

“UU Fervor”
Sunday, July 5, 2020

Welcome and Chalice Lighting Rev. Betsy Mead Tabor

Good morning and welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes. We like to call it UUFES. I’m Rev. Betsy Tabor. Glad to see you this morning!

We begin with some words about Unitarian Universalism.

Dan H: Good morning. My name Dan, and I’ve been coming to UUFES since I was 7 years old. This faith tradition is known for its embrace of diverse beliefs and the quest for justice.

Meghan H: My name is Meghan, and I’ve been coming to UUFES since I was 9 years old.

We have 7 principles. Instead of having a creed, UUs try to live by these values.

- #1. We believe that each and every person is important.
- #2. We believe that all people should be treated fairly and kindly.
- #3. We believe we should accept one another and keep on learning together.
- #4. Each person must be free to search for what is true and right in life.
- #5. All persons should have a vote about the things that concern them.
- #6. We believe in working for a peaceful, fair, and free world.
- #7. We believe in caring for our planet Earth, the home we share with all living things.

Dan: The principle I would pick for today is # 6: We believe in working for a peaceful, fair, and free world.

Meghan: The principle I would pick for today is #1: We believe that each and every person is important.

Together: Welcome!

Thank you, Meghan and Daniel. Please take a moment to switch to gallery view if you can and greet one another with a hand on the heart:

We gather these mornings in gratitude and in struggle.

Know that you belong here

With all that you bring, what you’re ready to let go of, and with what you long for.

Welcome. Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.

Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.

Here we seek healing and wholeness. Welcome, all.

Our service is called “UU Fervor.” It’s about enthusiasm – jumping into something with all you’ve got. And it’s about what it means to be a UU. Every June, Unitarian Universalists come together for a big enthusiastic convention. This year, the virtual GA registered nearly 5000 people, including 7 of us. The theme was “Rooted, Inspired, and Ready.”

We came home highly stimulated, lit up with ideas and spiritually full. We learned a lot. Beautiful worship and music made us weep. The calls to action unsettled us. They inspire UUs everywhere to do all we can to move out of the comfort of what we know into the discomfort and challenge of making meaningful change. Today we'll share stories about connecting with the larger UU movement.

Thank you to Barbara, Betsy, Kim, and Shana for their GA reflections today. We're grateful for today's music, for Alice's Time for All Ages, Jorge's reading, and Sandy's ready know-how. For this Shared Ministry, let us give thanks!

This morning we light our chalices in celebration of this faith movement that calls us to live into our dearest values. Let us kindle the flame.

The 4th of July always brings a mix of summer fun, patriotism, and reckoning. Today's tumultuous times point to the values on which America was founded and the struggle to live up to them. The tone of Shana's centering music reflects this complexity. Take a breath as we center.

Centering "America" Played by Shana Aisenberg

Shared Affirmation

Hymn "Wake, Now, My Senses" Performed by Palomar UU Fellowship in Vista, CA

Time for All Ages Alice Posner

I was about 8 when I heard that the rainforest, home of many of my favorite animals, was in a bit of trouble. I also heard that there was a charity buying up acres in Belize and putting them into long-term conservation. They advertised that you could adopt an acre, if you raised a certain amount of money, and they would work with local government and communities to put it into permanent conservation, in your name. I had seen quite a few charity events happen - where people would get sponsors to swim a long way, or in my dad's case (don't tell anyone!) dance all night, to raise money as people would agree to pay a certain amount per mile, or hour, or whatever they did.

So I decided to plan my own fundraiser, and I asked my neighbor, my grandfather who also lived next door, and my parents if they would sponsor me on a run to save the rainforest. I decided that I would run around my driveway as many times as I could in one go without stopping, and I would ask people to sponsor me per loop. We had quite a long driveway in front of the building I lived in, that also went to other houses. It was a long loop around with a small woods in the middle, that went up to a sheep field where the driveway continued out to the road, then circled back to the front of the building.

My friend Jessica was staying with my family at the time so she was going to do it with me. We went down to the driveway after breakfast and started to run. We ran around it a few times, and we were starting to get tired, come on, I told her, we can do this, this is for the rainforest.

I think what the people sponsoring me did not realize was that when I said “run to save the rainforest,” I did mean the rainforest, all of it. I figured the only thing between saving and losing the rainforest was me being up to running around my driveway enough times.

