



TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

August 2018

Unity & Diversity

Wisdom Story



Introduction to the Theme

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

What do you think about this liberal religious venture called Unitarian Universalism? Can it grow and, perhaps, thrive? Can it effectively give witness to this strange religious notion of unity in diversity, and thus provide a needed lesson to the larger world? Can it honor religious diversity within a congregation in ways that strengthen the faith of humanist and theist, atheist and mystic, Christian and Jew (and those who are, as yet, theologically undecided)? In the midst of these differing faith orientations should we seek soft truths with blurred edges that protect our unity, or should we pursue harder truths that emphasize our diversity? (Can we do both?)

The answers depend on whether or not we find unity in diversity energizing and creative, or draining and destructive. It can be either, depending on our tolerance for diversity and the degree of commitment we have for unity within diversity. For it to be energizing and creative, we must cultivate the ability to hear through the words and to see through the surface to the deeper truths that often remain hidden within differing faith orientations. To do this is to balance the particularity of a specific religious truth (bounded as it is by language, symbol, and history) with the universal truth out of which it has emerged. This is the both the challenge and genius of our faith.

Unitarian Universalist minister Mike Young introduced his essay on theological diversity with the story of Indra's net. He wrote, *Each fisher, with homemade net of differing mesh, / Catches life's experience sized / According to the holes between the knots. / Each fisher takes these net-caught meanings / For what fish there are. They call to one another, / "Your nets are*

(Continued on page 6)

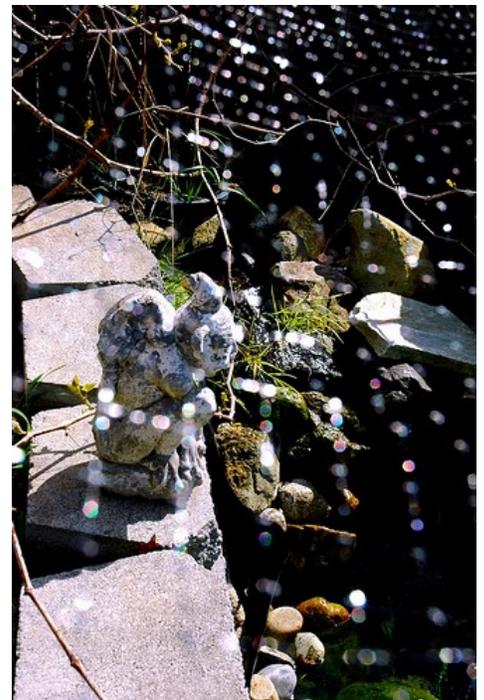
Unity, Diversity & the Common Good

The reality of the common good is an acknowledgment of diversity. In a monoculture, the common good is easy. It is the lowest common denominator, which is easy to identify and cultivate. But when simplicity grows into the complexity of multiculturalism, we need the highest common aspiration. The common good forges connections across these differences. The greater the diversity, the more important the common good becomes to create a force that binds a community together. The result is unity. In America, the ideal has been *E Pluribus Unum*, out of many, One. Said differently, it is unity in diversity. The motto of the Canadian province of Saskatchewan is similar: "From many peoples strength."

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Indra's Jeweled Net

Imagine, if you will, a great net, spun with delicate intricacy, adorned with lovely jewels, and stretching out in all directions. This is the magnificent net of the great god, Indra. Let us look upon it, and wonder.



Indra's net is like a spider's web in intricacy and loveliness, but this is no ordinary weaving for it spans the infinity of time and space. At each place where the threads of the net connect to one another, a single glittering jewel has been hung; and since the net is infinite in dimension, there are an infinite number of jewels, too. They stretch out across the vastness of existence, suspended in and supported by the net, catching the light and twinkling like the stars. It is a beautiful sight to behold.

(Continued on page 2)

Reimagining the Common Good

(Continued from page 1) **Indra's Net**

Imagine selecting one of the jewels for a closer look. Perhaps it catches your eye with its color, its luster. As you inspect this particular jewel, you notice first its cut and polished surfaces, the source of its glittering. But then you see reflected in the jewel's surfaces the other jewels of this net—and not just a few, but all of the other jewels in their infinite array. Each jewel in Indra's net is reflected in every other jewel, an infinite process of reflection.

