

## **Soul Matters 2019-2020**

### **September's Theme: *Belonging***

*The Soul Matters Sharing Circles provide an opportunity to explore our congregation's monthly theme from the previous month in more depth. Here's my reflection on this theme from The Beacon newsletter for September:*

September has always felt to me like the time for new beginnings – with so many years going to school, this cycle is embedded in me. For congregational life, it is also the time when various Unitarian Universalist congregations re-gather after a summer break. Some of you, like me, will be newer to this community. (You might also be new to Unitarian Universalism as well.) Others have been around for a while, and there are those who have known Beacon since its beginning 36 years ago.

***The theme for this month is belonging.*** What contributes to feeling like I belong – whether with my family, my friends, or within a Unitarian community? What we do together as individuals and as a group can create an environment that is welcoming and inclusive. What helps you feel like you belong in this congregation, just as you are? What have you seen here at Beacon that has helped you and others feel they belong?

I have experienced, and heard from others, how welcoming Beacon can be. That has been my experience as well when I attended Beacon Sunday services in the past. Yet I know, even when I try to be inclusive and welcoming, there are still blind spots where I may not recognize the diversity that exists within the person in front of me – and if I do recognize it, I may not know how to respond so I can be inclusive. That diversity may come philosophically, spiritually, or politically. It could come from sexual orientation or gender identity – or culturally, or due to our various abilities, or income level. I would appreciate it if you are willing to share with me what it means to you to belong and what I and this community can do to help include you.

I feel very honoured to be working with you at Beacon this year. If you would like to reach me, here is my contact information: [mroberts@uuma.org](mailto:mroberts@uuma.org) Cell: 778-870-9015

I also want you to know I'm here to offer pastoral care with an open heart and listening ears.

That may be when you:

- have something that is troubling you
- are celebrating something
- are feeling confused about something and want someone to talk to
- want to figure out how to engage in the life of this caring congregation this coming year
- and any number of other reasons that are part of your life

I am part of Beacon's supportive pastoral care team so please reach out and connect with me and with them. I look forward to learning from you and with you all how to cultivate an accepting place of belonging here at Beacon.

In the spirit of life,

Rev. Meg Roberts

## A Spiritual Exercise for This Coming Month

Unitarian Universalists want to do more than just read and talk about spiritual topics—they enjoy experiential learning. Many of us learn and process concepts best through direct experience. Given this, group members are invited to choose a “spiritual exercise” on each month’s topic to engage prior to the meeting. I ask you to try the exercises, believing that—whether you “enjoyed” it or not—the experience of doing it will help you learn something about life and yourself—something that sitting in a room just thinking about the topic never could. ***I invite you to choose one of the spiritual exercises below and try it out over the coming month.***

### **Option A**

Do a spiritual exercise of praying or meditating about your sense of belonging. (It could relate to belonging in relationship to a higher power/divine source, within the universe, within a family or relationship, or some other type of relationship.) What comes up for you? In light of that, are there spiritual practices and/or rituals that help you feel a sense of belonging? Choose one to do this month. Come back to the group with your reflections on your experience.

### **Option B**

On September 29, I’ll be exploring this topic:

#### ***How Can I Belong When What I Believe isn’t What You Believe?***

As Unitarians, one of the principles we affirm is “acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.” How do we do this when we each draw from different sources for our inspiration? How can we relate to one another when there are such differences?

Before that service, take time to do the exercise on the last page of this packet, created by John Pater (of the Unitarian Church of Edmonton): rank the UU Sources for their influence on your search for truth and meaning. If there are any that you regard as having no influence on your search for truth and meaning mark those as n/a. Add any that are not listed.

Reflect on how those sources affect what and who you relate to in your life and at Beacon. Notice as well those what you rank lower or n/a; how do those affect your response to others in your life and at Beacon?

Come back to the group with some thoughts to share from doing this spiritual exercise about what you believe and how it affects your sense of belonging at Beacon.

### **Option C**

Feeling our sense of belonging on this earth as part of the interdependent web of existence includes connecting not only with other human beings, it involves connecting with other creatures, as well as with the stones, plants, and earth itself. Spend time reflecting on this quote by Thich Nhat Hanh: “We inter-breathe with the rain forests, we drink from the oceans. They are part of our own body.” Decide on one monthly action or a weekly activity you will engage in this month to help you experience that interconnection. Come to the group with your thoughts and feelings about having done this spiritual exercise.

### Option D

Even when I try to be inclusive and welcoming, there are still blind spots where I may not recognize the diversity that exists within the person in front of me – and if I do recognize it, I may not know how to respond so I can be inclusive. Spend some time thinking about a time when you experienced having a blind spot for someone’s diversity (whether that diversity was from them having different ideas or beliefs philosophically, spiritually, or politically; from their sexual orientation, gender identity, or cultural identity/identities; or due to their abilities, or income level). How did you respond at that time? What did you learn from it? What would you do differently now? (This exercise may bring up a variety of emotions. I invite you to bring compassion to yourself and others as you remember. See this exercise as an invitation to be curious about your life experience and learning from it so you can choose how you want to respond in future.) Come back to the group with some thoughts to share from doing this spiritual exercise.

