



commUNITY

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Peace

The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community. We explore each theme in worship and in our newsletter; in covenant groups, guided writing sessions and Wednesday evening programming; and in our community outreach ministries, our literary journal and programs, and many other opportunities. The May theme is Peace.

The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh once noted that given the many threats our planet now faces, “We are about to panic because our situation is no better than the situation of a small boat in the sea.” If we are to stay afloat, he suggested, “We need people who can sit still and be able to smile, who can walk peacefully. We need people like that in order to save us.”

It sounds desirable enough – more people smiling and walking peacefully – but it’s hardly where we seem to be headed. Instead, as the briefest exposure to talk radio or television makes clear, we are actually turning up the volume on those who prefer to stand in the dark theater of the world recklessly shouting “Fire!” Or to stay with Nhat Hanh’s metaphor, if it’s a small boat we’re all in together, we have an awful lot of people rocking it right now, and not to any decipherable advantage to the boat or those of us in it.

So where and how do we define and find peace in the midst of the rough seas

we are in today? As wars slog on for decades and environmental destruction threatens planetary extinction and the nuclear meltdown in Japan reminds us of unanswered questions we would rather ignore, how can we possibly cultivate the kind of peace needed to sit still in this wildly tipping boat and smile at one another? Indeed, one might ask, should we?

A growing number of arguments on both ends of the political spectrum say this is not the time for sitting still. Rather, many declare it is high time we let our adrenaline kick in and move us into action. One key to understanding peace theologically, though, lies in recognizing that these two approaches are not as much at odds as we sometimes make them out to be.

Peace, in other words, is not inaction, nor is it the absence of concern or conflict. Conflict is a fact of our existence. In a world made not only beautiful but possible by diversity, conflict is as necessary to life as waves

are to the sea. True peace emerges not from the avoidance of conflict but in how we respond to it and whether we are able to take it in.

Can we widen our hearts and minds to make room for conflict within? Can we similarly open our relationships, our communities, our personal and civic dialogue to make room for difference and conflict without engaging violence? Can we extend our capacity for love to make room for those with whom we disagree, even our so-called enemies? These are the questions we might ask in cultivating peace, a practice that requires not only love but also time and great strength and discipline. It is also a practice that begins so close to home we often cannot see it, as the first and sometimes most difficult peace we are called to make is peace with ourselves.

“In the dictionary of nonviolent action,” Mohandas Gandhi pointed out, “there is no such thing as an ‘external enemy.’”

This may be another way of saying that when you’re in a little boat close to capsizing on a big, rough sea, it matters how you resolve your differences. The simple rules of family canoe trips through the Boundary Waters might be of some help here. For when sparring siblings in the same canoe cross a wide and windy lake, wisdom says: First, sit down. Consider the needs of the only paddling partner you have. Smile, if you can; at the very least, avoid insulting one another. Then, dip your paddles in the water together – and on opposing sides. It’s the only way you’ll reach the shore, against the wind and waves.

~ Karen Hering,
Consulting Literary Minister

Worship Theme Resources

BOOKS

Being Peace by Thich Nhat Hanh, a collection of talks by the poet and Zen master delivered to American peace activists and students of meditation about the importance of being peace in order to make peace.

Bone to Pick by Ellis Cose, a thoughtful and global exploration by a Newsweek contributing editor of the broad spectrum of possible responses to personal violence and national tragedy.

Let Me Stand Alone by Rachel Corrie, the journal writings, poetry and drawings of a 23-year-old American killed in 2003 by a bulldozer while trying to block the demolition of a Palestinian family’s home in the Gaza Strip.

FILM

Amazing Grace and Chuck a family movie about a little league pitcher from Montana who takes a stand against nuclear weapons and war.

Star Wars, any in the series...