Now each sparkling jewel is a being: a human, a plant, an animal—even a lowly worm. Each is connected to every other in an interdependent web of all existence. Each of us is there, reflecting and influencing one another. A change in one jewel—in one being, in one person—will result in a change, however slight, in every other. Everything affects everything else.

Pull back now and see more of Indra's net again. See how ripples of glittering light pass across the net. Think about what you might be sending out across the web of all existence. After all, when we harm even a single strand of the net, we harm the entire web. In the same way, though, every single helpful action will send positive ripples throughout the infinite net, touching every jewel, every being, every life. In the same way, though, every single helpful action will send positive ripples throughout the infinite net, touching every jewel, every being, every life.



Sources: Adapted from James Ishmael Ford, *The Jeweled Net: Buddhist Reflections on the Interdependent Web* (UUA General Assembly, June 21st 2002) and Mary K. Isaac, *Indra's Magnificent Jeweled Net in Families: Weave a Tapestry of Faith* (Unitarian Universalist Association, Fall 2010)

Unity, Diversity, Self-Identity

Rev. Emmy Lou Belcher

...The issue is not about whether we all believe the same but whether we can respect differing searches for truth. Unitarian Universalism is not a club for political liberals. It is not a club for those who think one way about religious questions and not another.

It is, instead, an experiment in pluralism, an on-going struggle to live with those who believe differently but hold a common value—that all people are ...called to account for what they do, not for what they believe.

...Dr. Eboo Patel...founded an institution to research and teach living in a religiously pluralistic world...

To successfully forge a culture of pluralistic inclusion, ...human beings have to first know themselves, then appreciate the commonalities they have with others. ...Patel is a Muslim, and one of his favorite passages in the Qur'an has God saying: "I created you into diverse nations and tribes that you may come to know one another." When Dr. Patel works with a group of youth or young adults, he asks them to begin by telling one of the sayings of their religious tradition of which they are proud. ... They find themselves in more agreement than disagreement.

The goal of a pluralistic society is not for people to think alike, but for them to shape a good world from within their mutual values. Recognition of pluralism requires ...humility—none of us is complete in our own uniqueness. We need each other. The good life requires unity in diversity and diversity in its unity.

Source: No Longer Online

The Vitality of Diversity

Parker Palmer

Diversity makes our lives more vital. Regular experiences of "otherness" not only bring blessed relief from ...recycling the same ideas with the same people. They also dial down the fear of "the other"

... **Diversity makes us smarter and more creative.** People from different backgrounds know different things and have different ways of interpreting what they know. As we come together in a "dialogue of differences," the collective becomes smarter than any individual in it. ...



Diversity gives us a chance to increase our personal resilience.

...I'm 78. But for a couple of months following the presidential inauguration, I felt more like 108, asking myself, "Really? Is this the way I'm going to go

out, learning daily about a fresh assault on dignity, decency, democracy, and truth itself that makes me ashamed to be an American?"

I began to recover my resilience as I talked with friends who—along with generations of their ancestors—have been targets of such assaults since the day they were born, and yet have refused to be intimidated.

My Muslim, Mexican, and African-American brothers and sisters have developed a ...spiritual alchemy that all of us can practice. It transforms the dross of political evil into the gold of political activism, revitalizing us to be the engaged citizens we should have been all along. Resilience comes from seeing people I care about take the next assault on their souls not as a reason to give up but as a source of power to keep on keeping on. Source: <https://onbeing.org/blog/parker-palmer-the-vitality-of-diversity/>

Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and

there is strength." Maya Angelou

Day 2: "The real death of America will come when everyone is alike."

James T. Ellison

Day 3: "Peace is not unity in similarity but unity in diversity, in the comparison and conciliation of differences."

Mikhail Gorbachev

Day 4: "What we have to do... is to find a way to celebrate our diversity and debate our differences without fracturing our communities." Hillary Clinton

Day 5: "In each human heart are a tiger, a pig, an ass, and a nightingale. Diversity of character is due to their unequal activity."

Ambrose Bierce

Day 6: "Diversity may be the hardest thing for a society to live with, and perhaps the most dangerous thing for a society to be without." William Sloane Coffin, Jr.