So I ran. Jessica decided after a few laps she’d do better sitting and counting my laps, so she sat by the front door and I kept going. I was a good runner, but I was lagging a little, but I was very focused on my goal, and kept going. I ran and I ran, propelled on by the excitement of my own agency in all this. I eventually started to go more and more slowly but kept going - I circled the driveway a LOT of times... I remember a kind of tunnel vision, thinking about the pumas and birds and monkeys. I did have a lot of kid energy and did not run myself to collapse, I used the special breathing my brother had learned to help with childhood asthma, and the rhythm of it kept me going. In, in out – in, in out. I think my mum just suggested it might be time to stop after she came out eventually to do an errand and was surprised to see me still running.

The neighbor ummed and erred a bit and kindly gave me a donation, but not, I noticed, near to the proper amount that my laps required. In my memory, ditto my parents although they may remember differently! My grandfather, though, paused and did ask me who did the counting, but then did, with a small and half hidden sigh, solemnly gave me the whole, correct amount, instructing me to give the check right to my mum.

I’ve been feeling like we all need to be long distance runners at the moment with all that is going on in the world. Focused on what is important, having the vision to set big goals that can propel us. How can we keep going, however slowly, and have the endurance to do so? That is what the UU church has meant to me, faith that is propelled by a conviction to work for what I believe in. Or perhaps another way to put it - there is so much energy in believing in justice, and grounding that energy in faith gives it endurance for me.

GA Reflection – Barbara Lubin

My greatest take away from last week’s General Assembly was the inequality that is still evident today. The 4th of July is the celebration of this country’s freedom from a distant oppressor almost 240 years ago. But that freedom didn’t extend to all. The words in our Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal” did not grant equality to all.

Many speakers at GA were inspiring. I was especially moved by the first evening’s Welcoming Celebration. Jessie Little Doe Baird, vice chair of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe shared that the Wampanoags have inhabited that land near Plymouth MA for more than 12,000 years and hospitably greeted the Mayflower landing party. She heartbreakingly went on to share that in March of this year, Wampanoags had to litigate the status of their land as a reservation which was being “disestablished” by the Secretary of the Dept. of Interior while at the same time dealing with the Covid-19 public health emergency. This was just one more action taken against this Tribal Nation after many previous acts that diminished the land held by it.

Other GA speakers and workshops were powerful and emotional. They focused on systemic racism and continued inequality among people of color and LGBTQ people. A workshop on class attended virtually by nearly 300 people had us examine and share within separate break out groups the economic and social classes we were in at age 12. We were told that most people

believe they are middle class. But we discovered unexpected truths about ourselves and how class background affects how we have socialized since our youth. Were we ashamed of being poor with uneducated parents? Or were we in a higher class that assumed everyone shared the same opportunities? We were challenged to consider class privilege and how Covid-19 is a test case of how inequality is reflected in our society now and how that gap may widen over the coming years.

I became more aware of our first principle affirming “the inherent worth and dignity of every person” and what it means to be an ally for social justice. The first step is to LISTEN and then to understand my own privilege in light of my class background. I felt some relief when the facilitator said we will make mistakes but not to shy away and accept impact over intent.

The five days I experienced GA encouraged me to bring to UUFES ways we can envision and engage in social justice actions.

“**Ancient Mother**” - Traditional Navajo prayer Played by Shana Aisenberg

GA Reflection – Betsy Loughran

This was my first GA, and as I thought about what I wanted to get out of it, I mostly concentrated on workshops that I thought might help me in my new job as your president. I tentatively selected workshops on UUthe Vote, and on leading congregational visioning sessions. In fact, I did go to those sessions and they were very useful. But the lecture that really got to me was the one given by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, the author of *The Indigenous Peoples of the United States*. Harvey Stephenson had introduced me – and a lot of you – to this book in the last year of his life. It’s an amazing book and certainly started me on the journey of revising all the myths I had absorbed about the U.S. being largely an empty country civilized by our European ancestors, and the “west having been won” by courageous frontiers men.

But Roxanne didn’t start with the meticulous history she wrote in that book. Rather she started with John F. Kennedy, the idol of my young adulthood. By the time Kennedy was running for office, the “Doctrine of Discovery” was already codified into our laws despite the fact that it led to the genocide of a continent of indigenous peoples. Kennedy who was a Catholic only one generation removed from Ireland, needed to transform his own negative story into a story of benign benevolence. Yet this myth was born as Democrats and Republicans engaged in brutal immigration policies towards Mexicans and Asians all during the 20th century and into the 21st.. As she says, white nationalism is not new with Trump. The violent theft of land from the indigenous peoples and the oppression of African slaves by armed men in the south and in the north is central to the American story. We are a nation of colonizers and imperialists - no better than the British and French in Africa and Asia.

