

Civility

Chalice Lighting: #576 A Litany of Restoration (Shared Responsively)

Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley

If, recognizing the interdependence of all life, we strive to build community, the strength we gather will be our salvation. If you are black and I am white,

It will not matter.

If you are female and I am male,

It will not matter.

If you are older and I am younger,

It will not matter.

If you are progressive and I am conservative,

It will not matter.

If you are straight and I am gay,

It will not matter.

If you are Christian and I am Jewish,

It will not matter.

If we join spirits as brothers and sisters, the pain of our aloneness will be lessened, and that does matter.

(Together) In this spirit, we build community and move toward restoration.

Sojourners Comment Community Covenant

Sojourners Faith in Action for Social Justice

I will express myself with civility, courtesy, and respect for every member of the Sojourners online community, especially toward those with whom I disagree, even if I feel disrespected by them. ([Romans 12:17-21](#))

I will express my disagreements with other community members' ideas without insulting, mocking, or slandering them personally. ([Matthew 5:22](#))

I will not exaggerate others' beliefs nor make unfounded prejudicial assumptions based on labels, categories, or stereotypes. I will always extend the benefit of the doubt.

([Ephesians 4:29](#))

I will hold others accountable by clicking "report" on comments that violate these principles, based not on what ideas are expressed but on how they're expressed. ([2 Thessalonians 3:13-15](#))

I understand that comments reported as abusive are reviewed by Sojourners staff and are subject to removal. Repeat offenders will be blocked from making further comments. ([Proverbs 18:7](#))

A Prayer for Civility

From the Progressive Christianity Blog

Gracious God, we stand before You to ask for healing and forgiveness. Sins of division have disconnected us from civil conversation, from one another, and from You.

Some of us have been hurt by adversarial rhetoric and uncivil conversation. We have felt the sting of pointed comments. We have heard people belittle our deepest passions. And in the process, we get harmed and forget that we are made in Your sacred image, Holy One. For this, we ask for healing.

Some of us have hurt others by using adversarial rhetoric and uncivil remarks. We have made pointed comments. We have belittled the beliefs of others. And in the process, we have harmed others and cause others to forget that they are made in Your sacred image, Holy One. For this, we ask for forgiveness.

Some of us have been left with disillusionment. We have seen lobbyists mute the voice of voters. We have seen polemic rhetoric and sound-bites drown out the nuance and beauty of real dialogue. And in the midst of this disillusionment, we forget that Your will for us is to have complete joy and abundant life, Loving God. For this, we ask for healing.

Some of us have been lured into the cyclone of cable news or the aura of shock jocks. We listen to their sound-bites. We repeat talking points. We share alarmist stories. And in the midst of this cacophony, we fail to hear Your voice of wisdom, Loving God. For this, we ask for forgiveness.

Gracious God, please forgive what needs to be forgiven, so we can start afresh on the path to civility. And please heal what needs to be healed, so we can be connected more deeply with one another and with You, Loving God. Weave us together into a beautiful tapestry of peoples.

Amen!

A Prayer for More Civility

Comment, posted January 6th, 2014 to the Bucks County Courier Times

This is a simple plea for a little more civility in our town halls and on our streets. My prayer is that in 2014, we would be a little kinder and gentler with each other, especially those of a different political persuasion and a different driving style.

The prophet Isaiah had a vision of a day when the lion would lie down with the lamb. My vision is of a day when persons who see an issue differently can engage in civil discourse regarding that issue without resorting to name-calling or belittling commentary. The English language is a rich language with millions of words. It fully provides for the stating of one's opinions without demeaning the other person.

A Quote from The Civility Solution: What to Do When People Are Rude, P.M. Forni

“When the healthy pursuit of self-interest and self-realization turns into self-absorption, other people can lose their intrinsic value in our eyes and become mere means to the fulfillment of our needs and desires.”

A Quote

Elizabeth Goudge,

“Nothing living should ever be treated with contempt. Whatever it is that lives, a man, a tree, or a bird, should be touched gently, because the time is short. Civilization is another word for respect for life.”

A Quote

Ms. Charlayne Huner-Gault

"So my challenge to the students is that every day of their lives they have to enjoy themselves as I did - even under those circumstances, I had wonderful friends and a wonderful experience, but I had to keep my eye on the prize. And I want them to keep their eye on the prize, which is to have a country that is tolerant and that is welcoming to all of its people, black or white, gay or straight, different in whatever way they are. If they are living and breathing in the same way that I am then they are all God's children and they need to be respected."

