

Soul Matters

A kaleidoscope of thoughts,
images, stories, poetry, and ideas
to engage hearts and minds.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PEOPLE OF INVITATION September, 2015

A Faith Journey...

Every September congregations across the nation celebrate In-gathering Sunday. It is a time of honoring our summer sojourns. It is a time of celebrating our relationships and deepening our commitments to our faith community. It is a time of returning to the familiar rhythms of church life at its fullest. It is a time of ritual practiced through the gathering of sacred waters from all corners of the earth. This year it is a time of bringing and binding us together after an extended time apart.

Following our monthly theme – What does it mean to be a people of INVITATION – we will gather our water with a call to consider what each of us brings to our beloved community, our shared ministry. I don't mean time and talents or riches. I mean **spiritual gifts and passions**. It could be hope, loving kindness, resilience, enthusiasm, grounding, energy, compassion, tolerance, joy, laughter, play, contemplation, generosity, and mindfulness. The list is truly endless.

This year In-gathering Sunday will be time to creatively engage the spiritual gifts we bring to church. We will explore together the passions, qualities and talents we want to bring to our faith community and our vision of a better world community.. We will set personal intentions and actively recommit to the vibrancy of everything that makes Unitarian Universalist Community Church a spirited congregation.

As you move through the end of your summer, I invite you to walk with these questions or sit quietly in reflection and let the answers present themselves. Then bring your water and your insights to our In-Gathering service on September 13th at 9:15 or 11:00. I will be there waiting for you.

1. When I am my best self this attribute is palpable and I share it generously?
2. I wish UUC had more _____. Is the deeper truth that I need more ____? How will I cultivate what I am longing for in myself and missing in my faith community?
3. Growing spiritual, ethically or morally this year includes nurturing the quality of _____ in my days.

May our individual wisdom and insight be that which binds us and brings us to this time of celebration and recommitment.

As we gather and bless the water may we be reminded our vessel is overflowing and may we be inspired to share the best of who we are with an aching and joyful universe.



This Soul Matters packet was created by Rev. Carie Johnsen at Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, ME.

Thoughts within were gleaned from the Soul Matters Network, the UUC Resource Circle, and other sources. If you would like to share your experience and wisdom for future packets, please email minister@augustauu.org. To receive an electronic copy please email info@augustauu.org. To learn more about Unitarian Universalist Community Church, please visit our website www.augustauu.org.

QUESTIONS TO WALK WITH



Below is a reflection and a list of questions to open the mind's gateway to reveal the wisdom that is right below the surface of our everyday ordinary lives. Pick one question, any, the one that grabs you and won't let go, then walk with it. Let your mind wander and wonder. Let the question percolate. Listen curiously to what surfaces. Live into the answers. Be surprised by what is discovered. Share what you learn with someone you meet along the way.



What Does It Mean To Be A People of Invitation?

*Do not try to save the whole world
or do anything grandiose.
Instead, create a clearing
in the dense forest of your life
and wait there patiently,
until the song that is your life falls
into your own cupped hands
and you recognize and greet it.
Only then will you know
how to give yourself to this world
so worthy of rescue.*

-Clearing by Martha Postlewaite

Create a clearing, listen for your song and let it teach you how to give yourself to this world. There is no better description of the religious life than this! And notice that it all begins with invitation, with the deep humility and knowledge that while the song is deeply ours, it also comes from something or somewhere beyond ourselves. It takes time, but eventually we each come to realize that --to be whole and to find home-- a space must be made, a clearing must be created, and otherness must be invited in.

That otherness takes many forms. Most often, we Unitarian Universalists have focused on the otherness of diverse perspectives and ideas. We have a rich tradition of continually expanding the circle to make room for multiple voices. If there is one spiritual practice we all share, it is the practice of trying to hear and invite in voices other than our own. There is power and holiness in the chorus. About this we all agree.

But right along side the chorus of multiple voices and perspectives sits another kind of otherness. It is the otherness of our particular calling, our particular voice, our particular song. It is never separate from us and yet it is also never quite under our complete control. Every single one of us knows how easy it is to lose touch with it. As Postlewaite's poem says, we make dense forests of our lives where what is most precious is not easily seen or heard.

So clearings become essential. Some may say that the sacred is earned by believing the right things. But for us the sacred never arrives until we are able to carve out the right amount of space. With all due respect to those who ask, Do you believe? We've placed our lot with those who continually ask, Are you making room? Are you committed to the precious clearing? Have you arranged a life with enough space to invite otherness in?

And so as this new year begins, we start with cupped hands.

