



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

CONGREGATION OF FREDERICK
Spirituality · Community · Justice

My Journey To and With Unitarian Universalism

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My Journey to and with Unitarian Universalism... My whole life has led me to this moment and place... the choices I made, the relationships that have crossed my path, the gifts I have been given, the challenges and even my failures. That is A LOT. As Nick shared a river metaphor with the music selections for this service, Thank you, Nick. It lends itself to the two distinct phases... the journey to Unitarian Universalism, then the journey with Unitarian Universalism as the river flows. In the journey with Unitarian Universalism this beloved faith has and continues to transform my heart, spirit and mind with opportunities to build a soul through the work of justice in relationship, mutuality and joy. I resonate with our colleagues

the Rev Alexa Fraser and
the Rev Meg Riley who asked-
“isn’t the purpose of religion to grow a soul?”

My journey to Unitarian Universalism is really the watersheds and tributaries of the experiences, beliefs, values the drew me into my first congregation. I remembered the question that Dr. Sharon Welch asked as I started seminary... who has loved you into this place? Who loved me into the place that I was able to hear the call of religious community, respond to the invitation, and entered through the doors of my first congregation. There are several answers to that question. Six in fact. Six blessings.

First, my ancestors... my ancestors have loved me into this place. I was raised in a liberal roman catholic family in New York where the church was the rhythm of our lives. My extended family served the congregation extensively and church was our weekly gathering and marked my life as I grew. We also often discussed the policies and positions of the church with our agreement or not... with passion and commitment. Sometimes vehement disagreement when we felt the policies and practices excluded children of god or failed to care for them. Our family believed that the role of the church was to care for each other as god cares for us, we lived by equal parts “As you have done for the least of these, so you have done for me” and “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”.

My mom supported my inquiry and questions that emerged as I came to understand the limitations of who was saved, and found I disagreed. She helped me explore other local faith traditions. None of them really fit at the time, but I appreciated them. These experiences helped me connect with my friends who grew up in many different faiths. Later, when I read “Cathedral of Universalism”, by the late UU minister The Rev. Dr. Forrest Church, it immediately resonated with these spiritual and religious paths.

I finally found a tent big enough for my questions where I could live into the answers. The gifts of my ancestors and family are my riverbed of the love of religious community, being able to remain in community through disagreement and the freedom to explore different ways of being.

Second, my failures have loved me into this place. My failures have taught me, as Rev Carl often quotes from our colleague The Rev Elizabeth Nguyen, “We are saved from perfection.” I really tried... OH how I TRIED not to learn that lesson. There was a period of time... a rather long time actually... that I believed the answer to most problems was to work harder... I believed that if I JUST worked HARD enough, I could do anything. I was wrong.

Eventually, I gave up that illusion... and I started finding the teams that brought out the best in each other making room in my life for ease and... well... living. Throughout that journey, I realized that while work is necessary, but it isn't the answer, love is. Love as bell hooks describes love, “Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality” In that love ANYTHING is possible. These lessons taught me far more than my successes and through compassion and growth, I returned to love. The growth is in the returning.

Third, my mentors/mentees and peers have loved me into this place. Through those relationships I learned a lot of skills for ministry... some were pragmatic... I learned how to write, speak, present, and others were interpersonal, engagement, collaboration and most importantly to listen. Listen deeply, listen to understand and not just respond, listen with my whole body, ears, mind, heart. These relationships were generally associated with my previous or other occupations. Apparently, I like M vocations.

Mom – for the past 15 years,

Medical – I have been a surgical physician assistant since 1999 – general surgery, vascular surgery, orthopedics and a flirtation with plastic surgery and wound care.

Military – I just retired after 20 years of service in the Army Medical Department in the National Guard and

Management – leadership, medical readiness administration, policy writing, project management...

while they are all different vocations and occupations... whatever I did in all of them were in-service. My favorite part of medicine was accompanying people as they healed. My favorite part of Management is building the teams that support people bringing their best selves. There are too many people, quotes, or ideas to single any out, but through these relationships I learned the beauty of people uniting to a set of values in service. And that is what Unitarian Universalists DO.

Fourth, nature has loved me into this place. I grew up playing in the wet lands behind our home. I scampered over rocks, along the creek, climbed trees and walked across the creek on fallen tree bridges. In those woods, my first conception of God as the sun dappled light on the leaves of tree making them glow with life was born.

I grew,... forgot... and over time, I remembered... our connections to the seasons, the flow of energy in the natural world and the reminders of the power of the earth are all parts of our lives. The amazing power of nature... a tributary that reminds us of our smallness, our softness, and that we are part of the interconnected web of life.

Fifth, science has loved me into this place. I fell in love with science in 4th grade and earned my undergraduate degree in Biology to go onto study and practice as a physician assistant and now support research. I love Rev Carl's statement that we take the best of the world's religions with science. Science structured my thoughts, explorations and opened the world... This tributary to Unitarian Universalism allowed me to bring all that I am, I didn't have to leave my scientific inquiry at the door.

Sixth, finally my family and friends... as I started moving for school and building my own home and family, I was unchurched for a while. I held a personal spirituality and agnosticism. Yet, as my family grew, I realized I really needed a community. One of my dearest friends engaged in some "elbow evangelism" –

Hey, we go to Accotink Unitarian Universalist Church...

you should come sometime....