Purpose and Potential of our Faith Community

Why I Go to Church

from “On Going to Church”

by Rev. A. Powell Davies (1902-1957)

Let me tell you why I come to church.

I come to church—and would whether I was a preacher or not—because I fall below my own standards and need to be constantly brought back to them. It is not enough that I should think about the world and its problems at the level of a newspaper report or a magazine discussion. It could too soon become too low a level. I must have my conscience sharpened—sharpened until it goads me to the most thorough and responsible thinking of which I am capable. I must feel again the love I owe my fellow men (and women). I must not only hear about it but feel it. In church, I do.

I need to be reminded that there are things I must do in the world—unselfish things, things undertaken at the level of idealism. Workaday enthusiasms are not enough. They wear out too soon. I want to experience human nature at its best—and be reminded of its highest possibilities, and this happens to me in church. It may seem as though the same things could be found in solitude, but it does not easily happen so. In a congregation we share each other’s spiritual needs and reinforce each other. In some ways, the soul is never lonelier than in a church service. That is certainly true of a pulpit, for a pulpit is the most intimately lonely place in the world—yet it is a loneliness that has strength in it. Perhaps this is because the innermost solitude of the human

heart is in some paradoxical way a thing that can be shared—that must be shared—if the spirit of God is to find a full entrance into it.

We meet each other as friends and neighbors anywhere and everywhere, but we seldom do so in the consciousness of our souls' deepest yearnings. But in church we do—in a way that protects us from all that is intrusive, yet leaves us knowing that we all have the same yearning, the same spiritual loneliness, the same need of assurance and faith and hope. We are brought together at the highest level possible. We are not merely an audience, we are a congregation.

I doubt whether I could stand the thought of the cruelty and misery of the present world unless I could know, through an experience that renewed itself over and over again, that at the heart of life there is assurance, that I can hold an ultimate belief that all is well. And this happens in church.

Life must have its sacred moments and its holy places. The soul will always seek its nurture. For religious experience—which is life at its most intense, life at its best—is something we cannot do without.

Rev. Scott Sammler-Michael

Minister Accotink Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Beloved Community requires humility, gratitude, praise, nurture and surrender to something greater. Religion is about discovering the beauty of what we can do when we connect deeply. Religion reveals that the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts. Unitarian Universalism is never about just you or me. We live our religious duty by inviting a true diversity of people into community to evoke the most accurate rendering of the holy.

Today some of us act as if our Churches are the 'religious lobby' for the Democratic National Committee. That is not the call I answered as minister – and it is no foundation for a life-saving faith. It also violates our basic theological claim that all have worth and dignity, denying the fact that in order to be justice seeking we must be critical of the culture and its politics and not be a reliable source of support for one party.

Monologue One: Anonymous lifetime Unitarian Universalist

I have been a Unitarian Universalist for 25 years... most of my life. Of course I was after being baptized a Catholic... but I've been a UU for as long as I can remember.

I consider myself a strong Unitarian Universalist, passionate about our religion. It defines a lot of who I am and I share it with anyone that might find our faith valuable.

I WILL remain a Unitarian Universalist for the rest of my life and my children will be brought up in our faith.

I grew up in a family that represented a diversity of political views but we all found a home in Unitarian Universalism. Our particular church ... our church really tries to be inclusive. It tries, but it doesn't always succeed. Even if I don't have strong personal

beliefs about being republican, I don't like the feeling of exclusion, because that's not what we are about. It's the more subtle things that people say that could make me not want to attend a particular church. I just think there is danger when everyone is very comfortable agreeing with one another ... that subtle exclusion, that's not what our religion is about.

(Pause)

If you were going to come out to your UU congregation as Gay, Christian, or Republican... It seems like republican would have to be the hardest. There is a bias among our people, that paints all republicans, not just as different, but as bad, or stupid, or greedy.

My father is a republican. At least, he would call himself one. He holds firmly to the original republican ideals. When I tell this to my friends I always have to qualify it by with the story about how we stood out in the rain together, handing out flyers, trying to get people to vote against the ban against Gay Marriage.

We need to be careful about what we assume that all people agree with.

I was making a joke one day at church with a member and friend that I love and respect. I was making a joke about my Dad's politics, and this beloved friend said "Well, I share your Dad's politics."

We lose a valuable balance when we assume. There is no fun or good in isolation.

