

November's Ministry Theme: *Mortality*



This month's theme gets to the heart of our very existence - how we human beings can go on living with the knowledge that we will die. This consciousness, and a desire to understand what happens to us after we die, probably led our ancient forbears to create myths and gods and goddesses to explain it all. Unitarian Universalist minister Forrest Church famously defined religion as "our human response to the dual reality of being alive and knowing we must die."

We are still rooted in those ideas, those fears and those hopes. Even with all our scientific knowledge and medical advancements, what happens after we die remains unknown. And how should we live knowing that we will die? And how will we go on loving when all our family and friends will meet this fate?

"Death," Reverend Church said, "is not life's goal, only life's terminus. The goal is to live in such a way that our lives will prove worth dying for."

--Rev. Susan

December's Ministry Theme: *Faith*



This month's theme focuses on the basis of religion: faith. Our Transcendentalist forebear Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote:

"A little consideration of what takes place around us every day, would show us that a higher law than that of our will, regulates events; that our painful experiences are not necessary. A believing love will relieve us of a vast load of care. Oh, my brothers, God exists!"

For many Unitarian Universalist, his last line might make us uneasy. Aside from the use of "brothers" (common in those days to mean all human beings), the assumption and exhortation of such a firm theism does not always sit well in our non-creedal context.

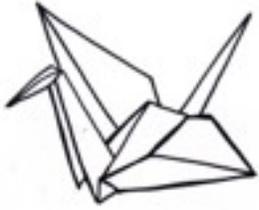
But think about what else he is saying in those few lines: that there is something behind our daily cares that holds us - a creative universe that offers us life. And when we are faced with choices and experiences that weigh us down, might there be something that can offer us a way out of that trap we create when we think we can control all of life around us?

Each of us has some kind of faith - perhaps not the belief system of our childhood or past years... but something that we can place our trust in; something that allows us to breathe deeply through the hardship and sorrow, and something that gives our joy and appreciation wings.

I invite you to think about this, as we enter the holiday season, where the stories of darkness giving way to light and the eventual return of life-giving spring ground us; where the story of the humble birth of a person whose actions and words might change the world becomes the cornerstone of a magical celebration that carries us through the winter's cold!

--Rev. Susan

January's Ministry Theme: *Hope*



"Hope is
folding paper cranes
even when your hands get cramped
and your eyes tired,
working past blisters and
paper cuts,"

This is from a poem called *Origami Emotion*, American poet Elizabeth Barrette. Hope has so many meanings... some grounded in our everyday existence, and others as ephemeral as "a thing with

feathers", as another poet, Emily Dickinson famously put it.

Hope lightens the burden we human beings carry as empathetic beings. Hope is the power to get up again when we, or those we love, have been dragged down by disappointment, loss, grief and hardship. It is a spiritual practice - not a feeling or virtue we wish for but something we must grasp and use every day.

"As religious liberals, we carry with us the burden of right relationship and the joy of knowing that we are not alone. We stand on the shoulders of generations that have come before us and struggled to grant us this place in history. We stand beside those who walk with us in the struggle, who renew our spirit, and who share in the vision of a world where dignity is a given and the illusion of separateness is no more."

Reverend Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister, All Souls Tulsa OK

Hope empowers us to continue the work of justice-making and building the world we dream about.

--Rev. Susan

February's Ministry Theme: *Love*

Love, like truth and beauty, is concrete. Love is not fundamentally a sweet feeling; not, at heart, a matter of sentiment, attachment, or being "drawn toward." Love is active, effective, a matter of making reciprocal and mutually beneficial relation with one's friends and enemies.

—Rev. Carter Heyward, *Episcopal Priest and Theologian*



Of course, it's February and the theme would be "love"! But the focus isn't the hearts & valentine's kind of romantic love most people think about when it comes to the word *love*. Because love is a fundamental building block to all relationships - human and otherwise.

Where would we be if love did not flow through our spirits? And what kind of a world could we help create if we let love flow freely through us, and if we gave it away as freely as we have received it?

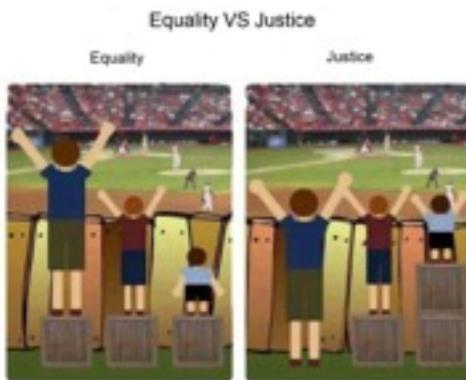
So we're joining Unitarian Universalist all over the country in *Thirty Days of Love*. With Love as this month's theme, let us reflect on who and how we love, and seek out ways to enlarge our hearts. Making love grow beyond the confines of the expected, where we

celebrate the love we feel for and give to our families of birth and of choice, to our extended families and our friends. AND then see how love can begin to transform the world. We're reminded that the cost of sharing love is little compared to the blessing and hope it can bring.

You can find more information about the *Standing on the Side of Love* campaign by visiting www.StandingontheSideofLove.org.

in the faith, with hope and love,
-- Rev. Susan

March's Ministry Theme: *Justice*



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.

-- Mark Morrison-Reed, Unitarian Universalist minister and author

We hear about justice a lot... just think of Superman's fighting for "truth, justice and the American way". The word appears twice in our own Unitarian Universalist Principles ("Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;" and "The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all"). Apparently, this is an important virtue for religious liberals.

It is a word that is immense in all that it includes - from simple fairness on the playground to matters brought before the Supreme Court. As it seems to be happening whenever we go deeper into any of these ministry themes - before we even begin to try to define "justice" and assert our expertise in this area, we are called to first see our own experiences and understandings first.

What do we mean by "justice"? Is justice the same as fairness? Do our understanding of justice evolve over time? Is it more than following *The Golden Rule*?

A lot to ponder, to be sure. I think in this month we will only begin to scratch the surface! But let's not let the immensity of the idea stop us - it is something we should think about and act on together.

--Rev. Susan