

Discussion – Engaging Our Theological Diversity – Session 1
8/11/2011

Chalice lighting and opening words by Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed (#580 in hymnal), a child of First U Chicago:

The central task of the religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others. Once felt, it inspires us to act for justice. It is the church that assures us that we are not struggling for justice on our own, but as members of a larger community. The religious community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be seen, and our strength too limited to do all that must be done. Together, our vision widens, and our strength is renewed.

Check in – who are you and did anything in the opening words resonate with you?

“Unveiling” is an interesting metaphor.

Need to think about whether a religious community is essential.

Response: think he means religious in broadest sense of people bound together in common cause.

Business:

Agreed to circulated covenant

Agreed to maintain Wednesday schedule, although the last scheduled date is the night before Thanksgiving, and we should change it.

Why did we want to do this (Bobbi and Ellen)?

Have been wanting to discuss UU theology for a long time.

Urgent sense that we must begin talking with each other to figure out what we agree about, and this seemed like a useful place to start, although we did discuss this as a congregation several years ago. Then we used a study guide. This time we want to have a discussion.

Seems like we need to go all the way back to the merger to start sorting out Unitarian and Universalist theology.

We want to have readings from UU theologians as well as the material in the report. It would be very useful to find contemporary readings as well as those from theologians of color.

We will post summaries of our discussions on the website. Bobbi will take notes and circulate them before posting. They will include ideas but not identify the names of their articulators.

Definitions of religion and theology

Religion is community practice based on a theology.

Susan Frederick-Gray editorial points out that UU theology is not concerned with the afterlife as other theologies are but rather to the “human experience and the conditions of people’s lives here and now.”

We have religious diversity but are there things that hold us together despite that diversity.

There are so many forces trying to divide us that it is essential to identify the things/ideas holding us together, especially when traditional church/faith/religion is declining.

Study guide questions for “Framing the Question: What Holds Us Together?”

- What do you tell people who ask you about Unitarian Universalism or about First Church?

First U is a place where a variety of religious beliefs are welcome, even though we have disagreements. That we believe in the unity of the human race and the universal rights as found in the UN Charter of Human Rights, rooted in the Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition on the one hand and humanism on the other.

That we are a non-creedal religion whose members hold a variety of theological viewpoints, tied together by our Seven Principles, and trying to carry out our goals in the here and now and not in the after-life.

That we are a non-creedal religion that confronts important questions of human life and to do it together is important.

We believe that we will learn what holds us together through practice when we act together.

We are based on the Seven Principles. We are not creedal. We examine what comes out of Judeo-Christian religion and for me, it has produced humanist ideals and social activism.

Stress that we are not trinitarian. Our sources are not only Judeo-Christian traditions but other religions as well. We have no creed, but we do have our 7 principles. Wish the 7 principles were more succinct. We engage in a lifetime of learning.

Focused on living out values and creating a better life. We are non-creedal. We have great concern for marginalized groups, generating social justice and humanist values.

That the 7 principles are important as a covenant without relying on a creed.

That we are heretics and can choose what to believe. We can critically examine ideas and if we change our ideas, we do not need to change our church because our church accepts a diversity of beliefs.

- What is the center of your personal faith?

God from a more rational and scientific point of view. The development of natural law in the universe over millions of years is personified in “god.” Ideas come back together in the notion of the “god of history.” Unitarian-Universalism came out of Christianity without repudiating it. I am a Christian with a small “c.” The 7 principles are a secular version of the process.

There is an original creative force that chose to initiate creation where each moment depends on the last (like Bumbaugh’s statement in a kind of process theology). The creative spirit is shared with

us, and I sense a responsibility to use that creative spirit to move society forward – establishing the beloved community on this planet.

I tried to accept what my mom taught about God because she was my mom and I loved her. When she died, I acknowledged I did not see any evidence of a god and therefore did not believe it. I can see cooperation among humans and therefore am a humanist as well as a skeptic and an atheist.

I rebelled at my Methodist confirmation. My parents left the Methodist church and came to First U. When I came here, I felt at home and grew into an agnostic and skeptic who leans toward humanism.

There is a creative force in the universe, and we all carry a spark of it. We are better off when we can put that spark to good use for everybody. There may also be negative energy in the universe, but I choose to focus on the positive energy.

We can be moral beings without God or religion. Morality can arise from non-religious values. I don't believe in the supernatural. I am an atheist and a humanist. Unitarian Universalism is the ideal home in which to engage in moral work. I was very happy to find Unitarian Universalism.

Religion is a pursuit best carried out in community with the common purpose of inquiry and discovery. The 7 principles are the practice we engage in. I don't know where my theological beliefs will go, and I have yet to discover our common practices and purposes.

I think of myself as a molecule in the great river of humanity, connected to all that came before. It is a miracle we are all here together now. I should be grateful for it and be responsible to what came before. There are sacred things on the earth – it is tipped so that we have seasons, photosynthesis generates life, and more.

I view myself as a dialectical materialist. All things interact and the product is different than the raw materials. This has formed the universe, fueled evolution, and governs the interactions in communities.

- Closing words – what did you think of Bumbaugh's theological suggestion and what did you think of tonight's discussion.

Bumbaugh: something a lot of UU's could agree with; good discussion of Unitarianism vs. Universalism; too complicated to be presented as a theology but worth discussing; embraced it.

Tonight's discussion: good discussion; revealed a great diversity among us; would like to have more dialogue; helped me clarify some aspects of theology; wish there were more people engaged in discussion, but that would also be unwieldy; excellent discussion and good idea to report it out where others can see it.