

**“The Things That Guide Us”**  
**January 9th, 2022**  
**Rev. Laurel Gray**

Starting a new year can feel like a relief after a year of struggle. I remember last year all the hubbub about 2020 finally ending, as if the change of calendar would be the end of the pandemic. But it wasn't, we know that now.

We had hoped, and planned, to be launching our hybrid services today, in person together for the first time in nearly two years. And here we are, still on zoom. I imagine there's a fair amount of disappointment, perhaps not specifically with our congregation's decision - it felt like a forgone conclusion - but more broadly disappointment with the state of things. Disappointment that navigating pandemic life is still complicated. I feel that. I imagine you do, too.

These last two years we've all been honing our skills at prioritizing what matters most, adapting, holding plans lightly - things that are all good life skills, but feel a bit overwrought at this point. It can be hard to feel like anything is sturdy with so much shifting. And yet, as I said when I preached in August, there are core things that guide us - core values that we hold dear even as we throw out plan after plan. Attuning to those core values is a spiritual practice.

It is part of our custom as Unitarian Universalists that we recognize the shift from childhood to adolescence with a Coming of Age service. It's an inflection point when we recognize that the youth who have grown up in our congregation are taking ownership of their own spiritual lives - that they have developed the maturity and capacity to be considered able participants in the community.

But developing our sense of spirituality, our muscle for attuning to our own deepest values, it's an odd sort of skill, one that takes practice, it takes spending time in our own quiet company. And it's not quite the same thing as saying what we do and do not believe - what one might call a credo. Which is a point of confusion, because it

is often expected that our Coming of Age youth will write and share credos during the service that honors their shift into adolescence.

Creeds are generally commonly held beliefs that are recalled regularly, often repeated together, and remain the same over time - things like the apostles' creed. But we UUs are a non-creedal tradition - we have covenants, commonly held commitments about how to live, but we don't have commonly held creeds. So, often Coming of Age credos are effectively rejections of creed, which is valid but not necessarily very specific or helpful.

Creeds are static - they're things that can be memorized because they don't change. And Unitarian Universalism is a living tradition, one that moves and adapts. Even our beloved seven principles, which form the core covenant at the center of our denomination, are intended to be revisited and revised. We as a denomination are currently engaged in the process of reviewing and renewing our central covenant.

This June at General Assembly, our national UU conference, delegates from every congregation will gather and vote on new principles. In order to be accepted, the new principles will then have to be voted on a second time, at next year's General Assembly. Collective attuning to the things that guide us is a process that takes time and reflection, something that requires our engagement if it is to be effective.

So when David King and I set out to lead our Coming of Age group last year, we wanted it to be helpful and supportive to our youth - not just the last task before graduating from Sunday school and getting to sleep in on Sunday mornings. Our goal was to help our youth practice attuning to their deepest core values, to reflect on why it mattered to know oneself in this way, and be amongst a community of seekers.

Adolescence is a complicated transition - so much is in flux from our bodies to our schools to our sense of where we belong or don't belong.

Entering a new year that we hoped would see the end of this endless pandemic, but

hasn't, that's also a complicated transition. Add in all the commotion about weight loss and self-mastery - all the pressure to make new resolutions this time of year, and it makes for a complicated transition.

For the month of January, our worship theme is "living with intention." I know Sharon already got us started last week, and I want to invite you into this kind of self-attuning process that we hoped for in Coming of Age. It is good to cast things off - to get clear about what we don't believe and what isn't important to us - and there is something deeper beneath that.

Maybe you reject an idea of some omnipotent and all-powerful God-person. Does that speak of collaboration and interconnectedness as a deep core value?

When we did Coming of Age, David and I started with the moral no-go zone. The things that we are absolutely against - things like murder, violence, etc. Because it's often easier to articulate those things than it is to speak to the things that we do value most deeply - the things that guide us, the things that ask for our attunement and attention. So we started on the margins and worked inwards week to week, until we got to the place of trying to name those ineffable things in the very core of our value systems.

In partnership with a half dozen or so congregations in Massachusetts, I'm helping launch an adult religious education program called the CommUnity Collaborative - you might have seen the intro video in the weekly update a few weeks ago. We're being led by Rev. Chris Jablonski who serves in Belmont, MA. The goal is to pool our specialties, interests, and passions to provide online classes, workshops and the like for our collection of congregations. It's a way to meet other UUs, learn new things, and have a place to tend more specifically to our spiritual selves.

I will be offering Coming of Age for adults, in much the same fashion that David and I did last year with our youth. I know some of our COA parents expressed wishing they could do the program and now you can! There will also be a whole host of other options from social justice film discussions to conversations on

different death and burial practices.

Our hope is that this collaborative provides a space for tapping into the things that guide us, for being amongst a community of seekers, and sharing our inspiration.

Because, yes, this time of year is always given so much focus as the moment to become our best selves, but in reality living lives of meaning is a daily practice of self-attunement, one best done in a community of love and support. I know I've shared before the Jewish teaching that the most important holiday of the year is not in fact the High Holidays - that period of atonement and renewal - it's Shabbat, the weekly practice of attuning to what matters, resting, and tending to our collective spirits.

We have five Sundays in this month of "living with intention," extra time for reflecting together about the things that guide us as we navigate the ever eventful terrain of life. We had hoped we'd be back in person today and we're not, because the thing that guides us is not the plan, it's the deepest values at the center of who we are together - our care for each other, our prioritizing collective well-being over individual desires, our faith in creativity and grace. No matter what comes, we'll find our way together.

Happy New Year and amen.