

“Seek But Don’t Find?”  
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When I meet with new members, I always appreciate hearing about their life journeys. There is often a specific reason the person is seeking religious community. It might be a life change – like a death or divorce, a move or an empty nest. For others there is simply a vague dissatisfaction with the way things are in their lives. Or, they might have had a deeply meaningful experience which left them wanting more. Whatever the reason – we welcome you!

We live complicated lives. Our livelihoods are not necessarily what we love to do best. So we construct a precarious structure for our lives that includes “down time” in which we can pursue what is most important. For many of us, this congregation is part of the structure that sustains us.

Like many of you, I am a seeker. When I first sought out a UU congregation, I was seeking a community to which my son and I could belong. I wanted this community to offer an open and affirming religious education that would help Christopher discern his own moral decisions in life. At that time I identified myself as an agnostic, so theology was not of great concern to me. In fact, I was relieved to be among folks who didn't want to talk about God and religion. People and community were – and are – the heart of my faith. Faith was something to be lived in our everyday actions.

I have been a Unitarian Universalist for more than forty years. In that time, my sense of identity as a UU has changed several times. I shifted from being an agnostic, to an atheist, deist, and a humanist mystical seeker. As the years progressed, I found myself seeking out new avenues of sustenance. Women's spirituality groups, classes in yoga and energy work, and daily journaling were done outside of the church. Why? Because inside the

church, the emphasis remained on doing good works, and intellectual stimulation, rather than on cultivating spiritual well-being. Anything remotely spiritual had to take place during the one hour of worship on Sunday morning.

Thank goodness we are getting smarter. With the advent of the Small Group Ministry programs – what you call Chalice Circles – and other opportunities for fellowship and personal growth, our vision of what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist is expanding.

When I was a lay leader, the most spiritual experience I had occurred when I attended New England Leadership School. There, the daily offerings of worship, Credo groups, and leadership work in fellowship with other UUs helped me know what was possible for us, not just for me. It was striking that I had to leave my home congregation to experience such deep connection. Because that kind of spiritual experience remained inaccessible in my home congregation, I embarked on a career in ministry. My intention

was to learn how to integrate a depth of spiritual experience into the life of the congregation.

So I went to school to learn how to bring spirituality into a UU congregation. Unfortunately, Divinity School didn't teach that. I still had to create opportunities for spiritual growth outside the program. Spiritual direction, energy work, and retreats became my mainstay. In a way, my seminary education was good preparation for parish ministry. Most of my time as a minister is devoted to administration, personnel management, pastoral care, and planning worship that will – or will not – meet the needs of a diverse congregation. My own spiritual nurturance still takes place outside the church – with the exception of the human connection I experience here.

In 1975, when I joined my first congregation, most of the members were seeking a community in which they could explore life's meaning without the baggage of religious dogma. Back then, we referred to

ourselves as “religious refugees” or “come-outers” or simply as “not really religious.”

So, I was very cautious the first time I introduced the topic of Unitarian Universalism as a “religion.” I drew on the root word of religion – *religare* – as that which binds together. I knew that anything remotely “religious” or “spiritual” had to be approached from an intellectually accurate perspective if it was to be taken seriously.

It reminds me of a story my friend Marty Wilson used to tell. She and her husband Charlie lived in West Virginia and had some friends visiting for the week-end. On Sunday morning, they told the friends they were going to church, and invited them to come along. “Wait a minute,” they said. “We have to get our Bibles.” “Oh, I don’t think you’ll need your Bibles,” Marty replied. “But you might want to bring a dictionary.”

In *Challenge of a Liberal Faith*, George Marshall wrote:

Unitarian Universalism is an inner-directed faith, building values and standards from within outward, creating an internal fortress for

survival. It helps people face more realistically the issues of life, struggle, despair and defeat. At the same time it encourages greater joy, through freedom from fear, in living a rich, full life on this earth, which is all the Heaven (and Hell) it promises.

That which binds us together is this community of which we are a part. Those who are drawn to this congregation are seekers. We are seeking ways to live in the here and now with integrity. We are seeking companions for the journey. We are seeking lives that have meaning.

The challenge for us seekers, is that sometimes we are so intent on the search for meaning, that we don't recognize it when it appears before us.

Deepak Chopra suggests that

Seeking can become stressful when you apply the same laws that you apply in the material world – hard work, exacting plans, driving ambition, and attachment to outcome. Ultimately spiritual awareness unfolds when you're flexible, when you're spontaneous, when you're detached, when you're easy on yourself and easy on others. (*You Are What You Seek*)

The life of the spirit is much more fluid than the daily grind we *call* our lives. We are not human beings learning to be spiritual. We are spiritual beings seeking to be fully human. Some of us are so accustomed to looking for answers to life's questions outside of ourselves, that we forget that the source of wisdom has been within us all along. Frenetic activity, seeking out gurus for spiritual growth, looking for the "quick fix" that will make us feel better, can all become obstacles to genuine spiritual wellness and wholeness. When we live each day as if it had meaning for us, then we are on the seeker's path that is our human journey.

I suspect that most of us share a similar longing – a longing for connection. We want to be connected to some thing or some one beyond ourselves. Human, divine, animal or natural "something" or "someone" does not really matter. What does matter is that we are on this journey together, each doing the best that we can to live ourselves

into human being-ness. I do believe that we are here to be seekers. If we are doing – and being – true to ourselves, then the journey continues at least until death.

I was first drawn to a UU congregation because I was seeking something that was missing from my life. As a minister I try to help congregations be communities that care for their members and walk together with a common vision.

My own evolution has brought me from seeking a community of like-minded people in which I was accepted as I am, to seeking a *religious* community whose members covenant with each other to grow their souls in a spirit of love and cooperation. I want to be part of a congregation that believes it can make a difference in the lives of its members, and in the greater world community.

This journey of ours is time-limited. We do not know when, or where, it will end. Or if it will ever end. That makes our time in the here and now even more precious.

Let us make it so.