Day 7: "Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival." Rene Dubos

Day 8: "Christian, Jew, Muslim, shaman, Zoroastrian, stone, ground, mountain, river, each has a secret way of being with the mystery, unique and not to be judged" Rumi

Day 9: "He who is different from me does not impoverish me—he enriches me. Our unity is constituted in something higher than ourselves..." Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Day 10: "If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity." John F. Kennedy

Day 11: "Ultimately, America's answer to the intolerant... [person] is diversity, the very diversity which our heritage of religious freedom has inspired."

Robert F. Kennedy

Day 12: "Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of

diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community."

bell hooks

Day 13: "Diversity creates dimension in the world." Elizabeth Ann Lawless

Day 14: "Is our blood not the same color? Do we not bleed the same or share each other's burdens? ... What makes you and I so different...?" Nadège Richards

Day 15: "We are not here to match and homogenize and agree on every point. One size of spirituality does not fit all. We are here to be our divine selves, boldly, passionately, respectfully, to the absolute best of our ability—and this, this is more than enough." sera break

Day 16: "The world in which you were born is just one model of reality. Other cultures are not failed attempts at being YOU: they are unique manifestations of the human spirit."

Wade David

Day 17: "It is not a Buddhist approach to say that if everyone practiced Buddhism, the world would be a better place. Wars and oppression begin from this kind of thinking."

Sulak Sivaraksa

Day 18: "Love is the key to diversity."

Cherrye S. Vasquez

Day 19: "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

Audre Lorde

Day 20: "The middle path makes me wary.... But in the middle of my life, I am coming to see the middle path as a walk with wisdom where conversations of complexity can be found, that the middle path is the path of movement.... In the right and left worlds, the stories are largely set.... We become missionaries for a position ...practitioners of the missionary position. Variety is lost. Diversity is lost. Creativity is lost in our inability to make

love with the world."

Terry Tempest Williams

Day 21: "When we lose the right to be different, we lose the privilege to be free."

Charles Evan Hughes

Day 22: "Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else." Margaret Mead

Day 23: "We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams."

Jimmy Carter

Day 24: "You were born an original. ...Don't die a copy." John Mason

Day 25: "There is nowhere you can go and only be with people who are like you. Give it up." Bernice Johnson Reagon

Day 26: "Like many white liberals, Ken sees the "whiteness" of his social life as more an accident of circumstance than a

choice. He would welcome greater diversity in the neighborhood. However, he does not consciously do enough work either in his social life or in the larger community to make that diversity possible." bell hooks

Day 27: "Insight, I believe, refers to the depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another." Mary Catherine Bateson

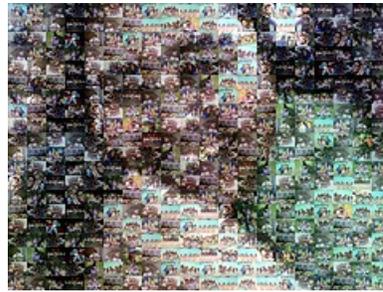
Day 28: "Diversity has been written into the DNA of ...life; any institution that lacks a rainbow array has come to seem diminished, if not diseased." Joe Klein

Day 29: "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts." Daniel Patrick Moynihan

Day 30: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stifled. I want all the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any." Mohandas K. Gandhi

Day 31: "We are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided."

J.K. Rowling





Faith and Theology

Diversity in the UU Pew Possibility or Pipe Dream?

Rev. Dr. Michael Schuler

Theological diversity — the promise

...The Bond of Union for the First Unitarian Society of Madison, composed by the Founders in 1878 and prominently displayed in our Sanctuary, states that the congregation “accepts into membership those of whatever theological opinion, who wish to unite in the promotion of truth, righteousness, reverence, and charity for all.” The Bond contains no qualifications: those of whatever theological opinion are welcome, it promises.

Given the Western world’s long history of bitter and often violent religious conflict, this is an amazing proposition. Of more than 2,000 American sects, we are almost unique in maintaining that it is possible to enjoy religious community without dogmatic consensus, to create an environment of mutual respect, support, and hospitality without papering over our differences. To the extent that Unitarian Universalism can succeed in this remarkable endeavor, we will have provided a fragmented, suspicious, and combative religious culture with a remarkable example.

