

Stress and Anxiety—UUFVB Covenant Groups—December 2020

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: What is most on your mind today?

Opening Readings

“P.S. You’re not going to die. Here’s the white-hot truth: if you go bankrupt, you’ll still be okay. If you lose the gig, the lover, the house, you’ll still be okay. If you sing off-key, get beat by the competition, have your heart shattered, get fired...it’s not going to kill you. Ask anyone who’s been through it.”
(*Danielle LaPorte, Psychology Today*)

“The truth is that there is no actual stress or anxiety in the world; it's your thoughts that create these false beliefs. You can't package stress, touch it, or see it. There are only people engaged in stressful thinking.” (*Wayne Dyer, American psychologist*)

Topic Exploration

“Everyone experiences stress and anxiety at one time or another. The difference between them is that **stress** is a response to a threat in a situation. **Anxiety** is a reaction to the stress.” (*The Anxiety and Depression Association of America*)

Stress is a normal response to something upsetting. Anxiety is how you deal with it. Do you hyperventilate, grind your teeth, pace the floor, repeatedly tap a foot, fear leaving the house? We can avoid these reactions by choosing to respond to stressful situations with curiosity and developing a positive mindset.

Most people say that stress interferes, at least moderately, with their lives. Chronic stress can affect your health, causing symptoms from headaches, high blood pressure, and chest pain, to heart palpitations, skin rashes, and loss of sleep. Chronic worriers are at risk for health problems due to prolonged stress response by the body. When we experience stress, our bodies release the hormones cortisol and adrenaline, and cause your blood pressure and heart rate to increase. Psychological problems may occur over a period of time. A study conducted by Carolyn Aldwin of Oregon State University linked high to moderate **stress** levels to an increase in **mortality**.

Physical and/or mental activity are proven ways to reduce stress. Regular participation in aerobic exercise has been shown to decrease overall levels of tension, elevate and stabilize mood, and improve sleep and self-esteem. Other strategies for dealing with stress include mind-body practices, breathing exercises, yoga, psychophysical exercises, prayer and/ or meditation. Mental activity may include memory techniques, calming relaxation, mindfulness, positive self-talk and visualization.

Questions / Sharing

1. What situations or circumstances are likely to produce stress for you?
2. Describe the difference in your reaction to stress as a result of your own actions, and stress caused by outside, nonpersonal events.

3. If some stress is good because it heightens alertness, but too much is bad for you, how do you tell when you're reaching the "too much" level?
4. Discuss strategies that you have used to combat stress. What kind of physical or mental exercises have you used?
5. Do you know someone who has suffered from anxiety? How did they manage, or conquer it?
6. What are the positive effects of stress?
7. To what extent does meeting the expectations of others contribute to your stress?
8. Describe a time when you felt entirely free of stress, when you felt fully at peace with yourself and your world. What factors brought you to that peaceful place?

Closing Reading

Falling Up

All The Woulda-Coulda-Shouldas

Layin' In The Sun,

Talkin' 'Bout The Things

They Woulda-Coulda-Shoulda Done...

But All Those Woulda-Coulda-Shouldas All

Ran Away And Hid From One Little Did.

(Shel Silverstein, American poet)

Check-out and reflections on today's session: Please express any thoughts on the content or process of 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.
The se we carry in our hearts until we are together again

Housekeeping