

Beyond Welcome July 9 discussion summary

Built Through Trust: What cultural norms at UUC might be serving as an unintentional vetting process that restrict a sense of belonging for all?

The first thing that came up was about expectations about music and even things like hugging. You know, there are differences there.

Treating people as commodities for pledges. We have to be careful to not think about people as commodities for increasing our pledging, our numbers, helping out with leadership, those sorts of things when that's really not the point of welcoming.

We have an intellectual humanist bent. It's difficult if people don't fit that mold.

Be radically welcoming, not just talk about work, etc. That kind of led up to being too strong with people coming, asking too many questions, barraging them with questions when they first come in, you know. Maybe find a particular thing of interest to them like mentioning the artwork and the Octagon and see where that goes, something like that.

Jesus isn't mentioned that you see and for Christians that can be difficult. Need to know who we are, not be fake.

One person said, why do we need to change?

One person felt not welcome initially because of a particular culture and very few people asked about that culture and had stereotypes even of that culture.

Some people are less socially adept and it's difficult to follow social cues and that makes it awkward.

So message to learn who we are, not who they are.

We can be too intellectual sometimes, be more open and curious about different views.

I mentioned that I had heard about nomads on Rick Steves and then also, eating as a called out and mentioned how we enjoy eating at UUC and that's a cultural norm, bonding.

A Circle For All: At UUC, to whom is belonging easily conferred? To whom is belonging rarely conferred or conferred with great difficulty?

I think one of our main themes was It was about difference. And how we tend to be uncomfortable with difference, but we need to push through that feeling of discomfort in order to be welcoming and inclusive. We have to remember that the other person or persons, if they're newcomers, if they're visitors, they're probably feeling uncomfortable too. So we have to keep that perspective in mind.

We talked about, I'll summarize it as image. That if someone is in the social hall with us, they come into the Octagon, and they are dressed the way we think people ought to dress, if they have tattoos all over them or for some reason physically they don't seem to fit into our norm. It's more difficult for us to create that sense of belonging and to make them feel welcome.

People gave some examples about specifics when they really felt uncomfortable or they felt someone close to them whom they introduced was not really welcomed and engaged with. And I guess we sort of sawf welcoming. It's the first step in belonging.

We also talked about cultural assumptions. And how that can be problematical.

We talked about having to get past that first, first, impression and first glimpse of people. One person said how rewarding it is to be in a congregation with people who are different from ourselves, who are not necessarily like-minded, who are young people and come from a generation who may have differences and not even speak the same language we do. Also, need to speak up if we feel that they were being somehow made uncomfortable. That we need to speak up about that and let people know that. Also we did talk about the assumptions around financial needs and budget and finance and that sort of thing and how that can sometimes make it difficult for people to belong if they feel like they just really can't pledge. Or not as much as others. So that can also be something that's a stumbling block to feeling truly welcome and to belonging.

Covenant and Community: How might we strengthen the UUC covenant based on the ideas in this essay?

I summarized the covenant (for the group). And one of the comments was, it's really all encompassing. Good stuff in there, but it would be better if shorter. Would be more accessible. It was months in the making, adopted by the entire congregation at the time. Very good work indeed. I remember. But it has fallen into disuse and apparently, not all the new members, have read or are aware of the covenant. Which I think is a real failing on our part.

And, we also, had an interesting comment here. That we have statements of vision, mission, principles, covenant, developmental goals, the 6 sources and the living tradition. And how do they work together?

I have a sense of how they should. But it seems to me that our covenant is at the root because it is locally among ourselves that this congregation how we are going to act and communicate with one another. Doing all of these other tasks and goals and having these visions based upon these sources.

One question was is it really necessary to enumerate all the ways that we should talk and think? Is that restrictive? Is it exclusive? A good question, really. And one that, we didn't have time to get into for all that it is worth but it's a real good question. As we go back to look at our covenant, can a covenant be exclusive or restrictive? Is it something that something we all agree with.

One comment that I did not get to make at this time. Was referring to a college course I had once in the Old Testament and one of the questions on the final exam was briefly describe the essence of biblical religion.

We have a long covenant. But yeah, it's too long for us, but imagine if we had to covenant to follow the Bible. My gosh, that's a lifetime study right there. Anyway, what the professor was looking for was that it was the first covenantal religion in which God said, You are my people. Do this for me. I will do this for you. I promise. And, people were called into covenant with their God. We are into covenant with each other. We are promising with each other. And I think if we're going to do that.

You know the promise should be very clear. We are a community. Community with Unity. So yeah, there's much more discussion than 20 min would allow, but I'm glad the questions were asked and that we've got such good comments.