

## **Why we attend Fellowship**

We welcomed new Members and friends today. It got me thinking. Why do we join in Fellowship services? Being raised in a Roman Catholic home, that question was easy to answer when I was a child. Skipping church was a mortal sin, and you would go to hell. Now that I'm an adult and I don't believe in hell (a belief I share with my other Universalist believers) that answer does not work anymore. With our busy lives, why do we spend our precious weekend time attending a Fellowship service? That is also a part of a bigger question – why belong to a church, temple, or Fellowship? What good do they do? Are there better ways to spend our time, talent and money?

It is my contention that fellowship with other Unitarian Universalist serves three purposes. The first is to give us a place in time to explore spiritual beliefs. The second is to minister to each other. The third is to serve as a more potent force in furthering social justice. I need to say more about each of these points, not only variant because a good sermon has three points, but because I have used some very emotionally loaded words like spiritual, ministry, social justice, and later in this talk religion. Before you stone me, let me expound on my points.

Being a progressive congregation, we use these traditional words in a different way. A progressive congregation. Questions tradition, accepts diversity, places an emphasis on social justice, care for the poor and the oppressed, and environmental stewardship of the earth. Progressive religion is not a new set of beliefs but a framework around which we make meaning of our own experiences in the current world. Beliefs are shaped by culture, environment, and experiences which are constantly changing. Progress by definition means to move forward.

This fellowship offers the discipline of spiritual exploration. The presence of others who challenge and enrich our lives reconnects us to ourselves, one another, and all of life. Spiritual exploration is not a presentation; it is

involvement. It is not a lecture, concert, or program. Our services are rooted in our living tradition which invites the individual to explore within the community. Although we recognize the power and personal devotion in solitary walks in the woods, we choose to gather together for the strength of many hearts beating in the spirit of shared wisdom. We can focus on the transcendental, the intimate, and the worthy. This exploration helps us to regain our grip on the fragmented, the obsessive, and the divisive. It reminds us that we, empowered by the love we receive and give, may challenge any idle of greed or violence which pollutes the human condition. Spirituality helps us to regain a sense of ourselves. The slow dance of our body movements, the timbre of our voices when we sing together, the glint of join others, the smell of flowers on the table, the taste of cookies or fresh bread. After the service, return us to our senses. In a world that seems focused on AI and electronic screens. In our gathering the sensual is one with the spiritual, intellectual, and the emotional. That is why as UUs we are challenged to move beyond the one dimension of mind in our services, and to connect with body, emotions, heart, and spirit.

The second purpose of the Fellowship is to minister to each other. We can trace this concept of shared ministry to our Protestant forbearers. The Protestants broke with the Roman Catholic Church who had institutionalized the system where access to the holy was mediated by an exclusive cadre of priests mediated for a profit. We can go back even further to the early Christian community which had no priests. It was informal and egalitarian. The members cared for each other and provided for their material and spiritual needs. "One key aspect of Unitarian Universalism is our belief that ministry of the congregation does not belong exclusively to ordained clergy, but to everyone."

In researching the idea of why we belong to a Fellowship, I came across two compelling witnesses to the role of the Fellowship in caring for its members. The first was from a radio minister by the name of David Feddes who told a

story of talking to a man who stopped going to church because he was upset with the local congregation. He stayed home on Sundays and watched a preacher on TV. His son was killed in a tragic accident. The grieving father found there are some things you don't get by watching TV. The TV preacher and his congregation were not there to embrace him and speak words of hope and comfort. The television screen doesn't weep with those who weep. The only ones who could give the man the support he needed were the people of his church. When you are facing a serious illness, or the loss of a loved one, or financial problems, or family crisis. You don't just need good advice over the airwaves, television screen, or computer. You need people who are right there who can support you in tough times.

