

Letter from the Minister

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Tell me about the church, the religion, the god you don't believe in. I bet I don't believe in them either. And yet, I am a Unitarian Universalist minister!

So here is a fact. Unitarian Universalism is not your normal "run of the mill" faith community. Yes, we are a not-for-profit religious organization. However, we differ a great deal from other groups in at least four ways.

First, I completed the higher education requirements, the training, the pastoral education, the psychological evaluation and then, after all that, jumped through still more hoops to become a Unitarian Universalist (UU) minister. I was ordained as a UU minister not necessarily by God but by Unitarian Universalists who *determined* that I had the aptitude for the role. That being said, I would argue that some holy force or great mystery *had to be with me* on that arduous journey that began over 25 years ago!! Which brings me to my next point.

I was not ordained by the online Universal Life Church. This entity has no association with Unitarian Universalism. That process involves answering a few brief questions online thus making it possible for individuals to officiate unions. (I had to correct one such individual who said they were ordained online so they could "officiacate" nuptials!) Even though traditionally speaking, a professional minister presided over weddings, we don't exist in an era when the Church of England ruled and *only ministers* could bless unions. These are different times.

You see, my main focus as a professional minister is to attend to the needs of the friends and members associated especially with the Unitarian Universalists of Clearwater. There is not much time left over to perform ceremonies for people outside of our congregation. If I am needed to assist with a marriage ceremony, in either a sacred or secular manner, time permitting, I will consider it. However, I do not think less of people in the wider community getting online certificates to facilitate a marriage ceremony. In my mind, we all need occasions to celebrate love.

My third point is this. On *many* occasions, I have had people say to me, "I don't need to go to church and have someone tell me what to do or to say that I am an awful person." Guess what? Punishing people is not part of my UU ministry. "Give the people not hell but hope and courage," said the Rev. John Murray, an early voice in Universalism in the United States

in the 1700s. I believe all humanity is born with dignity and the *possibility* for actions that bring about justice, love, compassion, humility and gentleness in the world.

Finally, it has been said that Unitarian Universalists are more focused on the *questions* rather than the answers. Yes and no. When I write a sermon, it is intended to foster thought. I provide questions to coax listeners to form illuminating answers. In this way, the question is indeed the most important.

And yet, when it comes to issues related to social injustice, *hopefully* I can inspire people to consider ways to address society's ills, such as climate change, white supremacy, homophobia, reproductive justice and misogyny. I promise you, I am not going to thump on a Bible and say, "It says here...and this is what God says." That is not part of my nature, and it is not part of my spiritual understanding. My intention is to support individuals in our covenanted community to transform thoughts and behaviors that lead to disrupting actions and policies that uphold forms of oppression.

It is my long-held opinion that fellow Unitarian Universalist minister, the Rev. Robert Fulgrum was spot on when he wrote, "...remember that book about Dick and Jane and the first word you learned, the biggest word of all: LOOK! Everything you need to know is there somewhere: The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation, ecology, and politics and the sane living." (*Go online and research "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten"*)

Tell me now, where is your community that prioritizes love and endeavors to live by six values including: justice, equity, transformation, pluralism (many diverse personal beliefs existing harmoniously in the same community), interdependence and generosity? ***