### Option E

What is a spiritual exercise that comes to your mind when you think of the theme “Belonging”? Create that exercise and share it with the group by email (if you are willing). Come to the group at our first meeting to share what it was like to create this exercise, how it was to do it, and what you learned from it.

### **Questions to Live With:**

*Don’t treat these questions like “homework.” You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and **find the one that ‘hooks’ you most.** Then let it take you on a ride. Live with it over the next couple of weeks. **Let it wander around in your unconscious the rest of the time.** Allow it to break into--and break open--your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share with the group something of what came up for you.*

1. What does it mean to you to “belong”? What does it look like, feel like? How do you know you are part of a place / group / community?
2. Beacon’s annual water ceremony on September 8 symbolizes the re-gathering of this community after a summer break. If you are able to be there (or even if you’re not able to), choose some water that symbolizes a special place for you (whether a favourite place you were this summer or from your tap at home) – you may have the water or you may just remember it in your imagination. What is the spiritual and/or personal significance of the water for you? How does it relate to your sense of belonging?
3. What is a special story in your life about belonging?
4. Who inspires you in how they include others and help them feel they belong?
5. When did you feel you belonged? What helped create that sense of belonging?
6. When did you feel you didn’t belong? If that changed, how did that happen? If it didn’t, why not?
7. What events, practices and/or behaviour at Beacon have helped you and others feel they belong?
8. What question do you wish had been included here? Ask yourself that question instead.

## Other Resources

**Family Resources** - *How does your family want to develop their sense of belonging?*



### Option 1: **If you can, attend Beacon’s Family Games Night**

**When:** Saturday, September 28, 2019 at 5:30 pm

**Where:** Amber Strocel’s home, 2972 Robson Drive, Coquitlam

**Bring:** Potluck food contribution, tabletop games, your children

**RSVP/Questions:** amber@strocel.com or 604-613-4532

Join other Beacon families for a fun and laid-back evening. There will be a potluck dinner (home cooking not required!), games for all ages, and a chance to socialize and get to know other parents and families in a relaxed setting. If you have a game to contribute, please bring it along. Your RSVP is appreciated, but not required.

### Option 2:

Find a time this month when you can relax and talk about what helps each of you feel a valued and treasured member of your family. In an age-appropriate way, ask each family member what would help them feel more closely connected within your family. It might be that they want more of something – like cuddles before bed; or less of – like being interrupted when they are telling a story about their day. Practice those new behaviors this month to build your sense of being in a loving, healthy family.

*Please let me know what you think of these family resources and what else we could provide that would be useful about this and other monthly themes.*

## Quotes

### **September 5 -**

Diversity is having a seat at the table, inclusion is having a voice, and belonging is having that voice be heard.

— From the Facebook page, “Where True Love Begins,” by @LizandMollie  
(Thanks to Janet Pivnik for the quote)

### **September 12 -**

I long, as does every human being, to be at home whenever I find myself.

— Maya Angelou

**September 19 -**

Although I am a typical loner in my daily life, my awareness of belonging to the invisible community of those who strive for truth, beauty, and justice has prevented me from feelings of isolation.

— Albert Einstein

**September 26 -**

If we have not peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.

— Mother Teresa

A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.

- Brené Brown (2010). *"The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are"*, p.40, Simon and Schuster

"We can either emphasize those aspects of our traditions, religious or secular, that speak of hatred, exclusion, and suspicion or work with those that stress the interdependence and equality of all human beings. The choice is yours." — Karen Armstrong, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*

"I used to think the worst thing in life was to end up all alone, it's not. The worst thing in life is to end up with people that make you feel all alone." – Robin Williams

"That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong."

— F. Scott Fitzgerald

"I only use my iPhone as a camera. I don't even know my number. I don't belong to this modern world and I'm out of it, but I don't want in." – Joni Mitchell, singer-songwriter

"A generous heart is always open, always ready to receive our going and coming. In the midst of such love we need never fear abandonment. This is the most precious gift true love offers - the experience of knowing we always belong."

— Bell Hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*

## Beacon Resources to Build a Sense of Belonging:

There are many ways to connect aside from attending our Sunday morning services.

- **Why not join one of the many groups that meet monthly.** Check:
  - The weekly bulletin “Beacon This Week”
  - The monthly newsletter “The Beacon.” Not on the list yet? Go online to subscribe: <http://beaconunitarian.org/index.php/subscribe-to-newsletter/>
  - The website lists lots of useful information: <http://beaconunitarian.org/>
- **For newcomers:** If you are new to the church and want to learn more, watch for Beacon’s “Getting to Know U” gatherings where you can learn more about Beacon, Unitarian history and chat with our minister. More information will be available through the weekly bulletins sent by email. Be sure and sign your name at the greeter’s table to receive the weekly bulletin. —*Joan Morris on behalf of your Beacon Connecting and Membership Team: Phil Campbell, Joyce Gudaitis, Susan Tarras, Sue Sparlin, Rev Meg Roberts.*
- **Need to talk to someone and want a listening ear?** Maybe you:
  - have something that is troubling you
  - are celebrating something
  - are feeling confused about something and want someone to talk to
  - want to figure out how to engage in the life of this caring congregation this coming year
  - and any number of other reasons that are part of your life

Contact Meg or someone on the pastoral care team. Beacon’s Pastoral Care Team and Lay Chaplain are available to provide you with the care and support you need.