The late Adlai Stevenson, a member of the Unitarian Church of Bloomington, Illinois, put it well in a quote that appeared in ...the *UU World*: “I think that one of our most important tasks as Unitarians is to convince ourselves and others that there is nothing to fear in difference; that difference, in fact, is one of the healthiest and most invigorating of human characteristics, without which life would become lifeless. Here lies the power of the liberal way—not in making the whole world Unitarian; but in helping ourselves and others to see some of the possibilities inherent in viewpoints other than one’s own; in encouraging the free interchange of ideas; in welcoming fresh approaches to the problems of life; in

urging the fullest, most vigorous use of critical self-examination. Thus we can learn to grow together, to unite in

our common search for the truth beneath a better and a happier world.”

This has been, of course, the dream not only of religious liberals, but of the revolutionary founders of our nation who chose the Latin aphorism *E Pluribus Unum* as the motto for a republic jerry-rigged out of thirteen radically diverse, independent-minded colonies. Unity-in-diversity has long been a cornerstone of American civic culture....

Theological diversity — the reality

And yet, our own denominational history — like that of the Republic — is replete with instances where, despite the progressive rhetoric, acceptance of theological difference has not been the norm. While it is undoubtedly true that Unitarians and Universalists have consistently rejected “creeds” and emphasized the primacy of individual conscience, restraints have typically been placed on that freedom. We have always had boundaries—embracing at times more, and at other times fewer theological perspectives. A hundred and thirty years ago, it was darned difficult to be a Unitarian or a Universalist and also a transcendentalist.... A bit later, the more conventionally Christian leaders of the American Unitarian Association in Boston were scandalized by the radically inclusive “Unity Men” of the upper Midwest, led by that redoubtable old Welshman, Jenkin Lloyd Jones.

Nor have such controversies abated in recent decades. Right through the 20th century, UU’s continued seriously to question the virtue and the necessity of so much theological latitude.

...During the hey-day of humanism, UU Christians felt marginalized. When interest in paganism began to pick up steam and Covens were formed, both Christian and Humanist UU’s wrung their hands.... At his moment in history, however, it seems to be the humanists

turn to feel excluded.

ly, I am a Unitarian Universalist largely because it does so enthusiastically embrace the principle of diversity. As someone whose religious outlook has been decisively influenced by Buddhism but who has no interest in taking Buddhist vows, I find UU culture extraordinarily congenial to, and for the most part, complementary of my perspective. In my own congregation at least, the poly-logue between humanists, Christians, pagans, Buddhists, Taoists, and Jews is typically rich, cordial, mutually supportive, and motivating. Theologically, I am a minority within UUism; there aren’t all that many Buddhists in our ranks. That doesn’t bother me because I don’t feel the need to be predominant in order to feel fully accepted. I sincerely wish more UU’s felt that way.

Building unity

So much for diversity. But where, in the end, do we discover unity? Edward Frost, my colleague in Atlanta, asks a question that surely is on many of our minds: “While pluralism and diversity must remain as highly valued principles of liberal religion,” Frost writes, “our commitment to pluralism and diversity does hold a danger.”

The danger is that unless we can also commit ourselves as a people, in unity of purpose and of mission, to something of ultimate importance, diversity will be all we have, and diversity is not enough.

Is Hosea Ballou’s famous dictum that it is sufficient for Universalists (and Unitarians) merely to “agree in love” not enough? Is something more required for “unity” than to respect one another’s integrity as free thinkers and to show compassion for them as fellow sufferers? What is that something more of “ultimate” importance to which Edward Frost alludes and that he feels all UU’s should embrace?

Personally, I prefer to keep it simple. For me, it is wholly sufficient to honor one another as unique and irreplaceable individuals, to participate in a movement which marshals people’s special gifts and talents to serve the greater good, and to be regularly stimulated in my own pur-

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When Crayolas Sang

Rev. Max Coots

Remember when you were eight or nine at this time of year ...and going back to school. ...[W]e all had the same "school supplies." Brand spanking new, un-marked, shiny and unused, as clean as our innocence and as unworn as our lives.

Rulers: Guarantors of the shortest distance between two points; A visual aid to the mystery of fractions; ...And guaranteed to fall clattering at the most embarrassing times.

Red rubber erasers, as yet untouched by the errors of our ways; ...Soon blunted and lost

Slick, tall, yellow pencils, soon marked and shortened as they were turned ...the friendliest of writing implements that never doomed us to the incriminating irreversibility of ink; the best desk-top toy ever invented.

