

Stronger and Better – All Together Association Sunday

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October 18, 2009*

Before I get into this morning's message, I have a confession to make. As I read through Marge Piercy's poem, "The Low Road" I thought "as much as I love this poem, 'The Low Road' is kind of a downer for Association Sunday." Even the title – "The Low Road?" What was I thinking?

Well, when I suggested Marge Piercy's poem to Rev. Mary Ganz, the lines that were foremost in my mind, and the ones that inspired this sermon are these:

Three people are a delegation,
a committee, a wedge. With four
you can play bridge and start
an organization. With six
you can rent a whole house,
eat pie for dinner with no
seconds, and hold a fund raising party.
A dozen make a demonstration.
A hundred fill a hall
A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter;
ten thousand, power and your own paper;
a hundred thousand, your own media;
ten million, your own country.

It goes on one at a time,
It starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again and they say no,
it starts when we say We
and know who you mean, and each
day you mean one more.

Association Sunday is a reminder that Unitarian Universalist congregations are a community. In addition to being the many individuals whose inherent worth and dignity our congregations affirm, Unitarian Universalism is also a "We." The UUA is the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. Underscore "congregations."

Congregations – both physical and virtual -- are the main entry way into Unitarian Universalist community. UUA President Reverend Peter Morales estimates that Unitarian Universalist congregations welcome around 5,000 visitors a week and

possibly 250,000 visitors a year. This number doesn't include the 650,000 people who claim Unitarian Universalism as their religious identity, and who knows how many people are associated with us through virtual community, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and whatever the next social media innovation will be?

But whether our numbers are 60, 600, or 600,000 what really matters is that what people are looking for and find when they associate with our congregations is community. Whether people enter through a doorway or a URL, the UU "We" can mean one more, one hundred more, or who knows how many more?

In my job I get to hear stories of the ways UU congregations are making an important difference in the lives of individuals and communities. Some of these stories show up in surprising places. For example, one day I was talking about Unitarian Universalism to a young, college-aged woman in my Afro-Cuban dance class, and she revealed to me that the UU Church of Arlington provided comfort and support to her after the death of her mother. Losing a parent is challenging at any age, but imagine how difficult this loss is for an 18 or 19-year old. Community is so much more important in such times.

Just a month ago, the young woman who teaches the Zumba class I attend told me that she thinks the world of the Arlington Church where she finds a religious community that is welcoming of the diversity that is part of her heritage and her family.

On October 11, when I was at the Equality Day Rally at the U.S. Capitol, it felt really good to be surrounded by hundreds of Unitarian Universalists who had journeyed with their ministers and members of their congregations to "stand on the side of love" for LGBTQ equality. It felt more than good. Good would have been just being part of the 100,000 gathered on the Capitol lawn. It was great to be with my UU community supporting each other in living our values and being a force for good in the world. This is what makes Unitarian Universalism a faith or religion for our time, and our ability to adapt to new revelations – whether in science or the understanding of human nature – is what will make us a faith for all times.

Three people are a ministerial relations committee,

or a welcome table. . . .With six

you can start an Interweave group,

eat pie for dinner with no

seconds, and hold a fund raising party.

A dozen makes a covenant group or an anti-racism transformation team

A hundred fill a worship

A thousand have solidarity and your own congregation;

ten thousand "harness the power of love to stop oppression"

a hundred thousand, your own association of congregations

People who are part of Unitarian Universalism now and who will become part of the UU "We" are looking for experiences of community that our faith communities offer – a welcome and acceptance of their full identity and humanity, diverse ways to nurture their spirits, justice-centered values, support during life's challenges, a sense of wonder in the face of life's mysteries, reverence for the natural world, hope in times of difficulty,

and celebration of what is good and beautiful in the human experience. These are the values that draw people into a Unitarian Universalist community, that make parents choose our religious education programs because they teach their family values while also teaching that we must value all families.

Generosity is another way that Unitarian Universalists live our values in community. I recognize that these are financially uncertain times. You may think “I am already sacrificing to support my congregation. How can I give more?”

Maybe you are helping adult children or grand children who cannot find work. Some of you may be assisting a parent whose retirement savings were hit hard. Or you may be thinking “there are so many organizations and causes I believe in that need my support” or “I’m not even certain of my own job.”

At the beginning of my message I talked about Association Sunday as a reminder that Unitarian Universalist congregations are a community. UU Church of Arlington, VA’s collection will be combined with the collection of hundreds of congregations across the country. Together the generosity of hundreds of congregations will multiply the capacity to support and sustain our communities’ vision for Unitarian Universalism. It will mean that Building the World We Dream About can be a living curriculum with updated resources and sustained support for curriculum leaders using electronic technology. It will mean that the Diversity of Ministry initiative will receive the sustained commitment necessary to provide new ministry for 21st century generations. Association Sunday support will support the dreams we have for Unitarian Universalism.

In uncertain times congregational gifts to Association Sunday affirm the value of Unitarian Universalist community. In uncertain times, it is even more important to invest in our vision for Unitarian Universalism, remembering that others who came before gave of their generosity to insure that we would have the communities that sustain us in times like these. In uncertain times, generosity is an act of faith.

Unitarian Universalism is a visionary faith. People in UU congregations have a vision of the world that some call “Beloved Community.” Professor Mark Hicks, a member of the Meadville Lombard faculty, gave that vision the curriculum title “Building the World We Dream About.” Another version of the vision is embodied in the song by Rev. Jason Shelton called “Standing on the Side of Love.”

All of these words recognize the importance of community in a world that is increasingly fragmented and isolated. Together as an association of congregations, as communities bound in covenantal relationship we can make possible more than any one congregation can achieve alone. This is what I was thinking when I titled this message “Stronger and Better All Together.”

I close with another adaptation of “The Low Road”

Two can teach an Our Whole Lives curriculum

Three people comfort grieving adult children

With four, you can start

a support group for multiracial families

A hundred fill buses on the way to the Equality March

A thousand have solidarity and make Unitarian Universalism a force for good in the world

Ten thousand make more compassion, more hope, and more justice possible

A hundred thousand build the world we dream about

BENEDICTION:

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