

Leader: We light this flame as a symbol of all this, of the spirit of life we have shared, and the common journey we will embark upon.

Congregation: To walk together as one, in the way of truth and love, one in the hope for a bright future.

May it be so.

#*Opening Hymn 1000 *Morning Has Come*

As we prepare to sing our hymn, you will find the hymnals under the seat in front of you, unless you're in the front row where they were on your seat. We invite you to share hymnals.

Story

Kathy Helmrich

Offertory Words

November Share the Plate
Covenant to Care "Adopt a Social Worker" Program

Here, we share with generosity what treasure we have with others whose needs are greater than our own. Each week we donate 50% of our total cash offering to a non-profit program that serves others. This month your cash contributions will go to our Covenant to Care Social Worker who applies our donations to address the needs of specific children, often living with grandparents, who have been removed from difficult family situations. Donations at this time of year anticipate the holiday season. Please give generously.

Offering & Offertory Music

Imagine, Lennon

SUUS Singers

Statement of Gratitude

We thank you for your generosity of spirit and of giving. And, now, children, please turn on your flames, while we sing you out.

#Sing the Young People Out *Children's Recessional (see back of hymnal)*

Honoring Our Joys and Sorrows by Spoken Word & Ritual

In the coming moments, we will share with one another our joys and sorrows. We do so in two ways.

(1) You may come forward to the mic to speak (or, if needed we will can bring a mic to you).

OR

(2) After our time of speaking our joys and sorrows, you may come forward to light a candle silently.

- If there are those among us who would like to speak their joy or sorrow from the microphone, please come forward now (or raise your hand as needed).

Verbal Expression

And, now let us enter into a time of quiet reflection.

In this time let us slow down the pace of life, see past the distractions, and pay attention to that which, perhaps, you've been too busy to notice. It could be a joy, it could be sorrow, it could be something with which you are struggling . . .

In these moments, ground your feet on the floor (as you are able),

[BELL]

relax your body, center yourself . . . breathe deeply. Reflect for few moments in silence on that voice longing to be heard . . . acknowledge it . . .

SILENCE

- As the spirit moves you, you may come forward to light a candle for that which is on your mind or in your heart. (Light the taper from the chalice.)

Silent Expression (Lighting Candles)

Musical Meditation *La Cathédrale Engloutie*, Debussy

[Bell]

Reflection *What Makes Unitarian Universalism a Religion?*

Rev. Lloyd

What makes a religion? First thing: most religions require obedience. Obedience to a theology and doxology (otherwise known as a list of rules) in order to get something you want. For many, the quest is for an immortal life, also known as a place in the afterlife. Or said another way, a relationship with G*d, and/or a like-minded community of supports.

But, what makes Unitarian Universalism a religion? . . . since we have neither a guaranteed afterlife to offer, or a relationship with a retributive G*d? The only G*d that is spoken of in our faith is one that cannot be defined, but is known as a G*d of Love, or a Spirit of Life, or Nature, or humanity or a reverential science, or other ways unknown.

Unitarian Universalism, unfettered by theologies that require obedience to retributive G*ds¹, is about constantly learning, growing, changing -- being transformed. It is about becoming a better version of the person, or people, we are today. It is about living into, as best we can, our ideals.

This is the experience our congregations seek to provide its members. These are larger than life values and aspirations and we need each other to begin to pursue them.

PAUSE

Often, though, the smallest changes (that we have control over) are the hardest ones to make.

There are, of course, the big ones that come along unexpected, unsolicited and unwanted. Like the changes to one's life when a loved one dies, when a job is lost, when a child moves on, when disaster strikes.

Those are certainly hard, but the changes they make in our lives are usually reactive. We didn't go out seeking them, and when they come, they come BIG, painfully, and reactively. We are forced to "get our head around them" whether we want to or not.

PAUSE

¹ Rev. Lloyd does not spell out the word, "G*d," because the term is loaded with many misconceptions and preconceptions. That which is the spirit of life and community, the spirit of love and death, the spirit of humanity, cannot be relegated to one three letter word. Rev. Lloyd invites others to reconsider the meanings of this word, and, to contemplate whether it is a noun or verb. Is G*d Love? The reader is invited to expand their vision and understanding . . .

But, then there are the small changes. The ones we want to do because they are “the right thing to do.” Changes that somehow require that we re-order our lives, because it is the healthy thing to do, the moral thing to do, or the compassionate thing to do.

In these cases, the key element is . . . that *we have a choice about whether we make the change*. Will we choose and act on that change?

I believe that a good religion, like a good lover, will draw out the best in you; will call you forth . . . into a new light where who you are and what you do, is congruent with what you believe. That’s what I believe Unitarian Universalism asks us to do. To never be satisfied that we have found “THE” answer, but to always keep searching for the Truth in all its varieties and permutations.

Fundamentally, living our faith, is not about changing things “out there” but about choosing to change things “in here.” In my heart. In my mind. In the very way I live. And, in so doing making this world a better place.

PAUSE

How many of you have ever been to one of our annual national General Assemblies for our Unitarian Universalist congregations? Let me ask those of you who have been, what was special about it? [Answers offered: energy, inspiration, and transformation.]

