

UUFCM Summer Worship Series 2018 - “Sharing the Stories of Living Our Faith”

Resources and Readings for Reflection

Someone once said that when reflecting on “faith” and what that means for Unitarian Universalists, the question is never “What do you believe?” but rather “What kind of person have you become? What are the fruits of your living?” In other words, our faith is focused not on what we believe, but how we love.

What follows are a list of quotes, longer readings, and book resources that were used in worship and as “reflection prompts” for our 2018 summer worship series reflections and subsequent discussions. We hope you find these offerings helpful in your own reflection on faith as a Unitarian Universalist.

“Faith is not settled belief but living process.” ~ *Catherine Keller*

“Faith is the energizing spirit that gives birth to our convictions, which lie deeper than our anxiety and stretch higher than our comprehension.”

~ *Tom Owen-Towle*

“Religion is not something separate and apart from ordinary life. It is life—life of every kind viewed from the standpoint of meaning and purpose: life lived in the fuller awareness of its human quality and spiritual significance.”

~ *A. Powell Davies*

So far as I can see, all the great leaders — and the great exemplars of religion — possessed...faith in life’s essence, in its hidden meaning, in its moral claim, and in the rightness of its inner spiritual guidance. And by this the great ones lived their lives. So must we. There are no problems greater than our power to solve them. There are no burdens greater than our strength. We shape — by every moment of our lives — the great decisions. Then let us venture still! — with reason as a lamp to guide us — but lighted with the light of faith.

~ *A. Powell Davies*

We find by losing. We hold fast by letting go. We become something new by ceasing to be something old... Out of each old self that dies some precious essence is preserved for the new self that is born; and within the child-self that is part of us all, there is perhaps nothing more precious than the fathomless capacity to trust.

~ *Frederick Buechner*

“In thinking about religion and society in the 21st century, we should broaden the conversation about faith from doctrinal debates to the larger question of how it might inspire us to strengthen the bonds of belonging that redeem us from our solitude, helping us to construct together a gracious and generous social order.” ~ *Jonathan Sacks*

Let me tell you why I come to church. I come to church—and would whether I was a preacher or not—because I fall below my own standards and need to be constantly brought back to them. I am afraid of becoming selfish and indulgent, and my church—my church of the free spirit—brings me back to what I want to be. I could easily despair; doubt and dismay could overwhelm me. My church renews my courage and my hope. It is not enough that I should think about the world and its problems at the level of a newspaper report or magazine discussion. It could too soon become too low a level. I must have my conscience sharpened—sharpened until it goads me to the most thorough and responsible thinking of which I am capable. I must feel again the love I owe to others. I must not only hear about it but feel it. In church, I do. I am brought toward my best, in every way toward my best.

~ *A. Powell Davies, 1902 – 1957*

To have faith requires courage, the ability to take a risk, the readiness even to accept pain and disappointment. Whoever insists on safety and security as primary conditions of life cannot have faith; whoever shuts off in a system of defense, where distance and possession are the means of security, becomes a prisoner... The practice of faith and courage begins with the small details of daily life. The first step is to notice where and when one loses faith, to look through the rationalizations which are used to cover up this loss of faith, to recognize where one acts in a cowardly way, and again how one rationalizes it. To recognize how every betrayal of faith weakens one, and how increased weakness leads to new betrayal, and so on, in a vicious circle. Then one will also recognize that while one is consciously afraid of not being loved, the real, though usually unconscious fear is that of loving. To love means to commit oneself without guarantee, to give oneself completely. Love is an act of faith, and whoever is of little faith is also of little love.

~ *Eric Fromm, 1900 – 1980*

Let go of the ways you thought life would unfold, the holding of plans or dreams or expectations – Let it all go.

Save your strength to swim with the tide.

The choice to fight what is here before you now will only result in struggle, fear, and desperate attempts to flee from the very energy you long for.

Let go. Let it all go and flow with the grace that washes through your days whether you received it gently or with all your quills raised to defend against invaders.

Take this on faith; the mind may never find the explanations that it seeks, but you will move forward nonetheless.

