

Members and Friends Sunday February 2nd, 2020 - Rev. Laurel Gray

In October I preached about what it means to belong to each other in community, and today is a day for celebrating that belonging. For welcoming new members, for remembering the commitment we make to each other as members and friends, for being reminded that you belong here. For remembering that this congregation belongs to you.

There are all kinds of ways that religious bodies are organized - some have bishops, some have popes - both systems in which decisions and power come from on high. But we, as Unitarian Universalists, are congregationalists through and through. Which means you are the ones with the power. UUUCSW is a self-governing organization and it is in becoming a member that you enact your right to vote.

Being congregationalists also means that you are the ones who make a minister. Because our system is not one in which some higher power, some high priest, hands down our authority as ministers. We go through a rigorous process of credentialing with the Unitarian Universalist Association, but the act of ordination, the moment of choosing to recognize someone as a minister and call them such - that power belongs to you.

This is a religious body organized around the idea that the people should indeed have power, that your agency and your ideas matter, that you can and shall be trusted with governing your own spiritual home. And in becoming members we commit ourselves to that task, we take ownership of our place in this community, and claim ourselves as being part of this congregation.

But that is not the only way to belong here. Because as Unitarian Universalists we also don't make requirements - there is no one telling

you how you must be, that your welcome here comes with conditions. It does not. You are welcome here as you are. Member or friend, newcomer or skeptic. We are Universalists and will call no one unworthy of belonging. We ask simply that you strive to live in line with our covenant, our seven guiding principles that Pauline led us in reading. And we ask this knowing that we are all human, that we will all fall short of our ideals, and yet this striving for goodness together remains a worthwhile endeavor.

I want to return to where I ended that sermon on belonging to each other in October - the whole recording is on our website if you missed it.

It is in the trust we build and our covenant that we come to belong to each other, here, in this place, in this vibrant and loving community.

This is why I'm a minister - because I believe that being together in religious community matters, that it does something for our spirits that is both critical and often hard to find. I believe we need the container of congregational relationships in order to walk safely into the unknown. Sometimes anonymity and solitude are helpful, maybe even easier, but they can also create isolation. And we are creatures wired for connection. We need to belong to each other.

But we are imperfect people. We can take that as given, thank goodness. Even with the highest aspirations and best of intentions we will mess up, we will let each other down sometimes, we'll be disappointed or angry with each other. And that's okay. We're all doing our best to practice being human, to show up with our whole wild hearts, to stay present when it's hard - and the beautiful thing is that in this place we do all of it together. Church is where we practice being human so we can go back

out into the week a little softer, a little braver, a little clearer on how to follow our own moral compass.

In this house, we belong to each other. And today is a day for celebrating that, for remember the commitment we make and we receive when we call this congregation home. For remembering what belonging here has meant for our lives, for remembering all the people who have made this congregation what it is today.