

Stewardship Moment #1 – Gratitude People

While Unitarian Universalist theological identity hasn't yet gelled into something we can easily articulate, some unique things have begun to bubble to the surface of our collective experience. One of those unique concepts is our sense of gratitude.

Various religious traditions have a defining discipline of faith. For example, Buddhists seek to lessen suffering by living in the moment, Pagans emphasize our connection to the earth, Humanists emphasize our responsibilities to our fellow beings, Jews emphasize obedience to the commandments, Christians emphasize love for one's neighbor as a reflection of God's love for humanity, and Muslims emphasize achieving peace through submission to the will of Allah. For UUs, our defining principle could be gratitude, which emphasizes all we have been given, and all we owe back in return.

"This is not about feeling warm fuzzies when someone holds a door open for you when your arms are full of packages." Rather, it is about HOW we respond upon recognizing that we are made up of our relationships to everyone and everything else – from trees (try living without oxygen)... to teachers (try getting a job without knowing anything)... to dinosaurs (without whom we would not likely have existed)... to whatever spiritual force we may hold dear. Like it or not, we are not just connected – we are deeply embedded in a vast universal web of life and existence.

There is an ebb and flow to this effervescent life. We inhale... we exhale... We love... we are loved... We give... and we receive... There is a yin and a yang... The tides go in... and the tides go out... Birth... death... love... loss... All of these forces push and pull us in a universal rhythm that pulsates and reverberates through time and space (or "spacetime" for the scientists in the room).

Try taking a deep breath and holding it. Sorry, you aren't allowed to exhale, just keep inhaling. You quickly realize the futility of that exercise. True gratitude yearns for a way to be expressed and released. President John F. Kennedy observed that "as we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them." It's the same way here at Second Unitarian Church. We gather... we receive... and we rejoice... but we must also reciprocate... and we must do so out of a motivation of gratitude.

As this new year begins, pause for a moment... be grateful... and look for opportunities to reciprocate.