Let go, and the wave's crest will carry you to unknown shores, beyond your wildest dreams or destinations.

Let it all go and find the place of rest and peace, and certain transformation.

~ *Danna Faulds*

“Belief Is the Enemy of Faith”

- by Peter Morales

- published in the Fall 2013 issue of *UU World* magazine

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/belief-is-enemy-faith>

I believe the future of religion is a spirituality that is interfaith at its core. I am convinced we Unitarian Universalists have a historic opportunity to help create that future.

For the last several years I have spoken about the momentous changes in the American religious landscape. Young people are rejecting all religion in numbers we have never seen before.

While this is troubling at one level, at another level I find cause for great optimism. The good news is that people, at least in the developed world, are rejecting **cultural and religious exceptionalism**. By religious exceptionalism I mean the conviction that my religion possesses the truth and, by extension, yours is false. As people mix more and more, they come to appreciate the contributions of all the great religions. All across the country we see students at college campuses engaging others from different religious backgrounds in interfaith settings.

Religions are not all the same, of course. Yet certain **common themes and core values emerge in all of them**. Among these are compassion, community, the practice of a spiritual discipline, and **the pursuit of a difficult path toward a new level of consciousness**.

We UUs have been open to other faiths for a long time. We draw from a number of religious sources. We respect and try to appreciate other traditions (well, at least the more liberal and progressive parts of them). I have sometimes joked that we are a kind of spiritual refugee center for people from other traditions. I am one of them.

Many current UUs came to our faith out of a rejection of the faith into which they were born. The search of many young people today is fundamentally different. They are not in flight from oppressive orthodoxy. Instead **I see them searching for something much deeper than an absence of dogma**. Something new is struggling to be born.

What is holding back a new spiritual awakening? How can we help it emerge? How can we play a role in this great cultural movement?

I think we can help change the conversation. We need to think about faith, religion, and spirituality in a new way. When I grew up I was taught that religion was about what we believed. What made my denomination different (and correct, of course) was our sound doctrine. We were right. **This made religion too much about being right, about us and them**. Too much attention then goes into defending our beliefs.

I am now convinced that “belief,” in the way we usually use the word, is actually the enemy of faith, religion, and spirituality. Let me say that again: belief is the enemy of faith. When we dwell on beliefs we ask all the wrong questions. **My faith is much more about what I love than about what I think.**

When the conversation shifts away from our beliefs to what we hold most dear, to what moves us at the depths of our being and what calls us, wondrous new possibilities emerge. We share and explore our deepest experiences. We discover what we have in common. Our attention naturally turns to how we want to live our lives and to the commitments we are willing to make. Our concern at the personal level becomes one of **developing our awareness, of spiritual disciplines, of growth.** At the interpersonal level, our attention turns to loving relationships. Finally, our attention turns to issues of compassion, justice, and interdependence. **Faith becomes a relationship. Faith is about being faithful to what we hold sacred.**

A new interfaith, multifaith spirituality is struggling to be born. Ours has always been a faith beyond belief. We have a historic role to play.

“The Theology of Unitarian Universalists” - blogpost by Marilyn Sewell

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/marilyn-sewell/unitarian-universalist-theology_b_870528.html

“It Matters What We Believe”

- by Sophia Lyon Fahs

Some beliefs are like walled gardens. They encourage exclusiveness, and the feeling of being especially privileged.

Other beliefs are expansive and lead the way into wider and deeper sympathies.

Some beliefs are like shadows, clouding children's days and fears of unknown calamities.

Other beliefs are like sunshine, blessing children with the warmth of happiness.

Some beliefs are divisive, separating saved from unsaved, friends from enemies.

Other beliefs are bonds in a world community, where sincere differences beautify the pattern.

Some beliefs are like blinders, shutting off the power to choose one's own direction.

Other beliefs are like gateways opening wide vistas for exploration.

Some beliefs weaken a person's selfhood. They blight the growth of resourcefulness.

Other beliefs nurture self-confidence and enrich the feeling of personal worth.

