

Why I Am a Unitarian Universalist

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In my thirty-four years as a Unitarian Universalist, twenty-seven of those as a parish minister, I don't think that I have ever written a sermon about **why** I am a Unitarian Universalist since the sermon I preached for the Ministerial Fellowship Committee in 1990. To tell you the "why" at this point in my life must first be predicated by the "how" I discovered it and what had preceded that.

I have already regaled you with stories of my growing up on a farm in a devout Roman Catholic family, as well as some tales from my escapades in the field of theology. A plaque in my Hypnotherapy Center (which has been collecting dust these past two years) says, "**That which you are seeking is causing you to seek.**" I suppose you could say that I have spent a lifetime trying to figure out what "that" really is...wisdom, truth, meaning, justice, enlightenment, peace and joy, perhaps.

Well, I have noticed over the years that many of the major turning points in my life have come from seemingly random but serendipitous moments. Some people might say they have all been just coincidences, but as a person of dubious faith I prefer to think that there has been some sort of cosmic GPS system that has been trying to guide me in a direction of meaning and purpose. And like the GPS system in my car, there have been times when my journey has taken me on circuitous routes that were much more interesting than the destination for which I was originally headed. So, I can honestly say that my discovery of Unitarian Universalism was not part of an intended exploration for a spiritual home, but rather it came after a severe case of morning sickness that had forced me to quit my part-time job, and now it was time to find a new one.

Pregnant for my youngest child with a toddler in tow, I was inwardly disillusioned with the Catholic church of everyday reality that was far from the halls of academia that I loved. I found it oppressive and dismissive and unyielding to change. Yet, on this particular day when I felt somewhat human again after throwing up for three months, church was not on my mind. Instead I asked my children's father (a former Jesuit) to bring home the local paper so I could search for a part-time job that was on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings when our daughter, Eve, was in nursery school. *And*, I proclaimed, I wanted it to be interesting and creative and something that would allow me to use my degree in theology. Pretending to be Karnac the Magician, he told me that he saw Stop & Shop check-out in my future.

Instead, I saw that the Winchester Unitarian Universalist Society was looking for a part-time staff assistant for a creative and interesting position on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings (the exact hours that my daughter was in nursery school). I had no clue who UUs were. There was no internet back in those pre-historic days to do exploratory investigations. My husband declared that it didn't matter what they believed, because if they were a church I would probably make more money at Stop & Shop check-out. But by now I had learned to pay attention to such moments of serendipity and I needed to find out more about them.

When I called to inquire about the position, the secretary told me that they had already received 28 applications for the job and weren't accepting anymore. When I told her my story she decided they had to interview me. What I didn't expect was that I would end up interviewing them. Who were Unitarian Universalists?

The Winchester UU church is a beautiful and massive structure. I loved it the minute that I walked in. It had stained glass windows with people in them (which is very unusual in our buildings) but I didn't see any symbols in the sanctuary. Curious, I asked the minister if they were Christian. *Well, some of us are and some of us aren't.*

Hmmm, I thought. Are you some sort of Jewish group? I asked.

Well, he replied with a twinkle in his eye. Some of us are and some of us aren't.

Now I was getting a bit confused. Seeing the perplexed look on my face, he said: *Here we have theists and atheists and everything in-between. We have Pagans and Buddhists, Humanists and Mystics, and other theological perspectives.*

My traditional Roman Catholic brain had never heard of such a denomination. *What is it that you worship?* I asked, all the while wondering if they were some sort of cult that worshipped ectoplasm or something weird.

Well, he replied joyfully, we worship the Spirit of Life that dwells within us all, and we draw from the scriptures of the World's religions, as well as from science and philosophy, literature and poetry, and we are passionate about social justice and earth justice, too. We listen to beautiful music and create worship services that are comforting, provocative, and hopefully inspirational. Then we ask lots of questions and get lots of different answers.

I was gobsmacked! I needed to learn more about them. Needless to say, they hired me and my life was changed forever. I had grown-up in a church that told me, *here are the answers, but we decide what the questions are.* I couldn't help but notice how parishioners at the UU congregation were joyful and came to the Society because they wanted to and not because it was obligatory. I found the Purposes and Principles of Unitarian Universalism to be liberating, and at the same time challenging. It was the religious tradition that I had always dreamed about, and I couldn't believe that it really existed.

A year later I joined the Society and didn't tell my husband or family for more than six months. (Both our families had Cardinals in them...although mine was much more progressive than my husband's. Mine was Humberto Cardinal Medeiros, and his was Richard Cardinal Cushing. Let's just say his side of the family was not happy, at all, with my decision.) When I signed the Membership book I looked up and waited for the lightning bolts to come down and strike me dead, but that obviously didn't happen. (A steeple did fall on my head later on, but I'm not sure that counts.) For the first time in my life, I was now responsible for my own spiritual path and growth. I welcomed the burden of that responsibility, and I have never regretted it for a moment.

I use the word burden, here, in a sober yet positive way. No one was ever again going to tell me what I had to believe; therefore, I had to do to the exploring and ask the hard questions myself. I have come to appreciate that just as our bodies and minds evolve over time, so do we spiritually evolve. What we believed as children changes with age and with experience. Hopefully there is a deepening, but alas all too often there is a distancing from our essence. UUism is here to call you back to your true self...and not be afraid of what you see.

I cannot say that this path has always been an easy one. If anything it has been labyrinthine. If you have ever walked in a labyrinth, you know that one minute you think you are getting close to the heart of things and then suddenly with one little turn you are flung into the outermost reaches of the labyrinth...still held within the circle, but fearing that THIS time you just might fall off.

Any faith journey, I have learned, is like that. It doesn't matter what theological perspective nourishes and sustains you, there are always those occasions that test your metal, that offer you uninvited opportunities for character building and soul-searching growth. Yet, when you are in community (when you are in a UU community), it is oftentimes the embrace of that community that holds you and keeps you

from falling off the edge, until that time when you are able to find your way back to the center again.

And so this morning I ask you, what moment of serendipity brought you to this place? What inspired you to walk through that door? Was it a long journey of dissatisfaction? Was it mere curiosity? Was it a friend or neighbor or family member who said, "You might want to check out UUs. They might be a good fit for you."

Unitarian Universalism has allowed me to walk with people of all faiths and no faith. It has widened my vision, challenged my perspective, honored my intellect, deepened my compassion, and enhanced the way I walk in this world. I will be forever grateful for this eclectic faith tradition that has opened my mind and my heart to what it means to be fully human and in service to, and communion with, others who also seek wisdom, truth, meaning, justice, enlightenment, peace and joy.

May, you too, find whatever it is you need to grow your spirit and allow you to experience what it means to be part of a UU community.

AMEN AND BLESSED BE

