

Soul Matters

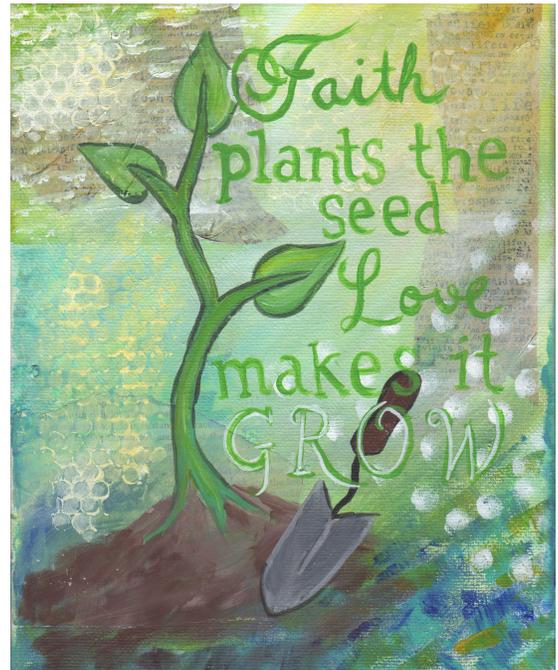
A kaleidoscope of thoughts, images, stories, poetry, podcasts, and videos to engage hands, hearts, and minds.

October 2017

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST IDENTITY

We covenant to affirm and promote:

***Acceptance of one another and
encouragement to spiritual growth
in our congregations.***



“An Unexamined life is not worth living”

~attributed to Socrates

In approaching the Unitarian Universalist Principles, I have sought to lift up the complexity of ways our living tradition manifests in our communities. It is a mistake to think this faith we love so dearly is an easy solution to a joyful and conflicted world. If you have followed the past three *Soul Matters*, I hope you have found the opportunity to wrestle with our call to live justly and love boldly a worthy challenge. This month, it will be no different.

Twenty-five years ago, I arrived at my first Unitarian Universalist Church. I sat in the pews and felt more at home than I did in the Lutheran Church of my childhood. Over the course of time, I examined the teachings of my childhood faith, wrestled with the theologies, and eventually arrived at a comfortable reconciliation with Jesus, Christianity, and God.

Today as minister in a Unitarian Universalist Church I frequently bear witness to people's desire to better understand how the teachings of Christianity – the roots of both our Unitarian and Universalist traditions – fit into present day Unitarian Universalism. I also bear witness to the celebration of Unitarian Universalist Christian commitments alongside the rejection of the teachings of Christianity. When we are at our best, this contradiction reveals our theological diversity. When we are not at our finest, these contradictions manifest as discomfort, distress, and tension. At our worst, we silence rather than affirm the diversity of theological expression in our midst. As a result, it has become an accepted practice for UU Christians to live a closeted life in their UU faith communities.

For the month of November, in the spirit of *acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth*, I invite all of us to reflect on our personal relationship with Jesus, Christianity, and God. On November 28, we begin a monthly discussion group using Scotty McLennan's new book *Christ for Unitarian Universalists*. For more information on please contact Rev. Carie Johnsen at minister@augustauu.org or 508-221-5295.



This Soul Matters packet was prepared by Rev. Carie Johnsen at Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, ME. 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 list of questions to open the mind's gateway to reveal the wisdom that is right below the surface of our ordinary, everyday 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 meet along the way

Identity

Your own Identity

by Gajanan Mishra

First understand
Your own identity.

And then see
Another living entity.

Here there is no question of
Partiality or
Enmity.

My Identity!

by Valsa George

To fit into another's mould
Constantly changed shape
Now I am not what I am.
That's my Identity!

Identity – Where Is It

by Gajanan Mishra

Identity
Where is my identity
That I can show you
I am that, I am this,
And how can I show you
That I am Yours.

I am covered with falsehood.
I am Truth and Truth has
No identity as You know
No identity, no affinity,
And Here I am in distress,
And here I am in dark.

O my dear, enlightened me
With knowledge that I am Yours.

Lost Identity

by Willa T. Olivier

In this spiritual blindness
I hope and seek in vain
for words of lovingkindness
to ease the dreary pain.

The pain of utter loneliness,
which most of us are spared
that comes when life's experiences
And thoughts cannot be shared.

I long in my self-sympathy
to reach some other soul,
With satisfying empathy
to make my being whole.

In truth I long not all for thee
For oft times comes the cry,
'Where is the one who should be
My soul, my self, my 'I'?

Questions to Consider:

1. *What poem above resonates with you most, and Why?*
2. *What part of your identity feels most true to who you are called to be in the world?*
3. *What parts of your identity seem most influenced by family, friends, and society?*
4. *Write a poem that begins with "I am..." Share it with someone. Post it on your mirror or fridge.*

CLOSING WORDS

We have a calling in this world:
We are called to honor diversity,
To respect differenced with dignity,
And to challenge those who would forbid it.
WE are people of a wide path.
Let us be wide in affection
And go our way in peace.

