

Statement of Personal Theology

Statement of Personal Theology or Religious Philosophy – Credentialed Religious Educator and Credentialed Religious Educator, Masters Level UUA Religious Education Credentialing Program

Please provide a statement of your personal theology or religious philosophy in a paragraph or more. Attach an additional sheet if necessary:

“God does not defy the laws of physics; God *is* the laws of physics.”

I’ve used that explanation many times - I have the pleasure to be a guest at the local high school’s World Religions class each fall. They use Huston Smith’s book as their text, and after their initial guests (an atheist and a theist who come together to answer kids’ questions), I come to the class as a local Wiccan.

It’s easy to choose just one theological, religious label and present answers from that perspective. The truth, as we know as Unitarian Universalists, is beautifully more complex.

As a pantheist, I understand that Chaos and Cosmos and Chronos - and all those fabulous laws of physics, expressed by the heart-wrenching beauty of mathematics - are immortal deity, the Creator and destroyer of all. One whole universe, of which I am a part.

God is pre-conscious. I will never rule out the possibility that all of us beings, with and without “life”, can and will eventually form the mind-bogglingly huge number of connections to bring our dear universe into single, precious consciousness.

I call the Universe “the gods who made us” - supernovae, entropy, gravity, DNA, oxygen, natural selection, human nature - all the forces which together have caused me to exist. I am of God and from God. Perhaps this is what comes of reading *Stranger in a Strange Land* at a formative age.

I believe in the gods who made us fundamentally.

I am the Universe’s component part and also her midwife, working to clean up my small piece of her in hope of the moment she is born.

I also have a deep faith in “the gods whom we made”.

Human nature has developed stories of Epona, Bride, Athena, Artemis, Jehovah and the Dagda. The stories are not entertainment. They survived because they answer deep needs and name deep truths.

My first altar was made to Diana, Roman moon-goddess, because at age eight I thought she must be lonely with no worshippers left.

I pray to the gods whom we made because there is power in time-honored ideas. They don’t have existence outside of human conception - and that makes them no less real. If I need to pray for freedom, perhaps for a friend who is stuck in an abusive situation, I know that praying to Epona touches a powerful force for freedom which exists in thousands upon thousands of people over thousands of years. Freedom is real - and is a human construct - and the momentum of my ancestors’ belief in Epona and my prayer to her carries me along to deeper understanding of freedom as I need to understand it now.

As a person who lives with Seasonal Affective Disorder, I need to process the change of seasons, the darkness which haunts me, the light which lifts me to giddy heights, as a spiritual journey. The cycles and seasons are God. They are my life. They are an ongoing tale of death and rebirth, and encouragement to examine my shadow side, fears, and summer-heights of creativity and ecstasy. John Barleycorn must die; the year must die; the sun must be reborn; the green goddess who was dead must be resurrected. This is my liturgical year in which I *must* believe, else December is the time of despair and suicide.

And that precious liturgical year leads me back to Cosmos, to the precise, balanced, spinning of this beautiful blue-green jewel. Goddess, Lover, Child.

Please provide a statement on your understanding of the meaning of faith:

Faith seeks to articulate the complex relationships between self and others, self and nature, and self and self.

Like a skeleton, intrapersonal Faith holds these complex, dynamic relationships in tension and in agreement, allowing the individual to move and act. Faith allows humans to integrate the thousands of signals, variables, and changes into a whole concept. It may be articulable, it may not be, but it allows us to function in a spiritual cosmos, rather than in chaos.

Faith is more - Pat Hoertdoerfer speaks eloquently of “Faith Tradition”. Faith Tradition is interpersonal faith - the stories, activities, discussions, hymns, habits, rituals, history of humanity communicating personal faith in order for a community to share certain assumptions about how the universe works.

Please provide a statement of your preferred pedagogy:

I affirm the Sudbury model of pedagogy - that every learner has a unique constellation of aptitudes, competencies, and strengths, capable of learning and succeeding. Learners engage in the process of learning, rather than being passive recipients of a process called “teaching” performed by “teachers”.

Rather than taking away the importance of the teachers, however, I embrace Maria Montessori’s concept of teachers. Teachers have accepted the delightful and creative responsibility of preparing a rich environment in which learners’ curiosity and thirst for knowledge can develop and be satisfied.

For my own children’s broad education, I have utilized both traditional public education and home schooled “unschooling” to take advantage of the benefits offered by each.

Taking advantage of Howard Gardner’s articulation of multiple intelligences is central to my understanding of pedagogy. In my own continuing education, I take advantage of my kinesthetic learning style and kinesthetic memory, engaging in activities in order to learn. My dear spouse may be able to read a book understand how to build our home, and I need to get my hands on the chisel and feel my way through making a join.

I reach out to different audiences in different ways. Children live in a world of metaphor and magic (and fie on the experts who think they don’t!). I embrace the Spirit Play model of religious education and support its use in our congregations and at home. I have brought sacred

dance to the children of UUCUV with the help of a young UU of the Dartmouth Dance Ensemble. I have had the privilege of providing intergenerational worship experiences to the UUCUV, and seek to fill these experiences with kinesthetic and mystical components.

My role as an educator - since I was a camp counselor at age 18 - has always been as an information resource, a safety net, and “She Who Has High Expectations”. Amazing what we can do when someone whispers, “I believe you can.”

With an adult audience, I am deeply respectful of the hours of service provided by volunteer and staff congregational leaders. I find myself at my most practical - and least metaphorical - when I work with adults. I provide handouts. I listen. I write things on large pieces of paper with arrows and Venn diagrams. I write reflective minutes and summaries and e-mail them immediately.

Is this pedagogy? Or simple respect for the talents and dignity of the folks I get to share learning adventures with? Or excitement about learning? It’s all good.

Name: __Sparrow F. Alden____ Date: __2 February, 2010_