

Honoring Differences

January 2018

Chalice Lighting

“Peace is not unity in similarity but unity in diversity, in the comparison and conciliation of differences.” --Mikhail Gorbachev

Check-in *Share briefly what’s been on your mind or your highs and lows since we last met.*

Readings

Third UU Principle:

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.

From Children’s Services Practice Notes for North Carolina’s Child Welfare Social Workers:

The author, a child welfare social worker, wrote, “I realized that because I had worked with so many families over the years, I made the assumption that I understood their differences. I had never really asked about their specific opinions or points of view that might be a result of their race or culture. Instead, I was just gathering information related to risk and safety and mandated demographics.”

The author developed a new script to be used with clientele with cultural/ethnic/racial backgrounds different from that of the social worker, asking the families if there is anything they would like her to know about their cultural/ethnic/racial background, and advising them that she does not want to assume she understands their family. The results? “Wow! Within the first week of asking these questions, the first few responses I obtained were so relevant and powerful I knew this [program] was a success. . . When I engage with families using the script, I can literally feel barriers melt and doors of communication open.”

(To see the script and read more: <http://www.practicenotes.org/v14n3/recognize.htm>)

From Waking Up White (Debby Irving, pp. 202-203):

The author describes an experience while teaching second grade. She had a Haitian student, Rosie, who kept jumping up during class work to go talk to a classmate, and would not follow instructions to stay in her seat. The author saw this as a serious self-control issue. Rosie, when corrected, would look devastated, return to her seat, and put her head on her desk.

One day, the author’s curiosity was sparked by learning that some cultures foster collaborative learning in the classroom more than is the norm in the United States. That day, she experimentally did not rebuke Rosie when she ran to a classmate. She observed Rosie helping the classmate with a math problem. At lunch, she approached Rosie and observed that Rosie seemed to love helping people. Rosie beamed and hugged her. The author observed,

“Rosie and I were caught in a classic cross-cultural clash, one for which I was completely ill equipped. When confronted with cultural difference, my first reaction had long been to see what people didn’t have that I did, not what they might have that I didn’t. I saw Rosie’s ‘inability’ to work independently as a flaw, a deficit, not her exquisite ability to tune in to the needs of others as a strength and an asset.”

Spiritual Exercise *(Adapted from <http://thrivinglives.org/community/differences/>)*

Notice when you are feeling intolerant of others with differing opinions, or people whose values are not like your own. Try to apply the following principles. Was this helpful? Share the results with the group.

1. **Seek to understand different views.** People may come from different backgrounds, different social and family groups and different cultures, religions or life experiences. Try to understand these differences.
2. **Seek a way to learn from others' opinions and educate yourself so you fully understand your own opinions.** Just because you don't agree with others at first, doesn't mean that you both can't learn from each other. In addition, be knowledgeable about your own opinions; don't just go with what others are telling you.
3. **Always remember that you might be wrong.**
4. **Remember that our communities need diversity to flourish,** and that our nation was built upon the ideal of freedom to express our own individual values and beliefs.

Questions for Contemplation

1. What incorrect assumptions have you made about others because of the way they look? What incorrect assumptions have others made about you? What has been the impact?
2. Unitarian Universalists say that we want everyone to have the right to speak their own truth; at the same time, we want our congregations to be a safe place for everyone. Are there times when you have seen these two desires come into conflict, when one person speaking his or her truth might make another person feel unsafe?
3. The third UU principle calls for "acceptance of one another." To what extent does that require that we listen to one another, including to those people with whom we disagree? To what extent is our congregation a safe place for those whose political or social justice views might be different?

#2 and #3 Adapted from San Jose Small Group Ministry Sessions, GO 62, UU Principles 3 and 5

Sitting In Silence

Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect.

Sharing/Deep Listening

Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention.

Reflection

This is a time to supportively respond to something another person said or relate additional thoughts that have occurred to you as others shared.

Song: *Singing for Our Lives, by Holly Near*

1. We are a gentle, angry people and we are singing, singing for our lives.
2. We are a justice-seeking people...
3. We are young and old together...
4. We are a land of many colors...
5. We are gay and straight together...
6. We are a gentle, loving people...

Extinguishing the Chalice

"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." — Max de Pree