Spiritual Practice - Deepening Experiences

Option A:

An Invitation to Redefine Success

[The Invitation](#) by Oriah Mountain Dreamer is one of the most referenced spiritual writings among all liberal religious groups--for good reason. It invites us to completely rethink what this game of life is all about. Forget "what you do for a living" or "how much money you have," it says. Instead tell us about your ability to "risk looking like a fool for love," "disappoint another to be true to yourself" or be "weary and bruised to the bone, but still do what needs to be done for the children." It represents an entirely different spiritual metric. It invites a radically counter-cultural vision of "the good life."

This exercise asks you to engage its invitation. Here's your assignment:

1. Spend a week with the poem: <http://www.stevenkharper.com/invitation.html>. Read it at least once a day for a few days.
2. Pick the one line that you hope will most characterize your life. Don't worry about whether or not you are currently living up to it. This is about aspiration.
3. Come to your group and share why this particular invitation is one you want to aspire to.

Option B:

Are You a Pilgrim or a Monk?

In her essay, [Following an Ancient Call](#), Christine Paintner reflects on two basic spiritual orientations. Each invites us to engage life differently. Using an animal spirit metaphor she writes, "*the bear hibernates to regain its power and the salmon follows the ancient call back home.*" Using the metaphor of monk and pilgrim, she writes,

"The *monk* in me feels the call of moving inward. My inner monk knows the deep wisdom to be found in rest, in slowness and spaciousness, in not letting the productivity of the world keep me running ever faster. The *pilgrim* in me feels the call of moving outward. My inner pilgrim feels a longing to travel, to walk across new landscapes, to find myself the stranger so that everything I think I know can be gently released."

So which is it for you? Restoration of power or return to home? Deep wisdom found in rest or needed release found in new landscapes? Which kind of energy is life inviting you to nurture this coming year?

To help with your discernment, take some time this month to:

1. Read Paintner's essay: <http://abbeyofthearts.com/blog/2013/08/19/following-an-ancient-call-a-love-note-from-your-online-abbess/>
2. Discern which of the two orientations is inviting you most clearly. Think about this as your spiritual work for the coming year.
3. Come to your group ready to share your discernment process *and two concrete commitments you are making to yourself to fulfill the call of the monk or the pilgrim.*

Opening Words

I rise to pray my story, tell my prayer,
a thousand, thousand tiny sparks
and I am one,
a bit of burning dust
of gratitude exacting,
of light turning to praise.
~ Ted Loder

Wise Words:

Beginning to Begin By Gunilla Norris

Can we recognize that now and then there
comes an inner sense,
a fleeting thought, a little yearning to live our
lives differently?
We don't know what this means
or what it requires.
We shake these notions off like a dog shakes
off water
And go about our business.
But the longing continues.
Our practical selves only know how to perfect,
produce and perform.
This, at least, we can see as useful.
This has results.
We want to believe in this way of perceiving.
For a little while it seems to give us
some sort of self-image.
But the longing doesn't let us alone.
It won't go away.
We become even busier perhaps
to "take care of it."
We numb ourselves with distractions— things
to do, consume, and maintain— things to
collect, experience, and entertain. We can
always think of more miles to run. Still the
little yearning continues. . . .
Could we sense that this longing is not lack or
something worse—some kind of fundamental
fault in us?
Could we receive it as an invitation instead, a
calling, a small voice inviting us home, back to
our truer self?
This shift in thought can move mountains. It
can let us begin to begin.

Calling, by Nancy Shaffer

When you heard that voice and
knew finally it called for you
and what it was saying—where
were you? Were you in the shower,
wet and soapy, or chopping cabbage
late for dinner? Were you planting radish seeds or
seeking one lost sock? Maybe wiping handprints
off a window
or coaxing words into a sentence.
Or coming upon a hyacinth or one last No. Where
were you when you heard that ancient
voice, and did Yes get born right then
and did you weep? Had it called you since before
you even were, and when you
knew that, did your joy escape all holding? Where
were you when you heard that calling voice, and
how, in that moment,
did you mark it? How, ever after,
are you changed?
Tell us, please, all you can about that voice.
Teach us how to listen, how to hear. Teach us all
you can of saying Yes.
before you even *were*, and when you
knew that, did your joy escape all holding?
Where were you when you heard that
calling voice, and how, in that moment,
did you mark it? How, ever after,
are you changed?
Tell us, please, all you can about that voice.
Teach us how to listen, how to hear.
Teach us all you can of saying Yes.



You don't have to attend every argument
you're invited to. -- ANON

A real conversation always contains an
invitation. You are inviting another person
to reveal herself or himself to you, to tell
you who they are or what they want.
--David Whyte

Closing Words

Those are my people,
who touch my hands,
who invite me to come along,
who make room for me to sit
in the shadow of the candlelight
and listen to their songs.

~Gerald Brennan