Monologue Two: Anonymous Unitarian Universalist Lay Leader and Mother

My husband is clearly to the right but straddles the middle. I kind of straddle the middle too. I will likely vote for someone that I trust to make decisions, he will vote the party line.

We have had challenges. One of our biggest fights was during the election. Still our political views meet at the point of respect for every human being. They meet at the point of our spirituality. We can see the God in each candidate, regardless of party, and we can certainly see the God in each other.

We are able to avoid contentiousness by beginning our discussions with gratitude - gratitude that we all have a vote - that we live in a country where we are able to vote our beliefs, and gratitude for the gift of diverse perspectives.

Sometimes our congregation mirrors these same practices, other-times not. I think that at one point my son was shocked to find out that there were others in our congregation that feel that way I do politically. He had made assumptions about how everyone in the congregation was politically liberal - he learned that assumption somehow - the bias

lives among us... even if it doesn't come from sermons, it comes through at Coffee Hour, or at social events.

Some of the experiences I have had at social events baffle me. I can't believe we can call ourselves Unitarian Universalists and wholly dismiss swaths of people. I understand disagreeing with a political viewpoint - but dismissing a person, rejecting a human, that's different. That's in blatant opposition to all we say we hold sacred.

Our Ecclesiologies and their Shadow Sides

Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd

There are competing ecclesiologies in our religious tradition; many different theories about why we show up to do what we do.

#1 - The church is a place to be with people like me

Positive – I hear this regularly in the congregation I served for the past eight years, a place smack in the middle of one of the most politically charged jurisdictions in the state of Virginia. Prince William County is a hotly contested political battleground, and many of my congregants would openly say that they come to their church because it is the one place that liberals can be around other liberals. It is a bastion of like-minded people in the midst of a political firestorm.

Shadow – If the church is a place to be around “people like me,” how do we define “people like me,” and if that litmus test becomes political affiliation, are we not mirroring exactly the partisanship and brokenness present in the world outside our doors? Are we not called to something higher than simply mirroring the worst of our surroundings?

#2 - The church is a place where I can be heard

Positive – surrounded by a world that often does not want to hear the voice of individual rabble-rousers or outliers, our congregations become places where, for once and in one place, people will listen to us. Where we will be noticed, known, even loved and where our voices not only can be heard, but must be heard, for it is our covenant to make room for one another.

Shadow – If we focus so much on the individual need for our personal opinions to be heard, do we then fail to make the necessary space to hear others? If each of us is intent on sharing our opinions, are we then equally intent on hearing the views of our companions? In the end, are we really there to persuade one another or to participate in the building of beloved community?

#3 - The church is a place to live my values

Positive – What can we say but yes. Our congregations are places to make real the commitments we hold in our hearts. Our personal values in the world are made manifest in the work we do as a people.

Shadow – but what if my personal values contradict or disagree with those of other members of my fellowship or congregation? If I should live my values, should they not live theirs too?

The truth is that all of these highly individualistic views of the purpose of religious gathering are very far removed from our history. As Unitarian Universalists, we trace our ecclesiology back to the 16th century when the Protestant Reformation took the whole concept of church and turned it upside down.

Our forebears were a part of the most radical wings of that reformation, the people who challenged the whole concept of church hierarchy. It was our forebears who insisted that the core of our gathering is not obedience to external temporal authority, but a commitment to a way of being together in relationship to God, a God experienced not only in isolation, but in community. At the core of these communities was a covenant, a promise between people and the spirit that connects them in ways that transcend their isolation.

A covenant is not a promise made by oneself. It's made in community. It's made between people, among mighty forces, pointing toward a purpose that unites them even and especially in the face of their diversity of opinion, of theology, of belief. At our core, we are a relational group committed to making promises. And that means a promise that there is room for different voices. There is room for disagreement. There is room for challenge and honesty and actual non-sectarianism of both the political and theological varieties.

Selection from the essay “A Seat at the Command Table”

Rev. David Pyle

I am a U.S. Army veteran and have served as a special operations soldier and a paratrooper in both Latin America and Bosnia-y-Herzegovina. Much of my faith as a Unitarian Universalist is rooted in the experience of my military service...

While I was wrestling with the decision to apply to seminary—and considering putting my uniform back on—I had the pleasure of meeting the (then president of the Unitarian Universalist Association) Rev. Bill Sinkford ... He had preached a sermon on the Good News of Unitarian Universalism, and standing in the receiving line I wondered if I would say anything to him about my call. When it was my turn to shake his hand, a friend of mine announced to everyone around that I was applying to seminary and that I wanted to become a military chaplain.