Blunt scissors, guaranteed safe.... For some, pencil boxes: an ingenuity of compartments, ...reminder of the organization of which no child is capable.

And Crayolas: The best of all, neat to the eye, the fingers, and the nose; Waxy magic rainbow ...to turn any paper into a Sistine ceiling. Even old, broken, and jumbled ...the same bright promises as when it had begun.

Crayolas were a crayon for all seasons. There was jack-o-lantern orange, full-moon yellow and cat-black, then Santa red and evergreen. New Year's came with grey trying to be silver for the bells. There was snow-shadow blue, tree brown, winter window and fireplace yellow. The red went fast for Valentine's and Mother's Day, being heart-felt times. By spring the by-then broken pieces got a chance to blossom forth.



Max Coots concludes by inviting the child in us "from time to time to hear Crayolas sing."

Source: *When Crayolas Sang* in "Leaning Against the Wind: a selection of sermons" by Max Coots, 1992.

Family Activity: *Tue Colors*

Cyndi Lauper's 1986 song *True Colors* is a song about being true to yourself, letting your true colors show. It is also a song about diversity. In 2007, Lauper launched the "True Colors Tour" in an effort to support gay rights and fight hate crimes.

Have a discussion with your children about the color of things to which we don't often assign colors. What "color" is Sunday, the wind, the smell of autumn, the song of a bird, emotions like anger or sadness, etc.? In choosing colors for these and other things, are you choosing different

colors? As an example, why might Sunday be yellow for one of you and blue for someone else? There are obviously no right answers, but choosing different colors for the same thing illustrates differences in creativity and preference.

The Four Pillars of Pluralism

Diana L. Eck

First, pluralism is not diversity alone, but *the energetic engagement with diversity*. ...Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.

Second, pluralism is not just tolerance, but *the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require [us] ...to know anything about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.

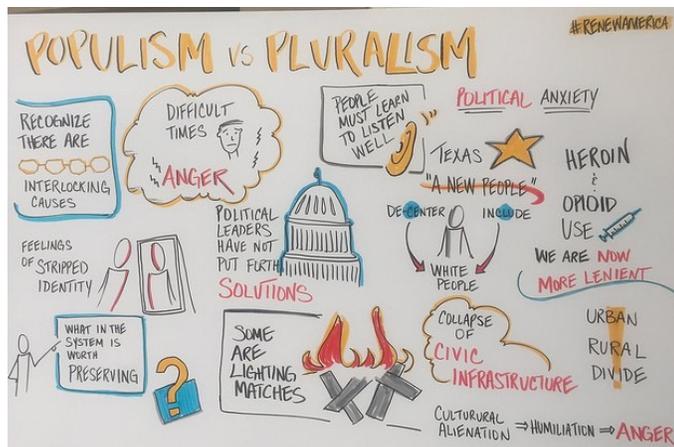
Third, pluralism is not relativism, but *the encounter of commitments*. The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation,

but in relationship to one another.

Fourth, pluralism is based on *dialogue*. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dia-

logue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the "table" will agree.... Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table—with one's commitments.

Source: <http://pluralism.org/what-is-pluralism/>



Becoming Like-Hearted

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to the Theme**



wrong! Those are not true fishes." / And they take the tales of one another's catches / For fish stories. They tell heroic sagas / Of the ones that got away; for, in truth, / There are uncounted fishes / That pass through all our nets, and fish so large / They tear our nets to tatters if we dare / To fish the depths. And how often / Do we carefully sein (that is, fish with a net) the long familiar shoals / And hang our nets to dry, proclaiming / "I have caught all the fish in the sea." / And who has not scoffed at the youth / With handline, the wrong bait, / And in inauspicious waters patiently awaiting / The fish that our nets tell us / Does not exist? Words. / They are the nets we humans go a-fishing with.

We fish with words as nets. We find solace in a Unitarian Universalist congregation because of the like-minded people

that we encounter there. Our congregations have felt like a liberal oasis in an illiberal desert, a desert that we found antithetical to our deepest sensibilities. While we would have rebelled at being told what to believe, we found respite in this like-mindedness. This is a curious response given the admonition, "We do not need to think alike, to love alike." Like-mindedness can be a safe bond, one that promotes unity. But like-mindedness struggles with diversity.