Some beliefs are rigid, like the body of death, impotent in a changing world.

Other beliefs are pliable, like the young sapling, ever growing with the upward thrust of life.

“For Religion to Be Significant”

- by Mark L. Belletini

For religion to be significant, it has to provide more than the comforts of community. It also has to provide opportunities for deepening, for what I call spiritual growth, and for the casting down of false images and stereotypes, which hurt us all. A good religion has to open us to the real diversity of our modern world. For our work as liberal religious people is not to be competitive with others, and to find ways to supersede others, but rather to find ways to supersede ourselves, to grow beyond our limitations and our constrictive boundaries, each and every one of us. Diversity, you see, must not end up being some sort of feel good slogan, a word we keep in our back pocket to make us feel like we're broad minded. Diversity is a gift. But it cannot be a gift... unless it is received. It is only received when there are hands and hearts open enough to receive it. And the opening of fists into welcoming hands and welcoming hearts is our spiritual work....

“Living Your UUism Means...”

- by anonymous

Living your Unitarian Universalism (UUism) means...

If a grieving neighbor needs some companionship, you brew the pot of coffee and sit down to listen.

Living your UUism means...

If your children or grandchildren steal toys from others, you take the time to explain why they must learn to share and respect others.

Living your UUism means...

If your local soup kitchen needs warm bodies to serve food to the homeless on Tuesdays at noon, you give up one of your regular bridge games, put on an apron, and pitch in.

Living your UUism means...

If one of your kids (or someone else near to you) is weeping from a broken heart, you reach out, and wipe away the tears.

Living your UUism means...

If your elderly relative or friend is living in a nursing home, you bring a song or picture for her room to brighten her day.

Living your UUism means...

If a co-worker needs your principled defense, you take the risk to stand up for what is right.

Living your UUism means...

If your nephew lives alone, slowly dying of AIDS, you set aside your fear of his illness and mortality and go, simply go and help.

Living your UUism means...

If a relief agency needs funds for the victims of some natural calamity, you write your check, and write it for a little more than you can afford.

Living your UUism means...

If your community needs a recycling center, you volunteer to serve on the organizing committee.

Living your UUism means...

If some stranger (perhaps someone of minority status) is being harassed or demeaned in a joke or in person, you speak up from your sense of justice and refuse to be an accomplice in that abuse.

“Long-Haul People”

- by Rudy Nemser, in *Bless the Imperfect*

You find them in churches
when you're lucky;
other places too, though I mostly
only know ecclesiastical varieties.
Long haul people
upon whose shoulders
(and pocketbooks and casseroles
and daylight/nighttime hours)
a church is built and maintained
after the brass is tarnished and
cushions need re-stitching.
They pay their pledges full and on time
even when the music's modern;
support each canvass though the sermons aren't always short;
mow lawns and come to suppers;
teach Sunday School when
there's no one else and they'll miss the service.
Asked what they think of the minister,
or plans for the kitchen renovation,
or the choral anthem, or Christmas pageant,

or color of the bathroom paint,
they'll reply: individuals and fashions
arrive and pass.

The church—their church—will be here, steady and hale
for a long, long time.

It will.

For long haul people bless a church
with a very special blessing.

“We Need a Religion”

- by Scott Alexander

In a world with so much hatred and violence,

We need a religion that proclaims the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

In a world with so much brutality and fear,

We need a religion that seeks justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.

In a world with so many persons abused and neglected,

We need a religion that calls us to accept one another and encourage one another to spiritual growth.

In a world with so much tyranny and oppression,

We need a religion that affirms the right and conscience and the use of the democratic process.

In a world with so much inequity and strife,

We need a religion that strives toward the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

In a world with so much environmental degradation,

We need a religion that advocates respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

In a world with so much uncertainty and despair,

We need a religion that teaches our hearts to hope, and our hands to care.

Book Resources

[*Speaking of Faith: Why Religion Matters – and How to Talk About It*](#)

- by Krista Tippett

[*Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience*](#)

- by Sharon Salzberg