



## *Why do we go to Church?*

Stephanie Trudel, Worship Leader

Why are we here? No, not that “why are we here”, the simpler, more immediate question, of; Why are we here, at Church, this morning? Why, when we all have our own busy lives do we show up just before 10 am on Sunday mornings? We are pulled in many directions, and our time is precious. The argument could be made that it’s because we have great coffee, and even better snacks, but I sense there is something deeper here. -We are seeking; Seeking understanding, answers, to be needed, to be cared for, and to belong. We at some point decided we needed something, and we sought out this place. Now, the reasons for walking though these doors are as numerous and unique as each who has entered. We all have our own stories.

First Impressions are meaningful, and often stick with us.

I was nervous. I hadn’t stepped foot inside a church for years. Wait, I take that back, I had begrudgingly entered churches for three weddings, and three funeral masses. I also recall a school performance at St. Augustine’s in Andover, the church affiliated with the private school of the family I nannied for. I hadn’t burst into flames, although, the joke was made. All in all, I had no idea what to expect from this new place, and frankly, I wasn’t entirely sure why I was there. I was raised Roman Catholic, yet felt drawn to Goddess and Earth Worship, and had a general distain and outright dislike for “organized religion.” My Mother, often and most lovingly referred to me as ‘her little heretic’. Conversely, I found theology to be a fascinating

area to study, as there were always so many questions, and I liked asking questions. I found myself on the steps of First Church right around the New Year, my then four-year-old daughter in tow. I remember it was gray, slushy and cold outside. As I entered the building, I could immediately smell white sage being burned. This was a good sign in my book. My Interest piqued further when I got to the top of the stairs and saw string, laid down so carefully to form what I knew immediately to be a labyrinth. I stood there, off to the side, feeling so self-conscious and awkward, and Lauren, after warmly introducing herself, said something to the effect of, "Come on in! We won't bite!" I held my daughters hand, and walked the Labyrinth. I felt something resonate deeply within me that day, so much so, that I returned.

First Impressions are meaningful, second impressions can be equally illuminating.

A week or two later, after I had read a little about Unitarian Universalism, I had learned just enough that I had, questions. I was still nervous and very skeptical that any organized religion could possibly work for me. I was proudly eclectic, and was drawn to what made sense to me, bits of everything from Goddess based ancient practice, to Buddhism, to Hinduism. Native American Wisdom resonated deeply with me. I also believed that logic and science had a place at the table, too. What I personally believed did not fit within the confines of the religion in which I was raised. There simply wasn't room for questions. There wasn't room for me. I had my doubts that this church would really be any different. How wrong I was.

That day, I saw something that for me was personally profound. Where I expected to see a priest, was not a priest. It was a Woman. She spoke of the Divine Feminine, Referred to the Higher Power as She, and Her. That was new to me! She was quite literally speaking my language! To see a woman holding that sacred space enabled me to listen to the message of First Church. I realized that this was a place where I could

learn and grow, and asking questions was basically a commandment! The David Francis quote “We Need Not Think Alike to Love Alike.” In my mind summed up beautifully the goal of Beloved Community, and this community.

As I got to know the folks around here, I realized that everyone I had spoken with on this had their own, unique and beautiful story of what brought them here to First Church. Each person, in albeit a different way was presented with precisely what they needed at that time. Each person received some kind of signal, some kind of sign that they could belong here.

We are Seeking to be needed, cared for, and to belong. We are seeking a Spiritual Home.

Choosing ones Spiritual Home is not something to take lightly. Our religions are often chosen for us by our parents and families. It’s no surprise that for some, this doesn’t feel right, it simply doesn’t fit. We have our own individual spiritual path we must take. Honoring what feels true is a sacred practice.

The third of Our Unitarian Universalist Principle calls us to affirm and promote the acceptance of one another and encouragement of spiritual growth in our congregations.

Well, that’s simple and Easy, right? Not so fast, Easy to agree with doesn’t mean it’s easy to live. In fact, this principle holds us to an extremely high standard. This principle requires that we not only accept one another, we also support them as they find their way on their spiritual journey. I look at this and think, wow, man, that’s a beautiful thought... Then I think, BUT... How is this done? What if I don’t agree with them? What if they don’t agree with me? How can I help anyone else, I’m just on my little path over here, and I’m not really sure either...and so on...

If we break it down, we end up with the verbs. Accept, Encourage, And Grow. This is a tall order, to be sure. How do we do this work? Let’s start with what we’re doing right. I’d like to draw your attention to how this

building, this sanctuary feels, right now. It feels warm, accepting, and open. It feels, in a word, Holy.

How THIS PLACE feels... Think about what makes this a holy place? Some could say it's just a building, and they wouldn't be wrong, per say. What makes This Place special? We do. Our intentions do. How we choose to be with one another matters. We actively create that feeling that so many have felt when first walking through the doors. The love we have, the compassion we demonstrate is felt by those who visit our building. We all have the opportunity to grow and stretch outside our own familiar ways, and what better way to do that than with the community we create when we come together? As Unitarian Universalists, we are set up to succeed theology wise. We are encouraged to seek out the wisdom that lies within all faiths and belief systems. We are encouraged to listen with open hearts and minds. In order to understand what each member of our community needs, we simply have to talk about it. Some of us can read cards, however minds, not so much. We need to have conversations about what we hold to be sacred and divine in regard to our own direct experience. I think this is part of how we dig deeper to find a way to grow spiritually together.

We are seeking understanding

I believe that a person's religion or spiritual beliefs should make them feel, well, good. They should help you to highlight the best of yourself, so you can look for that in others. They should help you to gain insight into why you feel or act a certain way. You should be valued and validated by the community that has been created. At best, religion should nourish who you are, and give you a place to find support during the often painful process of personal growth so that you may blossom.

*“Only as High as I reach, can I Grow, Only as Far as I seek, can I go, Only as Deep as I look can I See, only as much as I Dream, I can be.”*

-Karen Raun

Thank you for allowing me the honor of standing before you this morning. I am ever so grateful.

Blessed Be.