeply love those we might otherwise never have chosen as friends.

Questions / Sharing

1. Do you find it difficult to respect the full humanity and the inherent worth and dignity of all people even when you disagree with their views?
2. How does a partisan atmosphere carve division in your life--splitting you off from those you do or might otherwise love? How can this loss be remedied?
3. Do you agree with the assertion that "if you were going to come out to your UU congregation as transgender, Christian or Republican, it seems as if Republican would be the hardest"?
4. If our congregation were to become a place where people from all across the political spectrum were welcome, would you no longer feel welcome? Why?
5. Our third UU Principal asks us to "affirm and promote acceptance of one another" and to encourage spiritual growth specifically within our congregations. How do we encourage spiritual growth both within ourselves and across the partisan divide?
6. How are we part of the divisions we want so much to fix?

Closing Reading

The geometries of our own walled gardens have never been enough to contain the fullness of our spirits.
So let us meet, grapple, greet and seek after justice.
Let us weep and laugh and tell the truth even when it is difficult.
Let us fashion a network of mutuality that overcomes the alienation of our days.
And in this work, let us build the congregations we were always meant to become.

Check-out and reflections 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