~ Jean M. Rickard Rowe

OPENING WORDS

We meet on Holy Ground,
For that place is holy where we meet each other,
Where lives touch, where love moves, where hope stirs.
How strong is our need for one another
Our silent beckoning to our neighbors,
Our invitations to share life and death together,
Our welcome into the lives of those we meet,
And their welcome into our own.
We kindle our chalice, a bowl of light,
Reflecting that Eternal Light which shines around and before us.

~ Anonymous

Spiritual Practice - Deepening Experiences

A new way of being for all ages

Option A

Spiritual Nourishment: Connect with something bigger than yourself

We live in a time when it is easy to get caught up in the push and pull of multiple demands and expectations. It is easy to get lost in the pressures of work, family, friends, social issues, political rhetoric, and even church. It seems that everyone wants a bit of our time and attention. This month, I invite you to take time each day to connect with something bigger than yourself, and engage in one thing each week that offers you spiritual nourishment.

Something bigger than yourself – each day find a few minutes to quiet your mind and listen. Slow down to mindfully connect to something beyond yourself (Life, Love, Nature, God, Spirit, Joy, Community, Goddess, Creator). What name or image do you give to Great Mystery? How do you listen and connect? How does this connection sustain you and nourish you?

Spiritually nourishment – What are one or two things that bring you spiritual nourishment? If this question is a challenge, I encourage you to explore one new option each week. Participate in a yoga class, climb a mountain, walk in the woods, attend a meditation class, be still at home with a book of meditations or poems. Write in a journal every day. Attend worship with an open mind and heart, listen with curiosity and wonder, rather than with rejection and judgment.

Option B

Inclusive Community: Identify your Pronouns

We are no longer living in a gender binary (male/female) world—in truth, we never really have. As we strive to become a community where all gender expressions are valued, respected, and honored, I invite you to be part of a cultural shift to using gender pronouns.



Being a welcoming and inclusive community means consciously working to find ways to name, honor, and value experiences and identities that are usually minimized or devalued. It means uncovering our unconscious assumptions about what's "normal" and who is present in our community, and opening ourselves to the possibility of greater diversity. In order for us each to feel welcome and included in faith communities, we need to see ourselves reflected and present in some way.

Increasing the inclusiveness of our language means striving to understand the ways that language often unconsciously makes assumptions about people and unintentionally reinforces dominant norms around gender, sexual orientation, race, class, ability/disability, age, and other identities... ~ Unitarian Universalist Association

Suggested activity:

Identify your pronouns. Add them to your nametags.

Be part of a wider cultural shift. Practice offering your own pronouns when you meet new people. When checking in at meetings, ask people to identify their pronouns.

Respect a person's identities, chosen name and pronouns. A practice of mindfulness (slowing down your speech and thinking before engaging) is helpful in the transition to new more inclusive language.



We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The living tradition we share draws from many sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

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Other Wise Words...

The Dance of Time

by Kenneth W. Collier

Does the rose envy the sunset for its orange?
Or the sea envy the lake for its calm?
Does the sky blame the earth for being brown
or the whale blame the fish for laying eggs?

Does the redwood disregard the sorrel for being small
or the desert think less of the marsh for being wet?
Does the bird laugh at the snail that cannot fly
or the otter tease the rock that meditates in the river?

Are the stars embarrassed at the brightness of the moon,
or is the rain afraid of the cold of the snow?
Does the pine turn its head from the nakedness of the oak
or the corn, row on row, from the wild grass?

And am I less than the trees and stars and rose
that I should turn my face from the soul of another?

And the dance of time goes on without stop or pause.
The dance goes on. Day after turning day,
night after spinning night, on it goes, and on and on.
Leaping minutes, pirouette, grand jete,
plié, turn and spin and lift and leap,
on and on without end or pause.

Silent music rising out of the heart,
turning the hours, moving the dancers
each to a private music unheard by others,
each turning and spinning alone yet joined
to the others by invisible threads of dance that weave
a pattern of exquisite, profound beauty.

And all of this happens round me at every moment,
as the hours move, turn, and spin through life.

There is room on our path for any person who seeks a more complete understanding of what is true and good in life. The answers can't be found if you ask only men. They can't be found if you ask only Christians. They can't be found if you ask only gay people. They can't be found if you ask just yourself. The answers come from listening to people of great diversity and weaving their small truths into a larger tapestry of Meaning.

~ David Blanchard, *Unitarian Universalist Lesbian Gay Caucus Newsletter*

What I know about being inclusive—crossing culture to culture, learning the language of diversity—is that it's the work of a lifetime. It's hard to accept people who are not like you... Nothing that Unitarian Universalists need to do is more important than making justice real—here, where we are. Hard as diversity is, it is our most important task.

~ Rosemary Bray McNatt "It's hard Work"- *Been in the Storm So Long*