The second rider was the Rev. Noel E Bordador. He tells a personal story from his childhood to illustrate why we need to go to church or Fellowship. He says, "one day, when I came home from school for lunch, I found that we had a new table in our dining room. It was not a particularly beautiful table, but it was functional made of concrete, metal and tile. My grandmother, who had it made, wanted it that way. It was so heavy that it took nine men to deliver it to our home., But what happened around the table. You see, it was around the table that I learned the rules of relating, the rules of relationship, relationship with my family, and relationship with those outside my family. It was around that table where I learned how to share food and drink with one another and not just think of myself. It was at that table where I learned of my responsibility to serve my elders, my siblings, and our guests. It was around that table where I learned to listen to what others have to say. Not just be so self-absorbed with my own drama or problems. It was around that table where I learned to welcome guests, strangers, and even those I didn't particularly like. It was there where I learned to live with the differences, and it was around that table where I learned a whole lot about dealing with conflicts."

His table acted much like the Fellowship needs to act. It is the place for us to learn to care for each other. It is why we do candles of joy and sorrow. It is why

we have a caring ministry. It is why we communicate about members in need in our order of service. It is why we sponsor men's groups, women's groups and child circles. Small group ministry is an important way we can enhance caring about and for each other. As Dr. Thandeka writes, "our religious tradition tells us to listen to one another, to cherish one another, to hold one another in our hearts until we together are healed."

The third purpose of the Fellowship is to engage in the work of social justice and to join with others to make our voices heard. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior spoke with conviction over 50 years ago about how churches that were not involved in real world action would become nothing more than irrelevant social clubs. James Luther Adams in the book, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, makes the following statement, "the prophetic liberal church is a church in which all members share the common responsibility to foresee the consequences of human behavior (both individual and institutional) with the intention of making history in place of being merely pushed around by it." Our religious heritage compels us to address the important, widespread, and complex social issues of the day. Our faith is a covenantal faith with a relational theology at its core. Hospitality injustice are essential elements of our covenant with one another and with the holy.

Unitarian Universalist have a long history of social justice activity stemming from the earliest days of each religion. Many UUs trace their Universalist roots back to Hosea Ballou's *Treatise on Atonement* in which he argued that it was not fear of eternal damnation that led people to do good on earth, but an understanding that paradise is here and now. Historically, both Unitarians and Universalists have been active in seeking justice. The Unitarian, Henry Bergh, founded societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals and to children. The Unitarian, Robert Gould Shaw, led the first regiment of free Blacks in the Civil War. The Universalist church was one of the first religious groups to formally oppose slavery in 1790. Universalist church was the first to promote women into clergy in the 1800s. Theodore Parker, Unitarian minister, was one of the

first American clergyman to endorse women's suffrage and the first to refer to God as both father and mother. Many are familiar with the phrase used by Martin Luther King Junior, who paraphrased Parker with the assertion that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Another Great American also borrowed from Parker. In his Gettysburg address, Abraham Lincoln gave a definition of democracy as a "government of the people, by the people, for the people." He adopted a definition that Parker often used that democracy was "government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people." That all meant for Parker that democracy had not been achieved in America never would be, until social and political inequalities were overcome.

Since 1961, Unitarian Universalism is nurtured its heritages by continuing to provide a strong voice for social justice and liberal religion right after formation of the new denomination, UUs nationwide advocated for the rights of conscientious objectors during the war in Vietnam, as well as for voting and civil rights for people of color in the American South. The 1970s, UUs supported the rights of gay and lesbian people and published the *Pentagon Papers*. In 2001, there were more female UU ministers than male. The denomination continues to encourage women's leadership. Social justice work is incorporated into our Unitarian Universalist principles. The social witness process is a way that our Association comes to understand and act on the social issues of our day. The commission on social witness formulates official statements on social justice issues. Our commitment to justice also led to the creation of a powerful public advocacy campaign to oppose oppression in its many forms and counter hate with love. The Standing on the Side of Love campaign grew out of the UU community's response to a shooting at a UU congregation in Knoxville, Tennessee.

That is my belief about the purpose of the Fellowship. We need a place that invites us to explore spirituality in awe and wonder and to appreciate the beauty and mystery of the universe. We need a place where we can comfort, support, and care for each other. We need a place that can organize and direct

our voices for social justice and combine them with other voices to affect positive change in our world. We need a place for all those things. This is that place! Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is that place! I hope you will continue to support it with your time, your talents, and your money. Amen, Shalom, Blessed Be, Go in peace.