PAUSE

There is a certain fervor present in the workshops, the music, the sermons. These special events focus on our Universalist “heart” perhaps a bit more than our Unitarian “head”. And that fervor arises from the hope **we** bring to that gathering. It is a resolute hope that continues to live in the deepest parts of our hearts, despite today’s headlines, despite moments of sorrow and outrage. It is a hope arising from our shared values that change can happen, that transformation can happen and we can will ourselves to make that change happen (even when it is uncomfortable), even when it changes our own lives.

PAUSE

Historically, the values of Unitarian Universalism have been described for their breadth, size and expansiveness. It has even been called, “the larger hope.” But, why the word, “hope”? And, how is “hope” different from “optimism”? Cornel West says that there’s a marked distinction between the two. It’s easy to be optimistic when we have a pretty good idea of how things will turn out when things are going well.

Hope, on the other hand, as he suggests, has to do with seeing that things are not going well and actively struggling to change them. Hope requires courage. Courageous hope in the face of disappointment can sustain us during the really bleak and difficult times in a way that optimism just can't.

This kind of courageous hope is as much action than an emotion, and, action means change, and, change can sometimes mean the transformation of ourselves and larger systems.

In short, the kind of hope that Unitarian Universalism rests on is a hope with human hands and feet that is grounded in the Spirit within; and, for some, grounded in God's Spirit. It is a courageous hope that g*d with a little "g" is Love with a big "L". It is a courageous hope and conviction that, by our hands and lives, justice can live. In this way, Unitarian Universalism is a religion. It is not a non-profit club or society that never asks their members to change their own spirits. It is a faith that reflects our communities who, by their spirit and courageous hope, and action, know they themselves will be changed even as they strive to bring hope to the rest of the world.

PAUSE

While preparing for this service, I thought, *"Well, maybe I should look up the word, "religion" and find out how far off from Webster, Unitarian Universalism is?"*

Religion . . .

1.a. Belief in and reverence for a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator and governor of the universe.

Maybe – but that certainly doesn't work for everyone

Religion . . .

b. The life or condition of a person in a religious order.

The life or condition of a person – well – OK – but it seems to assume that supernatural thing again . . .

It won't work for everyone.

Religion . . .

3. A set of beliefs, values, and practices based on the teachings of a spiritual leader.

That could work. We certainly look to the great religious prophets of history for inspiration such as Jesus.

Jesus never talked about making a better kingdom of heaven. What he talked about was bringing the kingdom of heaven down here to earth, and creating paradise on earth. Implicit in his teaching is the undeniable assertion that the only ones who can make this happen, are those with courageous hope, those who have the confidence to act on their conviction. He knew justice on this earth couldn't happen without humanity's hope, its voice, its hands and its feet. Jesus knew this. So do we.

"A set of beliefs, values, and practices based on the teachings of a spiritual leader." It could work, but again, it won't work for all.

And, then finally . . .

Religion . . .

4. A cause, principle, or activity pursued with zeal or conscientious devotion.

Ah, yes. Principles pursued with zeal and devotion. You might say **7 principles** pursued with ***courageous hope***.

PAUSE

I believe Unitarian Universalism is a religion because it calls us to courageous hope, to act, and to transform the world into a just world. It is a religion because it lifts up the strength and value of the human spirit to change things for the better. It is a religion because, when we let it, and when we help it, it brings out the best in us and our communities.

Amen and blessed be.

Responsive Reading 2

In a moment, I'm going to invite you to join me in the 2nd Responsive Reading on your pink sheet. But, first I want to address the word "Amen". It can carry a lot of undeserved baggage. The word "Amen" comes from the Hebrew word "truth" and means "So be it."

Please stand.

Leader: When we give from our abundance in religious community, the gifts we can offer are extraordinary.

Congregation: We are blessed with many gifts. Let us use these gifts for the good of the world.

Leader: And may the people say, Amen.

Congregation: Amen!

Leader: When we work together in religious community, the good we can do is extraordinary.

Congregation: We are talented and resourceful. Let us use our resources to make a real difference.

Leader: And may the people say, Amen.

Congregation: Amen!

Leader: When we worship together in religious community, the spirit we show is extraordinary.

Congregation: We are powerful people. Let us use our power to bless the world.

Leader: And may the people say, Amen.

Congregation: Amen!

Leader: When we give, work, and worship together, with love as our guide, we discover that who we are and what we can give, truly, is extraordinary.

Congregation: We can transform the world.

Leader: And may the people say, Amen.

Congregation: Amen!

Please remain standing for our hymn . . .

***Hymn 360** *Here We Have Gathered*

***Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice**

Please remain standing as you are able and join hands as you are willing.

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. We extinguish this flame, but not the depths to which we know we belong to this spiritual home and each other. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Let the congregation say, "Amen."

Please be seated to sing our closing.

Closing Song 131 *Love Will Guide Us*

Silent Reflection

Let us sit together in silence as we reflect on the message and meaning of today's service.

* Please stand as you are able and comfortable.

Latecomers may be seated.