

Choosing to Connect

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Every Saturday morning, my husband and I rise early and head off to volunteer at our local food bank. The food bank is supported by people from twenty-eight different congregations, including our Unitarian Church. After we set up, volunteers gather as our Director reads a Bible passage and a prayer.

As a UU and atheist, these prayers initially caused me discomfort. As I stood listening, all I heard were the things that I did NOT agree with. But by focusing on the things I disagreed with I created a sense of separation, of judgment, between me and the others.

Over two years, as my relationship with the other volunteers and the mission of the outreach has deepened, there has been a change in my relationship to these prayers. Now during the prayer, I hear the sentiments I agree with, rather than those I disagree with. I agree that we all give of our time, talent, and treasure to do this work; that the work we do is important in the lives of our clients; that we who volunteer feel called to do this work.

But who or what is calling us? This is where the prayers and I diverge. The prayers suggest we are called to do this work because God directs our life and calls us to it. But as an atheist, I feel called to do this work because of my belief that with every act and choice I make, I can create a better world. While I may have little control over the larger world, I can help create a better world in my own neighborhood, one client, one connection at a time.

Now as I pray with my friends, I feel a deep sense of connection to them and the sacredness of this work we all feel called to do. I realize it is my actions and choices that determine my connection to others. Now it no longer matters to me who or what is calling each of us, only that we show up in love and faith to do the work of creating a better world.