

## Do You Have a Calling?

A couple of weeks ago, Reverend Laurie asked us “What would you do if you had no fear? What would we do as a congregation if we had no fear?” Well, I for one have conquered a lot of fears here at the U.F.L. and the biggest one, I am still conquering – standing up here in front of all of you expressing my personal thoughts and feelings.

I know that I have been on a spiritual journey nearly all my adult life and becoming a Unitarian-Universalist has been part of that journey but lately, I have been struggling with the idea that perhaps my journey was leading elsewhere. Being a chaplain here was a unique growing experience for me and in that role, Leaf was a mentor, an encourager, a teacher and a friend to me. When she left, I considered leaving too. I felt keenly the air of dissention and conflict among us. Although I never asked about the details of Sarah Ohl’s sudden departure or Leaf’s leaving either for that matter, I sensed that there was more going on than first met the eye.

Since we had no services last summer, I decided to investigate some other spiritual communities. I went to Unity of London a few Sundays and I took their introductory class. I was moved by the positive nature of the services and the upbeat music but it was all just a little too positive and upbeat even for me. There was a lot of emphasis on positive thinking and forgiveness and no mention of social justice. Now, I have spent my life putting on a smiling face. Indeed, I was trained as a child not to show anger or sadness. After all this time, I want to be real. It may be true, as they espouse, that positive thinking attracts positive results and negativity attracts negative results but I just can’t be positive and upbeat all the time, nor do I want to be.

Disillusioned with Unity, I next trotted off to Wesley Knox United Church where I took a course over the summer entitled “Saving Jesus” led by Harry McLean who is quite a liberal radical in the church. Now, I don’t believe any more in my childhood teachings that Jesus will save me (I think I am beyond saving anyway), but was there any part of Jesus or his teachings that I wanted to save?

I learned a lot from this course and most of all, I recognized that I am still a liberal Christian, with the stress on Liberal. I still consider Jesus as a role model for my life. What I could not accept, however, was that in spite of a few radicals in the pews, there are still some pretty traditional attitudes in the United Church that I cannot buy into.

And so, I came back to the U.F.L. in the Fall with fresh eyes and a fresh commitment. I realized that I already have a supportive spiritual community right here at the UFL. I have taken risks here and tried new things as a chaplain and as a worship leader and you have all encouraged my growth. I am not about to jump ship just because the seas are getting a little rough.

Lately, I have renewed hope for our future. Laurie and Murrielle and the Task Force are breathing new life into our congregation. It’s an exciting time to be here and I feel that I really do have a calling to play a part along with all of you in this time of change and renewal. I know that being a chaplain was a calling for me and I have been asking myself exactly what am I being called to do right now at the U.F.L.

By calling, make no mistake, I don’t expect some voice from the sky to call down to me, “Patricia, be a worship leader” or “Patricia, you really should do more dishes at the U.F.L.” I am not talking about a calling from some abstract God or even

Goddess. Instead, I am listening to my own inner rumblings and intuitions – to my heart or my soul, if you will and my intuition is leading me to two things.

First, I want to do more worship leading. In spite of my fears (and by the way, having a calling doesn't mean having no fear), anyway, in spite of my fears, I find writing and delivering a sermon is an opportunity to discover more about myself.

Also, you will see me at the front door greeting you some Sunday in the near future. One of the things I love about coming to the UFL on Sundays is being greeted by so many smiles and hugs. As greeter, I get to give and receive all kinds of smiles and hugs and I can never get enough hugs in my life.

In this time of change and growth, there are a great many needs at the U.F.L. I think that each of us has a special and unique calling here. It's easy to see that someone like Mark Konrad has a calling. Just look at the energy and commitment he puts into Global Importune and Amnesty International. Now Bill Radcliffe and MaryAnn Nyhoff may scoff at me when I say this but I think they have a unique calling here too. They will probably say that they are just doing what needs to be done but have you ever seen anyone scrape a sidewalk with more energy and commitment than Bill? Have you every heard anyone more convincing and dedicated than MaryAnn when she calls you on the phone?

Just in case there is some confusion, let me clarify what I mean by a calling. In a little book that I keep going back to time and time again, Let Your Life Speak, Parker Palmer explains "We do not find our calling by conforming ourselves to some abstract moral code" In other words, by trying to be like Gandhi, Jesus or Martin Luther King or even like Bill or MaryAnn. Parker states that "we find our calling by claiming authentic selfhood, by being true to our unique nature."

He further explains that "the deepest question is not 'What ought I to do with my life?' It's more elemental and demanding: 'Who am I? What is my nature?'" True vocation or true calling joins self and service as Fredrick Beuechner assets when he defines calling as " the place where your deepest gladness meets the world's deep need."

So, I ask you to consider – What brings you deep gladness and how does that joy fit with the needs of the U.F.L.? Do you love children? Are you a creative person or an organizer? Do you love counting money? We need lots of help right now in lots of areas. So the important question is:What could you contribute that would bring joy to you and to the congregation? The key here is to be true to yourself, not doing things out of obligation or guilt or because you should do it and if you don't do it, nobody else will.

Last night, I had a dream where I was panicing because I was late coming to the service today and here I was worship leader. When I got here no one was in the sanctuary. You were all downstairs (yes, in my dream, miraculously we had a basement) having chicken noodle soup. Bev Ball was serving and I asked her "Could I have a bowl?" No, not unless you have \$3.00," she replied. Suddenly she broke out in a fit of sneezing and coughing. "Should you be serving soup when you are ill?" I asked. "Probably not but nobody else wants to do it" she said in an exasperated tone. "But won't people catch your cold?" I worried. She replied, "Probably, but the chicken soup will cure them" Now, I ask you. Did Bev have a true calling to serve chicken noodle

soup or was she just doing it out of obligation. Furthermore, was she acting out of true compassion for others?

One way to understand the link between service and selfhood is offered by Rumi in his observation that “If you are here unfaithfully with us, you’re causing terrible damage.” Palmer offers further insight: “If we are unfaithful to true self, we will extract a price from others. We will make promises we cannot keep, build houses from flimsy stuff, conjure dreams that devolve into nightmares and other people will suffer.”

Make no mistake, there are times we need to say “No”. Sometimes, we have more time and energy to get involved than other times. Palmer talks about this too: “Self-care is never a selfish act. It is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer to others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves but for the many others whose lives we touch.”

The last thing I want is for anybody to feel guilty that they are not doing enough or involved enough. I am certainly not saying everybody should be a service leader or an RE leader. Just the opposite.

We all have our limitations as well as our talents. I am just encouraging you to think about whether there is something calling you to try at the U.F.L. This is a special time in our history as a congregation where we can each find personal fulfillment and help revive the energy of our congregation at the same time. Have you made that commitment to help us become a healthier, stronger community? Do you have a calling here?