

Letter from the Minister

September 1, 2023

Many of us read “Beyond Welcome,” edited by Linnea Nelson, this summer. One of my favorite quotes was this one by Rev. Leslie Takahashi : “The old rule I was taught is that ‘between’ involves two parties while ‘among’ is three or more. We are so much in an ‘among’ world now. I don’t have a new term I truly like, but ‘multi/and’ comes closest to capturing this emphasis on multiple truths rather than exactly two.”

Now more than ever, the people our UU congregations seem to attract are multi/and. Meaning, one’s faith today involves trust in a divine source, in humanity’s ability to save ourselves, in nature’s mysterious ways and/or none or all of the above. It’s a departure from Unitarian Universalists of the past. For example, our early UU history revolved around understanding God as either “trinity” or “unity.” Several years later, it was “theist” or “non-theist.” Thankfully, our communities are comprised of MANY identities instead of the former either/or paradigm.

I recall when a congregant at a former congregation I served said, “When can we stand up and argue a point like we used to do?” While I cherish a good debate, I was baffled that this was a practice during Sunday morning service gatherings in some of our UU meeting houses in the 60’s. After asking a few of our old-timers, they tell me this was true.

Rev. Takahashi stated later in her thesis, “How often do we wrestle with each other because someone has nostalgia for a world that only existed for people like them? So what is our work in service of and living among the ‘multi/and’? Perhaps it is to practice questioning more than answering, listening more than questioning, learning more than knowing.”

On Sunday mornings, during coffee hour, it is a prime time for helping us to welcome especially newcomers to UUC. However, there are two stumbling blocks to becoming radically welcoming to newcomers. This is what I have observed.

Since there is often discomfort with knowing how to talk to a stranger, a UU often A) tends to talk on and on about who we are without pausing to notice if the newcomer asked, “What’s a UU?” And B) is afraid of saying something stupid to a newcomer so we avoid the person totally and seek a familiar face instead because it is more comfortable.

As an introvert, I totally get this. And yet, like you, I am constantly trying to get better at meeting new people. So, below, I am listing some discussion starters that might help us all to be more open to newcomers. And, in turn, to help us better grow our beloved community.

General discussion starters include:

- What's the number one item on your bucket list?
- What's your go-to comfort food?
- What pet peeve drives you the craziest?

- What's the last movie you saw in a theater?
- What's your favorite hobby?
- If you could travel through time, what time period would you visit?
- What's the worst job you've had?
- What five albums would you take to a desert island?
- What would you do with the money if you won the lottery?
- Have you ever met anyone famous?

If you are feeling especially brave, you are welcome to state and then ask the following:

- So many of us UUs are readers. That is, lifelong learners. What is one of your favorite books? Mine is...
- Social Justice is so important at UUC. Do you have passion for a particular issue? Mine is...
- In (date here) I came to UUC. One of the things I love here is (your love here). What is your first impression? What are you hoping you might find here?

Before I close, consider avoiding asking these questions during a first encounter:

- Where are you from?
- Where did you go to college?
- What do you do for a living?
- Do you believe in God?
- What's your political affiliation?

Meeting new people is awkward. But if you know someone's name it becomes less so. And, if you coax a silent moment thereby providing an opportunity for another person to speak and then you listen carefully, true relationships begin to form. You will soon also likely notice that no one person is either/or. Respect this growing fact. And refrain from making assumptions about anyone. We are a complex society filled with multifaceted understanding. More so today than ever before.

With you on this journey, Rev. Amy Kindred