Rev. Sinkford smiled and told me that his son, who was at that time serving as an Army Ranger in Afghanistan, called him once a month or so to ask why there were so few UU ministers serving as military chaplains.

I realize now that the conversation with Rev. Sinkford had been overheard by several people, but I was unaware of that at the time—until a young woman stopped me.

The first thing I noticed was her necklace: a pendant with a chalice superimposed on a peace sign hanging on a long leather cord. Without any preamble or introduction she said, "I don't see how you can call yourself a UU and be willing to serve in the military."

...There are times in life when something speaks through you, when what needs to be said is said before you even realize you are going to speak. Without a second's thought I looked at her and said, "How can we expect the military to show our Unitarian Universalist values and ideals if we aren't willing to be there?"

The young woman who challenged my call saw that distance as unbridgeable, but I knew it could, for it had been bridged within my own heart and soul.

Selections from "Picking Blueberries" A Sermon Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

Not every political opinion is by its nature good. Our work as a religious community is not blindness to politics. We are called to engage. We cannot turn out sanctuary into a political convention, papering our walls with the images of a chosen candidate, but we can and we must consider the values inherent in political positions. How must we treat our immigrant neighbors? Should abortions be legal? Is healthcare a human right? When is war necessary, if ever? What laws are discriminatory, and how?

It is possible to engage these questions and even advocate as faith communities for transformation, without demanding, subtly or outright, allegiance to a certain political candidate or party.

Our work as a religious community is engagement. But let me tell you how it pains me when I see us overstep engagement and enter the halls of near creedal domineering. I saw a poster for Obama in one of our congregations. I've heard preachers make jokes about Republican presidents from their pulpits. I watched as my parents were chased out of our Unitarian Universalist Church when adherence to a certain political perspective was not so subtly demanded. I've heard members share at social events that being a Unitarian Universalist and a Republican is impossible. This is not how I was called to serve as a Unitarian Universalist. I am called to find the holy in every soul and honor the inherent worth and dignity of every person. I am called to see wholeness, not be blinded by a label. I am called to be in relationship with diversity, knowing that that relationship is inherently life giving, life saving.

Not every political position is by its nature good yet every soul has worth and dignity and every soul will darn well be welcomed into the sanctuary of the spirit that I am called to serve.

Meditative and Reflective Elements

A Chasidic Tale - "Walking a Rope over a Ravine"

From a collection by the Rabbi Chaim Stern -

One time Rabbi Israel joined a group of Chasidim who were seated together, and they asked him: Tell us, honored Rabbi, how should we serve God? The question surprised him, and he said: How should I know? But I'll tell you a story.

Two friends were accused of a crime, found guilty and brought to the king for judgement. He loved them and wanted to show them mercy, but even the king must obey the law. So this was his verdict: Let a rope be stretched over a deep chasm and the two were to walk it, one after the other. If either one reached the other side, he would be granted his life. If was done, and the first one got safely across. The other then cried to him: how did you manage to walk that rope? The first called back: All I know is this - whenever I felt myself toppling over to one side, I leaned to the other.

Interrelationship

by Thich Nhat Hanh

You are me, and I am you.

Isn't it obvious that we "inter-are"?

You cultivate the flower in yourself,
so that I will be beautiful.

I transform the garbage in myself,
so that you will not have to suffer.

I support you;
you support me.

I am in this world to offer you peace;
you are in this world to bring me joy.

One Song, an excerpt

Rumi (1207-1273) translated by Coleman Barks

All religions, all this singing

One Song.

The differences are just
Illusion and vanity.

The Sun's light looks

A little different on this wall than

It does on that wall,

And a lot different on this other one,

But it's still one light.

We have borrowed these clothes,

These time and place personalities
From a light,
And when we praise,
We're pouring them back in.

**An Excerpt from The Flame of the Heart: Prayers of a Chasidic Mystic
Reb Noson of Breslov (1780 - 1844).**

"Master of the Universe, Kind and Merciful Father, help me acquire the holy trait of kindness. Like Abraham and Sarah, who performed deeds of kindness all their days, may I show hospitality to worthy guests, and may my house be a 'gathering place for the wise.' May I have guests who are tzaddikim, and may I receive them with great love, respect and joy. Grant me the privilege of personally attending to their needs and serving them in every way. May I humble myself completely before the wise, until I become a spiritual channel for the light of Abraham and Sarah, and so attain the trait of true kindness."

**Where the Mind is Without Fear
Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)**

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action--

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.