

Soul Matters 2020-2021

November's Theme: *Right of Conscience and Democratic Process*

The Soul Matters Sharing Circles provide an opportunity to explore our congregation's overall theme for the 2020-2021 program year, and within that, each monthly theme. We reflect on the previous month's theme in more depth. Here is my theme reflection from The Beacon newsletter:

November is framed by our fifth principle: we affirm and promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.

I was listening to CBC Radio "Ideas" interview of Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson by host, Nahlah Ayed. Col. Wilkerson spent over 30 years in the U.S. Army, was chief of staff for former Secretary of State, General Colin Powell, and is a lifelong Republican. He is aware of the maldistribution of wealth and has been warning how massive military spending is turning the United States into what he calls a "warfare" state. Whatever your political beliefs are, he is an example of a person who is using his right of conscience to speak out about things that are not popular within his own party and the military establishment. He is doing it because he believes speaking out will help save his country and will help readjust things back to a "welfare" state where the needs of the many and those most at risk are addressed. He is putting his hope in the younger people from both political parties who do not have the same investment in the present power structure and democratic system.

Later in the interview he talked about working on the National Task Force on Election Crises. They're looking at simulations of various scenarios of violent civil unrest. They are preparing just in case. It may not happen, or there may be only isolated instances. It was sobering. How do we respond as Unitarians in promoting democratic process if it isn't effective? I know I am not alone in worrying about what may happen before, during and after the election, whatever the outcome. So, if you are also worried, what do we do?

I believe it is important to recognize how we are feeling and the level of stress we're experiencing. Some of you may not be feeling much stress, or only from time to time, while others may be experiencing it intensely. The election stress can be compounded by the stress you feel about the pandemic, health, finances, the earth, or other areas in your life or in the lives of those dear to you. Here are some recommendations from various health and wellness sources:

- While supporting the democratic process means staying informed, it does not mean staying glued to the news for hours on end each day. Decide how much time you want to spend so you are not feeling overwhelmed and still have energy for other things that are good for your health. Perhaps choose two times during the day you will watch/listen/check on the news.

- Bring a pause into your reactions: mindfulness means being aware here and now. Notice how your body is reacting, how you are feeling in your heart, mind and spirit, and then intentionally pause and take a deep breath or two to re-centre yourself.
- Remember to see what is happening in a bigger perspective, both of your life and the life and history of the world. Consider what you believe and how it can support to you now (whether you believe in the power of humans to effect positive change over time; the power of community; being reminded of the healing power of the earth, the universe or the divine). I'll be including in November's theme packet some ways to support these reflections.
- Find someone to talk to. If you are feeling overwhelmed, reach out to those you trust. That can also mean me or others on the pastoral support team: pastoralcare@beaconunitarian.org. Also talk about positive things you are experiencing and things you feel grateful for.
- Reach out to those who may be most affected. Perhaps you're not feeling the stress as much, so consider others in the congregation or in your circles who may be. Check in with them. Listen compassionately. I recommend not getting into debate or intense discussion if people are feeling particularly vulnerable. Just be there with them so they are reminded they are not alone. We are part of a caring community.
- Increase those things that help to ground you: spiritual practices (meditation, prayer, connecting with nature and the earth); get some fresh air; eat well; if your sleep is affected, do those things that have helped you in the past.
- If you don't feel you are coping on your own, reach out to a professional: your doctor, counsellor, minister.
- Decide on those things you can do to help yourself and others – even one thing a day can help ease the stress.

We are in challenging times. Being part of a democratic process in our congregation means we are looking for the voice of the people, listening to those on the margins as well as the majority. Those in need as well as those who can offer care, Hearing each other now, with all our differences and similarities, is a way to live our democratic process in this community.

In the spirit,
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

Using a spiritual practice you already do, take time to reflect on, meditate on, and/or pray about promote the right of conscience (for yourself and for others). You may engage with the God of your understanding/the Spirit of Life, those you hold dear, others in your world, and yourself. See what arises within you and decide on one thing you will do in response over this month. Come back to the group with something you are willing to share about doing this spiritual exercise.

Option B

Read this article about “UU The Vote” movement in the United States, connecting UU values with democratic process:

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/year-long-focus-election>

Notice your thoughts and feelings as you read this article. Consider what you might be willing to do to support UU principle of democratic process in society at large. Where are the challenges? What are the benefits? Come back to the sharing circle with an insight or thought you had from doing this spiritual exercise.

Option C

If you have been feeling stressed because of the election in the United States and/or the pandemic, consider your own voice in matters that concern you, like your health. What is helping you right now? If you would like to try out any other ways to support your own health and well-being, review those in the newsletter column as well as others you find or know about. Come back to the sharing circle with an insight or thought you had from doing this spiritual exercise.

