



Integrity

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 faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community.

When you consider a person of integrity, what are the qualities that come to mind? Are they the Boy Scout law of “trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent?” Or, when you think about your own integrity, or that of others, would you agree with one of these two typical descriptions: “the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles and moral uprightness,” or “the state of being whole and undivided?” Or, given the partial ceiling collapse in Parish Hall, perhaps we consider “structural integrity,” meaning that you can count on all the parts of a system to work together, and, in our case, hold up the ceiling!

The typical ways we consider integrity in people is that there is no discrepancy between the self you present to the world and self that you know “inside.” That’s part of the reason why Unity’s mission statement involves living lives of “integrity, service and joy.” Living with integrity means the on-going spiritual practice of closing the gap between what we feel inside and the way things are.

When we dig deeper into what it means to live a life of integrity, we realize that it’s not a one-size-fits-all concept. For example, if we adopt the meaning stated above of “living as if our inside and outside selves are consistent,” that definition may not work for a person who is queer or trans. Why? Because to live into the fullness of ones being or becoming, it might not be possible or may not be safe to do so. Doesn’t that call forth a different kind of integrity — of

having to navigate the assumptions and expectations of a culture that so often demands conformity to certain norms?

Integrity becomes even more complicated when we consider acting on one’s personal integrity (i.e. morals, values, standards) as an individual or on behalf of the larger community. What if, for example, you are living in Nazi Germany and an SS officer comes to your door, demanding to know if you are hiding any Jews? Does your integrity require you to always tell the truth? By saying “yes,” can you call yourself a person of integrity knowing that your “yes” will likely result in the murder of those under your roof? Or, do you say “no,” thereby saving lives but compromising your own commitment to truth-telling?

Perhaps one way to frame this challenge is to understand that living a life of integrity is an on-going process that involves not only the individual self, but the self in relation to a larger community and commitment. We are all part of a larger “body” whether our own or in relation to community. As the Apostle Paul said, “Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say ‘because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less part of the body... and if the ear would say, ‘because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body...” (1 Corinthians 12:15-16)

As members of Unity Church, we strive to live into our mission of leading lives of integrity. Yet, living in community also means that we may come to

very different conclusions about how we do that. For example, when we question the integrity of our fellow church members, it stings because our personal integrity is deeply connected to our dearest held values. As we consider how to live a life of integrity, the quote attributed to Maya Angelou might be helpful to us. She wrote, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” How we live out those convictions while being in relationship with others, is an important part of a deepening spiritual practice, which leads us to live lives of integrity, service and joy. Our theme team hopes that this topic brings you into many rich and generative conversations this month.

Blessings on the month ahead,

Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, with this month’s theme team: Rev. KP Hong, Rev. Karen Gustafson, Tom Duke, Ray Hommeyer, Drew Danielson, and Rev. Andrea Anastos

Theme Resources

For further reflection on this theme please see this month’s Spiritual Practice Packet which will be available online at unityunitarian.org/chalice-circles.html.