

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Vero Beach
Covenant Groups
Dignity
October, 2022

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:

“We...covenant to affirm and promote: The inherent worth and dignity of every person.” (First Principle of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations)

“The dignity of the human person is rooted in his or her creation in the image and likeness of God. The right to the exercise of freedom belongs to everyone because it is inseparable from his or her dignity as a human person.” (*Catechism* of the Catholic Church)

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” (United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Topic Exploration:

The opening readings claim that dignity is a moral value that belongs to every person solely because they are human. Thus, dignity is inherent and never-changing, as long as a person lives. However, the Catholic Church and United Nations readings claim it is our responsibility to exercise freedom, reason and conscience in treating others with dignity. This suggests that dignity is a socially-constructed, experienced state that allows for individual differences, in which dignity can be both gained and lost. Many religions claim that all persons inherently possess dignity in full measure, but practically speaking, we recognize that dignity may vary depending on many factors, such as a person’s social status, public behavior, wealth, or achievements. How do we reconcile these two views?

Dignity is often tied to self-worth and self-determination, specifically to what degree individuals have the capacity and the freedom to control their own lives. What about those who are sold into slavery? What about those who are forced to pick through garbage dumps for their food? What about humans who are treated as animals or lower-type human beings, as occurred in genocides such as the Holocaust and in Rwanda, where the minority were compared to insects? We surely recognize dignity by its absence. While we may all be born with dignity, we are not born knowing how to act in ways that honor every person’s dignity, including our own.

If treating others with dignity becomes the baseline for our interactions, then others’ bad behavior doesn’t give us license to treat them badly in return. However, if we find another’s behavior

unacceptable, do our inclinations to treat them with dignity get compromised? Despite the indignities that society can impose on individuals and groups, we have seen instances of human dignity expressed eloquently in the lives of the humble (think of Mother Mary Teresa) and in the lives of those who adhere to principles despite assaults on their character, actions and positions (think of Nelson Mandela).

Questions/Sharing:

1. What is your opinion of UUA's principle regarding dignity? How has it affected your attitudes towards, or treatment of, others, even those for whom you have little respect?
2. To what extent do you believe you personally have, and exhibit, dignity? Do you believe you are treated with dignity by others? Does the level of dignified treatment you receive depend on who you're with, or on what you're doing?
3. Discuss instances in which we as Americans have humiliated or dehumanized individuals or groups of people, and whether the damage to their dignity has ever been repaired, or ever could be.
4. We've heard the expression, "It's beneath my dignity." What would be beneath YOUR dignity, and why?
5. Describe a person or persons whom you believe exhibit great dignity, and explain why.

Closing Reading:

Excerpt from the song, "Greatest Love," lyrics written by Linda Creed, and made popular by Whitney Houston. Read it together, or sing it, if the group is so inclined.

I decided long ago never to walk in anyone's shadow
If I fail, if I succeed, at least I'll live as I believe
No matter what they take from me, they can't take away my dignity
Because the greatest love of all is happening to me
I found the greatest love of all Inside of me
The greatest love of all Is easy to achieve
Learning to love yourself, it is the greatest love of all.

Check-out and reflections on today's session: Please express any closing 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.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping

uufvb covenant groups/b.s.