Option D

Spend time reflecting on the role your conscience has played in your life. What are your core moral beliefs and values that influence your conscience? When are times you struggled with following your conscience? What impacted your decision? What helped you follow your conscience? Come back to the sharing circle with a few thoughts about the role of conscience from doing the spiritual exercise.

Option E

What does democratic process look like in our families? In simple language, this principle is about people having a say in matters that concern them. Think back to your own growing up (or if you have children, about your time raising them - in the past and or now). In what ways did you have a say in matters that concerned you? In what ways didn't you? How did that feel? (What about with your children?) What have you learned about democratic process in families as a result? Come back to the sharing circle with a few thoughts from doing the spiritual exercise.

Option F

What is a spiritual exercise that comes to your mind when you think of the theme “the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process”? Create that exercise and share it with the group by email (if you are willing). Share what it was like doing that spiritual exercise with the group when we meet.

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. When did I struggle in my conscience about something? What did I learn from that experience?
2. What are different kinds of democratic process? Who benefits within each? Who loses?
3. How have I supported the democratic process in the congregation? In society at large? What else might I do?
4. How do we as Unitarians promote democratic process? Where else could be done?
5. What is working well in our democracy in Canada? What isn't and why?
6. Whose act of conscience has inspired me? What did I learn from that?
7. Where do I see examples of democratic process working? Where are examples of democratic process failing?
8. When I feel disillusioned about democracy, what can I do?
9. What question do I wish had been included here? I'll ask myself that question instead.

Other Resources

Quotes for the weekly e-news update: Beacon This Week

November 5 –

“Democracy is not just the right to vote, it is the right to live in dignity.”

— Naomi Klein

November 12

“There is a higher court than courts of justice and that is the court of conscience. It supercedes all other courts.” – Mahatma Gandhi

November 19 –

“There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right.”

— Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*

November 26 -

“Of course, the aim of a constitutional democracy is to safeguard the rights of the minority and avoid the tyranny of the majority. (p. 102)”

— Cornel West, *Race Matters*

Family Resources – How does your family give people a voice in matters that concern them?

The UU World magazine Family Pages' fall edition is "Keeping the Covenant of Democracy":
<https://www.uua.org/families/uu-world-family-pages>

Option 1:

Read the story on pages 1-2, "A Tale of Three Villages." Talk about the three questions that come after the story. Then talk about what agreements you'd like to have in a village you live in. Then talk about what agreements you want to have together as a family.

Option 2:

Page 3 has a description of the process to make a family covenant. Create a covenant for your family and decorate it. Post it in a place you all agree on. Also, talk about what happens when someone isn't following the covenant. How can you remind each other in a way that is kind? Come back to the covenant at least one a week during the month as well as at times when you are learning to practice that covenant. Change it as needed.

Here are some parenting resources for during the pandemic from the Unitarian Universalist Association:

<https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/parenting-pandemic>

Also, check out Ashley's "Quarantine Kit: Weekly package of resources to help families in this time of quarantine." Email her if you aren't yet receiving it then share it with friends, family and neighbours: dre@beaconunitarian.org.

Quotes

"The only tyrant I accept in this world is the 'still small voice' within me. And even though I have to face the prospect of being a minority of one, I humbly believe I have the courage to be in such a hopeless minority."

— Mahatma Gandhi, *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work, and Ideas*

Reflection on the Fifth Principle

"In our religious lives, the democratic process requires trust in the development of each individual conscience—a belief that such development is possible for each of us, as well as a commitment to cultivate our own conscience. We could call it a commitment to the value of each person. In the words of [Theodore Parker](#), 'Democracy means not "I am as good as you

are,” but “You are as good as I am.” My connection with the sacred is only as precious as my willingness to acknowledge the same connection in others.”

—Rev. Parisa Parsa, executive director of the Public Conversations Project (read more from Parisa in [The Seven Principles in Word and Worship](#), ed. Ellen Brandenburg.)

Worship Resources from the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Worship Web Consider using as a piece to meditate on as a spiritual exercise this month.

Chalice Lighting by Melanie Davis



If ever there were a time for a candle in the darkness,
this would be it.

Using a spark of hope,
kindle the flame of love,
ignite the light of peace,
and feed the flame of justice.

Chalice Lighting by Laura Thompson

Across the distance, the light from within me shines, sending love to all
Across the distance, your light is fuel that warms me
and helps to keep my own light burning
Together, we keep the flame of community burning bright

Benediction by Cynthia Landrum

We leave this gathered community,
But we don’t leave our connection,
Our concerns, our care for each other.
Our service to each other, to the world, and to our faith continues.
Until we are together again, friends,
Be strong, be well, be true, be loving.