An aspect of like-mindedness has been a fierce individuality, with which we struggle to balance with the community. The "weak force" of community has not been able to achieve equilibrium with the "strong force" of individuality, and some of our congregations have failed to thrive. Congregations will not really flourish if we are only like-minded, for we will always find sources of disagreement. More is needed. Since love is the covenant of our faith, we must also become like-hearted in order to flourish and to find and nurture the unity in our diversity.

We lament the lack of diversity in our congregations, and it is true that on the surface we are mostly white, middle-class, well-educated folks. If you scratch the surface, however, you will find more diversity than imagined. Doing so requires going deep with one another, telling the stories of our lives that reveal stark differences and unexpected simi-

larities. Doing so requires honesty about brokenness and struggle. Without such depth, our congregations are pseudo-communities in which difference is hidden out of fear of not fitting in.

M. Scott Peck suggested that real community emerges among "individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to 'rejoice together, mourn together,' and to 'delight in each other, making others' conditions their own.'" Too often, pseudo-community, as Peck called it, masquerades as true community. In pseudo-community, people avoid conflicts, minimize the diversity that exists within the group, and communicate superficially because they rightly lack the trust to express their deepest beliefs and feelings. The focus is on like-mindedness, because that is easier than a like-heartedness that engages unity in diversity.

Max de Pree said, "We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion." It is in the work of becoming like-hearted, of focusing on our covenant of right relationship, that we create the space in our congregations for diversity and the deep and challenging work that recognizes unity in diversity.

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology**
suit of deeper insight and abiding happiness. ...When it comes right down to it, Unitarian Universalism embraces relational rather than propositional truth, as Hosea Ballou suggested. If we agree in love, no disagreement can do us any harm. That, in a nutshell, is the operative principle that makes unity-in-diversity possible...."

Source: <https://www.midamericauua.org/psd-annual-conference/conference-lectures/1916-diversityintheuupew>

Diversity is a Gift

Rev. Mark L. Belletini

For religion to be significant, it has to provide more than the comforts of community. It also has to provide opportunities for deepening, for what I call spiritual growth, and for the casting down of false images and stereotypes, which hurt us all. A good religion has to open us to the real diversity of our modern world. For our work as liberal religious people is not to be competitive with others, and to find ways to supersede others, but rather to find ways to supersede

ourselves, to grow beyond our limitations and our constrictive boundaries, each and every one of us. Diversity, you see, must not end up being some sort of feel good slogan, a word we keep in our back pocket to make us feel like we're broad minded. Diversity is a gift. But it cannot be a gift... unless it is received. It is only received when there are hands and hearts open enough to receive it. And the opening of fists into welcoming hands and welcoming hearts is our spiritual work.... Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/for-religion-to-be-significant>

We Are All More Human Than Otherwise

Rev. Dr. Richard Gilbert

The human race is a vast rainbow, white black, red, yellow and brown bursting



into view.

Yet for all blood is red, the sky is blue,
The earth brown, the night dark.
In size and shape we are a varied pattern
of
Tall and short, slim and stout,
Elegant and plain,
Yet for all
There are fingers to touch
Hearts to break, eyes to cry,
Ears to hear, mouths to speak.
In tongue we are a tower of Babel,
A great jumble of voices grasping for
words,
Groping for ways to say love, peace, pity
and hope.
Boundaries divide us,
Lines drawn to mark our diversity,
Maps charted to separate the human race
from itself.
Yet a mother's grief, a father's love,
A child's happy cry, a musician's sound,
An artist's stroke
Batter the boundaries and shatter the
walls.
Strength and weakness,
Arrogance and humility,
Confidence and fear
Live together in each one,
Reminding us that we share a common
humanity.

We are all more human than otherwise.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/we-are-all-more-human>

Why Diversity?

Leon Spencer

Frequently I am asked, 'Why should the Unitarian Universalist Association {UUA} spend money, time, and resources on racial and cultural diversity?' I sometimes feel burdened with the expectation that I should have an answer because I am a psychologist by profession and because I happen to be an African American.

Often the person asking the question goes on to point out that not many African Americans would be interested in Unitarian Universalism [UUism], that African Americans and other minorities have a theology that is too different from UUism or that we will never get a large number of them to come. Once, someone even invited me to leave and go back to whatever church I came from if it was so bad at the UUA.