Rev. Meg Roberts, Consulting Minister: [mroberts@uuma.org](mailto:mroberts@uuma.org), 778-870-9015

Pastoral call or visit from others on the care team:

[pastoralcare@beaconunitarian.org](mailto:pastoralcare@beaconunitarian.org) or call the chair Beth Connelley at 604-880-3287

## Worship Resources from the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Worship Web

**Chalice Lighting Words** – by Kimberlee Anne Tomczak Carlson

We are a People of Memory.

As inheritors of our ancestors’ legacy, we hold their stories tenderly.

Gleaning wisdom from diverse journeys; united in hope for the future.

Guide us to trust in love as we kindle this flame together.

**Affirmation** – by Karen G. Johnston

Do not be alone right now. Gather together.

Gathering together grows courage: in ourselves and in others who see the numbers swelling. It is a small thing, but right now it is an important thing.

Great sources of wisdom remind us: just because you cannot stem the tide of *all* hate, it is still right to do the thing you can do. These things add up: your one thing & my one thing; his one thing & their one thing & her one thing. Together it becomes a BIG thing.

Do not be alone right now. Any liberation—all liberation—is collective liberation. My freedom is bound with yours and yours with mine. Inextricably.

Let us together cast our lots doing this BIG thing: bending the moral arc of the universe towards justice.

**Affirmation** - by Rev. Dana Worsnop

Often people say that they love coming to a place with so many like-minded people.

I know just what they are getting at -- and I know that they aren't getting it quite right.

I don't want to be with a bunch of people who think just like me.

I want to be in a beloved community where I don't have to think like everyone else to be loved, to be eligible for salvation.

I want to be with people who value compassion, justice, love and truth, though they have different thoughts and opinions about all sorts of things.

I want to be with independent-minded people of good heart.

I want to be with people who have many names and no name at all for God.

I want to be with people who see me in me goodness and dignity, who also see my failings and foibles, and who still love me.

I want to be with people who feel their inter-connection with all existence and let it guide their footfalls upon the earth.

I want to be with people who see life as a paradox and don't always rush to resolve it.

I want to be with people who are willing to walk the tight rope that is life and who will hold my hand as I walk mine.

I want to be with people who let church call them into a different way of being in the world.

I want to be with people who support, encourage and even challenge each other to higher and more ethical living.

I want to be with people who inspire one another to follow the call of the spirit.

I want to be with people who covenant to be honest, engaged and kind, who strive to keep their promises and hold me to the promises I make.

I want to be with people who give of themselves, who share their hearts and minds and gifts.

I want to be with people who know that human community is often warm and generous, sometimes challenging and almost always a grand adventure.

In short, I want to be with people like you.

**Blessing** – by Andrea Hawkins-Kamper

Blessed are we who gather with open hearts, together, in this space, today.  
Blessed are we: the chalice-lighters of resistance, justice, love, and faith.  
Blessed are we: the heretics, the outcasts, the walkers of our own way.  
Blessed are we: the border-crossers, the refugees, the immigrants, the poor, the wanders who are not lost.  
Blessed are we: the transgressors, the trespassers, the passers-by, the cause-takers, the defiant, the compliant.  
Blessed are we: the hand-extenders, the sign-makers, the protestors, the protectors.  
Blessed are we: the trans women, the trans men, the non-binary, the cisgender, the multigender, the no gender.  
Blessed are we: the friend, the stranger, the lonely, the hidden, the visible, the authentic.  
Blessed are we who rise in solidarity, blessed are we who cannot, blessed are we who do not.  
Blessed are we for this is our Beloved Community, and this is who we are.

**Chalice Extinguishing** – by Krista Taves

It is our work, shared with each other in covenant,  
That creates and sustains this beloved community.  
We extinguish this chalice, but its light lives on  
in the directions we have chosen today.  
The light of this faith lives on in us, together,  
in our hearts, minds, bodies and spirits.  
Amen and Blessed Be.



## Unitarian Universalist Sources Ranking Exercise

Created by John Pater, Unitarian Church of Edmonton (used with permission)

Rank the UU Sources for their influence on your search for truth and meaning. If there are any that you regard as having no influence on your search for truth and meaning mark those as n/a.

<b>UU Sources</b>	<b>Ranking from 1 - 6, with 1 being highest and 6 being lowest</b>
direct experience of that <b>transcending mystery and wonder</b> , affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life	
words and deeds of <b>prophetic women and men</b> which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love	
wisdom from the <b>world's religions</b> which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life	
<b>Jewish and Christian</b> teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbours as ourselves	
<b>Humanist</b> teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit	
spiritual teachings of <b>Earth-centred traditions</b> which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature	
Other ...	