I'll see you there.

That was the start of my journey on the river of UU... and my life has never been the same.

Pivoting to my journey with Unitarian Universalism, it began about 15 years ago. I was very pregnant when my husband and I decided to go visit the three UU churches that were equi-distant to our home. I walked into Accotink Unitarian Universalists Church, I received a gracious welcome. I looked at my husband and said, "well, I'm home. How about you?" that was our beginning and we are still members of AUUC today.

I have loved learning of the welcoming ministry in the congregation, and that is a ministry that will help people start their journey on the river once they get here.

We began attending and in those chairs, I learned about this wild and wonderful faith. I learned of Emerson, philosophy, and I heard Dr. Seuss (Theodore Geisel) from a pulpit for the first time. I saw a minister play “baseball” with a question box sermon emphasizing that ministers all bring different talents, perspectives, and attributes. I heard the word Juneteenth for the first time and learned history that was new to me. I learned about the transcendentalists, I read Einstein’s book for a church group discussion. All the learning opened new paths, new ways of being, exposed me to new thoughts and thus new growth.

Structurally, I began to experience religious community with the structures and rhythms from my embedded religion. I attended services regularly, joined the choir. I began studying my new faith, discovered a sound bath, practicing that deep relaxation and experiencing my first meditation in UU practice. These experiences sent me looking for other mind-body connections. Eventually, this grew into my yoga practice.

Through my journey with Unitarian Universalism, I experienced the ministry of four, wonderful, settled ministers and innumerable visiting ministers. I learned and appreciated how each of us are invited to bring our whole selves and all our gifts to our ministry, our differences are our strengths.

Several of the long-term members pursued second careers as ministers. The community helped us move, held my family when I deployed, twice, and numerous mobilizations for local and national emergencies. That love in action contributed to my journey to this place and ministry. I am so grateful for the broad, open faith, and community specifically that supported a path for me to answer my call. The journey with Unitarian Universalist loved me into this place with unlearning what is not true, learning untold truths, and a path to my call.

My journey with Unitarian Universalism is marked with service. I served on the board and learned some of the behind the scenes effort that makes a congregation work. I led a chalice group or a small group ministry and taught faith formation at several grades. Occasionally, I just sat in the nursery. Otherwise, I worked at a project level, task focused, short efforts, defined goals. And we developed traditions, such as my family routinely participates in the Crop-walk, an interfaith fundraiser to fight global hunger, near Thanksgiving. During my grounding in seminary, I served in a prison ministry with the Opportunities, Alternatives, and Resources. Service loved me into this place with work to build my soul and honor the spark of the divine in each and every human being.

I learned and I unlearned so much in those chairs, in that community and with our colleagues. I grew and found yet even more ways to approach the divine. I learned that my worth as a human being wasn’t in what I produced, how hard I worked, my degrees, or anything else... my worth is just in being me. Human rights have only ONE requirement and belong to ALL of us, it is the work of religious justice.

My journey with Unitarian Universalism taught me that we can make the world more Just. On this river run, I am learning some of the skills and tools to help make that happen. I learned of the pride of Unitarian Universalists in our actions during the civil rights era, and pain that Mark Morrison Reed wrote about of the failure to welcome our black and brown siblings into our communities of faith afterward. Recently, I had the honor of working with the racial justice committee and contributing to AUUC adopting the eighth principle.

On this journey, I have grown to hold two truths... this is where I am from, this is my nation and country and I am honored to have served it. I believe that we can continue to grow into the justice of our aspirational ideals, in love. I also live on the unceded lands of the Monahoc tribe of the Great Sioux nation.

I am learning to see and take action against the racism that is in the ground water and influences the structures of our society, in our history, and limits the health and life of all people. The journey with justice has loved me into this place with steps toward the multicultural, beloved community.

Slowly, over time, and with all the people that have loved me into this place, the call to religious leadership that I first felt as a young girl returned. In this faith what was then impossible, was now possible. I started talking to our minister and weighing when is the right time... seminary is a big step. I planned. I prepared the family. I began reading and exploring social science, yoga and contemplative practices. Michele Alexander's book, "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness" blew my mind wide open. I had led a life of knowing... and through this journey, I learned

we are feeling beings who think ...

justice starts beyond the individual

reliance and justice start in community

this was a big pivot in how I would be in the world.

Finally, the most recent bend my river journey with Unitarian Universalism was my chaplaincy training in my first unit of clinical pastoral education.

I loved the connection to the people,

the learning community,

learning to pray extemporaneously and

in ways that speak to different people in different faiths and with an interfaith perspective that honors all our humanity. It affirmed that interfaith work is foundational for me.

I invite those of us who found Unitarian Universalism to reflect on all the people or events that brought us into our first Congregation and those whose contributions brought us to the place that were ready for the invitation into this faith and our journey with it. For all of us, I offer the question, who has loved you into this place? After reflecting on our individual journey, lets build it out to the small groups and even to the overall community Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Frederick.

After reflecting on what is... What tributaries do we dream for our congregation, committees, to service and celebrations for those who haven't found our life saving faith.

Today, we have talked about the past. We have talked about the present. And now we... you and I are here, in this place and this time. Now we can create our ministry and celebrate the future we build. I'm grateful to be with you on this journey. Together, we will we decide what really matters in our ministry.