The reason I want racial and cultural diversity in the UUA extends beyond issues of numbers, theology, or money. It has to do with the fact that this is the right thing to do. The religious challenge of our time moves us to open our doors to all and to promote wholeness in the midst of diversity.

Working for Diversity

Rev. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley

Why should we intentionally work for diversity? The responses to this question vary widely. Of course, hard demographic realities suggest much. But for me, beyond any demographic or sociological justification, there is a theological imperative. Affirming the inherent worth and dignity of every human being, for me, means working to create places of worship where all who subscribe to a liberal approach to religion can not only feel welcome, but enter into worship settings that reflect the diverse cultural realities of "we the people." Congregations that reflect the pluralism of our society are one step in beginning to transcend the social boundaries that divide us from each other and from all that is, which some of us call God.

Many people seem to want racial and cultural diversity up to a point. I believe that true inclusivity removes that point.

Learning how to develop, value, and appreciate cross-cultural relationships is to everyone's benefit. To embrace a world where there is racial and cultural diversity, Euro-Americans, Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, people of all sexual orientations and all ages, people dealing with physical and emotional limitations, women and men must ...examine themselves and reach out to the community.

When everyone comes to the table for discussion, there will be differences of opinion, and yet we can ignore no one. All bring gifts to be shared. All can be honored and enriched. To build a racially and culturally diverse community is to build a world of beauty and power. It is the right thing to do. Being able to honestly and lovingly share gifts, pains, and appreciations with each other is what religion is truly about. A blessing awaits us all, and it will come when we experience the richness of racial and cultural diversity.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/why-diversity>

The task ahead is an arduous one. Indeed, diversity is one of the most challenging tasks we will ever undertake as a religious movement. What we are dealing with is not simply racial and ethnic diversity, but a paradigm shift that is rooted in a commitment to growth in a pluralistic community as well as readiness for and acceptance of cultural change within our congregations....



Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/why-should-we-intentionally-work-for-diversity>

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion: Unity & Diversity

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of *Explorations* and the questions.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: "If diversity is a source of wonder, its opposite - the ubiquitous condensation to some blandly amorphous and singularly generic modern culture that takes for granted an impoverished environment - is a source of dismay. There is, indeed, a fire burning over the earth, taking with it plants and animals, cultures, languages, ancient skills and visionary wisdom. Quelling this flame, and re-inventing the poetry of diversity is perhaps the most important challenge of our times." *Wade Davis*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: "Knowing yourself is not so much about introspection and interaction. To know yourself is to realize that you are more than the little self that has been given to you by your history — the pattern that others made — that your true self is, in truth, much larger and includes other people,

other cultures, other species even. That life is less about being and more about inter-being. We come to know ourselves, then, through coming to know each other. And the deeper that knowledge, the richer and more creative the world we build together." *Danny Martin*

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. What age were you growing up when you first met people of different races and/or ethnic backgrounds? What was the experience like? Did others around you respect or distance themselves from these differences? What impact did all of this have on you?
2. Have you interacted with people from other cultures, either in the United States or abroad? What mistakes did you make because you didn't know the customs? What did you especially value about these other cultures?
3. Have there been situations in which you were the minority by virtue of your skin color, language, culture, etc.? What were these experiences like?
4. In terms of encountering people very different from you, what were the challenges? What transformations occurred as a result of those encounters?
5. What differences are most difficult for you to tolerate, and why? What are the similarities, despite diversity, that you find most striking?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *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.*

Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles, Minister Emeritus (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Our Important Task

It's Hard Work

Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt

Why are we still talking about inclusivity and diversity when we have done so little to make them real? ...Because diversity, inclusivity, is terribly hard, terribly uncomfortable, definitely unsettling, and often quite frustrating.

...Learning the language of diversity — is ...the work of a lifetime. It's hard to accept people who are not like you, who don't talk the way you do, or believe the things you believe, or dress or vote as you do. It's even harder to appreciate them for the things about them that are not like you, to find them interesting and fun, ... and to acknowledge, finally, that you may have to agree to disagree.

...But if we cannot bring justice into the small circle of our own individual lives, we cannot hope to bring justice to the world. And if we do not bring justice to the world, none of us is safe and none of us will survive. ... Hard as diversity is, it is our most important task.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/its-hard-work>

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