As I look at my reasons for going to national conventions back when I was working, it was always to learn something new - to catch up on the major trends in my field - to have my world view upended. Roxanne’s lecture certainly did that for me. Her book had begun the process, but this lecture got at my current world view. Kennedy and all of us liberal Democrats have bought into the myth of Americans as being morally superior to our European ancestors. We came into this country, bought property based on the “doctrine of discovery;” We often ignore the violence

and racism that informs our immigration policies, and our taxes support a police force that has become increasingly militarized. As Pogo said, we have looked for the enemy and the enemy is us.

So I come home from GA feeling quite disoriented, not knowing quite what to do with all this. But it feels like exactly the challenge that the country is facing now with all of the protests. I even think it is a central task for our largely white congregation in northern NH. I look forward to our work together in the coming year.

Joys & Concerns

“There is More Love Somewhere” - a song of resistance during the time of slavery, which reminds us that there’s always more for us to do, explore, resist, and open ourselves to

“Spirit of Life”

Meditation

We give thanks
For beauty out the window
The canopy of green - the canvas of sky - cool waters

We are grateful for this circle of seekers
This faith that nourishes the spirit
and nudges us out of our comfort
Into loving more fully and committing to make a difference

We call to mind friends, family struggling with illness of body, heart and spirit
We wish them peace and well-being

We remember all people on the margins - by race, means, orientation.
May our dreams of equality and inclusion inspire us
To love, to forgive each other, to reach toward one another.

In the name of all that is good and holy and true, blessed be and amen.

[Respond to Joys & Concerns.]

Reading “Re-Birth” by Betty Jeanne Rueters-Ward Read by Jorge Dominguez

GA Reflection – Kim Hamel

I thought I knew what to expect at GA. As a delegate, I’d attend business meetings and vote. I’d also hear interesting speakers and attend workshops that might help me live out my UU values. I would certainly be spiritually uplifted thru worship and music.

Well, those things did happen (30 hours worth!), but here’s what surprised me: the business meetings were much more than just voting, there was a passion from the moderators and

delegates to really shape who we are as a faith community in this transformative time, the speakers were engaging, presenting a perspective I hadn't thought of before...on topics like:

- How White Supremacy has shaped my world and why it needs to be dismantled
- Seeing inequality in our democracy around race, wealth and technology
- Exposing the myths we were taught about Indigenous People
- Planetary Health....and the part Indigenous People play in this work
- And anti-racism....and “hard conversations”

Every one of these topics felt huge, overwhelming....“I'm not an activist!” I proclaimed to myself! I could hear our President, Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, say, “Ours is not a casual Faith,” and Co-Moderator Elandria Williams passionately demanding we get ready to “live our UU values out loud!” I kept thinking, “I'm not ready for all this faith calls me to be.”

Then came the service where Sarah Dan Jones led us in her song “Meditation on Breathing.” I slowed my mind and sang along (having a moment of thinking, how cool, I'm singing with Sarah Dan!). I realized that I am at the very beginning of my journey of understanding and awareness of the history of my country, of the systemic racism that permeates it. I have to give myself time to read and learn all the things I never knew I didn't know.

I must also share how moving it was to sing in the Virtual Choir. Rehearsals started several weeks before...not quite what I had hoped being on Zoom. But, singing in a choir is what uplifts me and helps me feel connected to others in a spiritual way. As I recorded into my phone on my porch, I worried I wouldn't feel that connection. Then came the Sunday Service...and there I was surrounded by a community of faces and voices singing about our ancestors and “better days.” I was truly moved. That experience will stay with me.

GA left me feeling...knowing I have a lot to learn...and it's ok to take my time...to sit with it all for awhile. As Rev. Mykal Slack said last Sunday, “We don't all have to be in the same place...we just have to be moving together.”

That's what I felt, immersing myself in this virtual GA. All of us are moving together toward building, living into the way we want this world to be. I maybe didn't understand everything that was being discussed, but I knew in my heart that “these are my people.” GA affirmed for me that I am in the right place and in the right Faith community...with some truly amazing people.

Offering Beethoven Duo in C Major

Played by Betsy Ginsberg and Karen Papetti

Reflection – Rev. Betsy Tabor

I'm grateful for the fervor of GA. The energy and excitement. The rainbow of faces. The aspirations. And I loved the camaraderie of the 7 of us last week. We compared notes daily. What moved us the day before? Which workshops will you go to today (workshops where hundreds of UUs poured their ideas and questions into Chat, and it flowed like a river).

