

“Living Our Faith”
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Once upon a time, doesn't every good story start that way?

But seriously, once upon a time, in my lifetime, there were Unitarians and Universalists. Two separate faiths. I grew up Universalist. We had a gorgeous church not far from here, with a round stained glass window, wooden pews and communion the first Sunday of every month. There was a Unitarian Church in town too.

In junior high, yes I pre-date middle school, we had Sunday school on Monday afternoons after school. We studied neighboring faiths and attended a Hari Krishna wedding, and sat restlessly at a Quaker meeting house. All these varied experiences influenced my youthful spiritual development, taught me to admire and respect people's faith traditions, and how honored I am when I'm invited to share in that. And it's stuck with me.

Case in point, when I was a director of a child care program, I often ate lunch with the children. One Monday, I was eating with the four year olds and little Christopher starting singing part of the Catholic liturgy, Lamb of God..... Everyone went silent, and one child said “My father said God is dead.” At that point the classroom teachers started backing away from the table. I said, “You're right, I've heard that some people believe that.” Another said, “My mother said God is in nature.” Again, I said, “You're right, I've heard that some people believe that.” And a third said, “My mother said God is everywhere.” By this time, the teachers are at the door, shaking their heads because they can't believe I'm encouraging this conversation. And again, I said, “You're right, I've heard that some people believe that.” Finally, a child asked, “How can we all be right?” “Well, that's what gives the world all its different religions.” Enough said! Of course, I had to write to the families and report we had this conversation!

Growing up, each Sunday we recited an affirmation from Hymn of the Spirit.
(Brace yourself)

We avow our faith

*in God as Eternal and all-conquering Love,
in the spiritual leadership of Jesus;
in the supreme worth of every human personality;
in the authority of truth, known and to be known;
And in the power of men of goodwill and sacrificial spirit to overcome all
evil and progressively to establish the kingdom of God.*

Oh, how our faith has evolved. Now we have a blended faith – UU – and a set of Principles that we read in the responsive reading. I don't know about you, but I hear nuggets in the affirmation I just recited.

Part of what I believe our faith tells us to do is serve. It's how I live out my faith. As a youth, I tutored 2nd graders in reading. I was a Big Sister to a 7 year old. These experiences convinced me I wanted to become a teacher and I did. Sometime serving falls into your lap. When I was in high school, our youth group – LRY – Liberal Religious Youth, was a UU group of both the Universalist Church and the Unitarian Church in town. We went on ski trips every February school vacations. While our mission on this trip was snow and fun, we got snowed in and couldn't get home. We also had no money to pay for an additional night. So, you know what they say, when you can't pay the bill, you do the dishes. And we did indeed – we shoveled snow, we scrubbed the floors, and yes, we did all the dishes. The owner let the juke box run and still today when I hear certain songs, it takes me back to Sugarloaf, Maine.

Service continues to feed my spirit. I started volunteering at General Assembly in exchange for the waived registration fee. But then it became so much more. For the past 16 years I have coordinated the accessibility services helping people with disabilities get the most out of GA. It's how I do GA now – no workshops, just service, with a few worship services sprinkled in. There is such joy in making our faith more inclusive.

I coordinated a soup kitchen with my former church, serving dinner one night each month at Bread of Life in Malden. My children were involved and it won Beth Volunteer of the Year in middle school. That soup kitchen continues.

I get more than I give when I volunteer. Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, in her book *My Grandfather's Blessings*, describes it well. She says, "True service is not a relationship between an expert and a problem; it is far more genuine than that. It is a relationship between people who bring the full resources of their combined humanity to the table and share them generously. Service goes beyond expertise. Service is another way of life." She continues, "Service is a relationship between equals." "Serving is also different from fixing. Seeing yourself as a fixer may cause you to see brokenness everywhere, to sit in judgement. When we serve, we see the unborn wholeness in others; we collaborate with it and strengthen it." The inherent worth and dignity of every person.

And this church had shaped my attitude and approach to service. Rev Mary Harrington had an approach to service that said "What does help look like to you?" Of my 51 trips to New Orleans, I got to practice this over and over again. On one particular trip with a college group, our assignment was to help Miss Donna organize her garage. She had already gutted her home and salvaged what she could and it was all stored in her garage. She had hired a contractor who began the rebuilding but then took off with all her money. She was now re-traumatized. But she thought getting her belongings sorted and organized by room, would help her move on. It was what help looked like to her. But when the car load of college girls arrived they called me and said there was so much more Miss Donna needed – her lawn needed mowing, her home needed so much work...on and on. I explained organizing her garage was what we were asked to do, it was on top on her list. So they grunted and groaned but went to work and organized all her belongings. That evening, when Miss Donna returned from work, she called sobbing, saying "thank you" over and over again. Saying now she could see her kitchen, her bedroom, her living room because her belongings were all sorted by the rooms they belonged in. She could move on. Well, needless to say, now the girls were all in tears too and understood "what does help look like to you?" Serving, not fixing.

For the past three or four years, each Saturday my daughter Beth and I volunteer at UU Urban Ministry at Fair Foods. We join a group of regular and visiting volunteers of a variety of ethnicities and faith traditions to sort and bag produce and prepare it for sale for \$2 a bag to people in the surrounding Roxbury neighborhood. Fair Foods runs 50 weeks a year, rain or shine, and we make the

majority of Saturdays a priority. We bag more than 250 bags of fresh food a week, nourishing the neighborhood.

I am a Sanctuary volunteer as well spending a last three nights a month at First Parish Bedford in support of their guest. It's what I can do to fight the injustices against immigrants who came to the US seeking a better, safer life.

This once upon a time story seems to be all about me, and well, in a way, it is. But I tell these stories to bring our faith to life. I believe in the Principles and have taken each to heart and live my life according to the Principles.