I imagined the 7 of us sitting together at the noon talks. And the annual Ware Lecture. This UU movement is amazing. Did you know that it has brought in such speakers over the years as Julian Bond, Martin Luther King, Jr., Karen Armstrong, Cornel West, and Mary Oliver?

Kim wrote up a raft of notes at the end of each day and sent them around to us. When something lit one of us up, the rest of us made a note to watch the recording later. Like the opening ceremony that began with calling on our ancestors and indigenous people dancing in prayer as an embodiment of hope. “What a lovely service that just ended,” Barbara wrote that evening, “tears in my eyes.”

GA grounds us all...and it sets UUs up to do some work. We will surely grow into the “liberatory faith” we heard about last week: “a liberatory Unitarian Universalism.” A faith in which people of privilege can use that privilege to foster more fairness, equity, and justice. A faith that helps us muster courage for racial justice and what Chris Crass called “building the spiritual left.” A faith that reminds us that we have a responsibility to bring as many people into this work as possible.

A powerful theme for me was the spiritual call to *readiness*. Part of what it means to be a UU is to be ready to be where we don’t think we can go, nor do we know quite how to go there. The Folk group Rising Appalachia sang, “I believe in being ready...for the time is drawing near.” Ready to do what needs to be done. “Even though I’m afraid,” another song went, “even though I don’t know how, nevertheless I am willing. I’m saying yes.

Community Response

What does it mean to you to be a UU? To return to this circle week after week, this home of the UU movement? Today, we’ve taken a deep dive into the GA universe. I invite you to type into Chat what in this UU faith calls to you? What does it mean to be a UU? What do you feel ready to say yes to?

Lynn H: You said it earlier, Betsy: “a circle of seekers.” That’s what this place means to me.

Rod F: Well, it all started down in Austin, Texas when I was growing uneasy about having a young family and not being able to tell them very much other than the ordinary things. So I became a UU. I walked into that UU church and, before I left, I signed the book. From there, it was a very active engagement in Plattsburgh, New York, and then I came over here, and I felt very empty. There happened to be a Russ and Janet Miller, who put an ad in the paper saying they were looking for similar thinkers. So we got together and met in homes, and eventually...here we are. That was 1981, but I signed the book in 1982. It’s been a wonderful, wonderful journey.

[People’s ideas flowed like a river into Chat.] I’m seeing beautiful words in the Chat and will read some of these – this is lovely. What drew you to UUism? What keeps you coming back?:

- Freedom, reason, and tolerance - my soul has found a home - JUSTICE for ALL - connection - sanctuary; engagement - Lately UUs feel like a pocket of sanity - a place that makes me feel uncomfortable, but where I know there will be company in that

feeling - a community of friends who explore and support each other as we all try to be our best selves - reminding myself to help other people - love - the wide invitation and acknowledging we still have much to learn in humility - for me it's the guiding principles...every single one speaks to me of a world I want to live in - nurturing; fellow travelers in the (hero's) journey - embraces the idea that social justice is a holy pursuit - trying to live into our principles - "I look at myself in a beginning kind of way to increase my awareness. What words do I use? What actions do I choose in being with others?" - "Back in the days when we were not here, no UUFES to go to. It felt pretty empty. So a few of us got together and started UUFES. And here we are. It's been an exciting journey" - it feels good to be surrounded by folks who share my beliefs and who might help give me insights on how to foster change - acceptance, community and Shana's music - "I am not a UU member. I can say, however, that every time I have attended a UUFES service, often to hear a particular speaker, I have found I have been sincerely welcomed by friendly non-judgmental people. This is not always the case in other religions where one's economic status, whom one is living with, sexual orientation seem to be relevant to membership in that particular community" - THANK YOU ROD - I love our principles, and the true effort with which people make an effort to live by them - "I was dragged rather reluctantly to UU meetings as a pre-teen in Durham, NH. I do remember going to other churches as part of the youth program and being amazed by how exotic other traditions were!" - a feast: it's an arena for heart, mind, soul (wherein comprising contact sport)....

Hymn "The Fire of Commitment"

Chalice Extinguishing

Reminders

- Coffee hour

Benediction

On this July 4th weekend, may we leave the circle and go out into the world with prayers and hope for this country. With each day, may we be rooted in this faith, a faith of commitment, because we believe another world is possible.

GA Reflection – Shana

Postlude American Fiddle Tune Medley