



Faith

Each month, we gather to reflect on and discuss the monthly theme. The November theme of faith provoked much generative conversation. This article includes both theological and personal reflections on the theme of faith, with the hope that it inspires and stimulates your own. Enjoy.

It is said that a visitor once came to the home of Nobel Prize — winning physicist Niels Bohr and, having noticed a horseshoe hung above the entrance, asked incredulously if the professor believed horseshoes brought good luck. “No,” Bohr replied, “but I am told that they bring luck even to those who do not believe in them.”

Is what Bohr expressing “blind faith” or “naïve faith?” Or perhaps “ironic faith?” Faith is not one thing — it has many facets. Consider some of the many expressions commonly used in conjunction with faith. We are asked to “keep the faith!” when we’re having a “crisis of faith.” Sometimes we have to take a “leap of faith” or simply “take it on faith.” Or, as Oliver Cromwell was quoted as saying “Put your faith in God and keep your powder dry,” understood as both a statement of both piety and practicality.

Is faith primarily about what one believes? In Islam, the belief that “there is no god but God and Muhammed is the Messenger of God,” is a central to ones understanding of Islam. As one Islamic scholar writes: “Faith in Islam means to believe in Allah, to affirm His truth, and to submit to His commands. True faith, then, must manifest itself in the heart as sincerity, on the tongue as affirmation, and on the limbs as action.” In many Christian traditions, the recitation of the Nicene or the Athanasian Creed is the way a believer professes a faith.

What then, is “faith?” The English word “faith” derives from the Latin word *fides*, which means fidelity or loyalty. In Pali, the language of original Buddhist texts, the word for faith is *saddha*, which can also mean trust, confidence, clarity, and even devotion. We all have faith in something,

whether we name it as faith or call it something else. Faith is intimately linked to trust. When we say “we light this chalice for the light of truth and the warmth of love,” we are saying that we put our trust in those qualities and that we wish to embody them.

When we ask our Coming of Age youth to write a credo, we are essentially asking them for a statement of faith. But we don’t ask them to simply reflect back whatever teachings they have absorbed, we insist that they do their own thinking about essential questions of life. We ask them to consider “in what do they place their trust” and how do they practice it. Faith then becomes not a description of an idea, but an invitation into something we practice, even when we don’t have clarity about the ultimate outcome.

“Faith is...How I personally relate to the infinite mystery of life and the universe and the world and our relationships. It’s a matter of surrender and trust...which includes doubt and uncertainty...some giving of myself to trust in life.”

A journey of faith isn’t about having a determined big picture with an outcome in mind. Almost always, there is no “end,” no final, right answer. But faith helps us see beyond the immediate moment, offers flashes of insight that give us the courage to keep going, the ability to leap into the unknown. Sometimes, having faith means letting go and believing in a power beyond our own. For some of us, the word faith brings up challenging memories — harsh

expectations about following creedal rules, of having faith in “the right way” with no space for questions or empirical tests. So often faith has been wielded as a cudgel, as a way to silence opposition even in the face of facts. We sometimes recoil from the language of faith because it has been used to wound our minds, souls, and bodies.

In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, to be a person of faith *includes* questioning the very nature of faith itself. We don’t profess blind faith in creeds without interrogation. Indeed, while the nature of faith is a mystery, it must be examined. But what is also important is the nature of that questioning. How do we examine ours and other’s faith not in a way as to prove rightness or wrongness, but with curiosity and openness to the mystery that is also at the heart of faith?

One of the members of our conversation group put it this way:

“Faith is not something I have...It’s something I practice; In other words: “it’s ‘faithing in...’ I don’t see faith as anything I can possess...and, it doesn’t fall apart until I stop practicing... Sometimes, when I lose my faith, I may need to hand it over to other people... people who can hold me in place... So for me, faith is a relationship and a practice.”

When we approach the question of faith not as a system of beliefs, but as a community of relationships that

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IN THE MEANTIME / WHEEL OF LIFE



“So, what’s the plan?” a church member asked me recently. The question arose from our conversation about the lingering feelings of concern regarding the 2022 ministerial search process and the May 22 congregational meeting. The question was important and timely, as I’ve been listening carefully to many of your concerns and working with Interim Minister of Pastoral Care, Rev. Karen Gustafson, with the executive team, and the board in thinking about how Unity Church moves forward and prepares, eventually, for another search.

Most interim ministers will engage a congregation in something called a Congregational Life Review or History Wall. It’s a Friday night – Saturday noon exercise of hearing stories about a congregation’s history. Everyone gets a chance to participate and tell stories; while listening and learning from one another. It’s both an illuminating — and generally — enjoyable exercise. I had scheduled that for the first weekend in November 4–5.

However, after more discernment, I realized that there are many stories about Unity’s past which need to be heard, but that should be shared in an environment that is well prepared to receive them. To be honest, I don’t think we are ready to dive into a weekend of storytelling just yet. So, I’m postponing that weekend.

Instead, I’m inviting you to a conversation entitled **Forward Together: Next Steps**, scheduled for **Saturday, November 5, from 9:30-11:30 a.m.** The executive and ministry teams, as well as the board have been in conversation about what are the next steps in the process of personal and institutional healing? From these conversations, a plan for moving forward is being created, but for this to be successful, it will require your input and your participation.

The broad strokes of this presentation will include a plan to support individual members who want to be in better relationship with one another; information about creating a Healthy Congregations Team that assists with conflict; a reminder about Team Dynamics workshop on January 21 on Change, Conflict, and Complexity: Antidotes and Spiritual Practices; ideas for sermons and Wellspring Wednesday programs; and an update on the board’s work on their next steps. Finally, it is my personal hope that Unity Church will plan to celebrate its 150th anniversary this spring; acknowledging that the church has weathered many storms in its 150 years and continues to stand firm and fast in this faith.

As an interim minister, I’ve both witnessed and walked with congregations through hard times. The good news is that all of them have come through these times stronger and clearer about who they are and what they need as a congregation to carry them forward into the future. The theme for November is faith. And Unity Church Unitarian — I have absolute *faith* in you. All of us will move forward — together.

Love and gratitude for this one, wild, precious life we share,
Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, Interim Senior Minister

The Wheel of Life

In Memoriam

Bill E. Webb

September 23, 1950 –
September 26, 2022

Faith {continued from front cover} informs a committed spiritual practice, we are in a better position to live into the statement by Universalist minister Olympia Brown. “Stand by this faith,” Brown proclaimed from the pulpit. “Work for it and sacrifice for it.” Brown promised that “there is nothing in all the world so important as to be loyal to this faith which has placed before us the loftiest ideals, which has comforted us in sorrow, strengthened us for noble duty and made the world beautiful. Do not demand immediate results but rejoice that we are worthy to be entrusted with this great message, that you are strong enough to work for a great true principle without counting the cost.”

Stand by this faith. That is a hard charge from the first female Universalist minister, but it is a journey we can share together, knowing we will be living out our faith in a community of love.

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

Forward Together: Next Steps

Saturday, November 5 • 9:30-11:30 a.m. • Parish Hall

Watch for information about online participation.

A presentation and conversation about a plan for congregational health and healing, offered by Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, Rev. Karen Gustafson, and Unity’s Board of Trustees. This is an opportunity for you to hear about insights we’ve gleaned from last year’s ministerial search process as well as insights from your interim ministers about how we might forge a path ahead — together.

Faith Theme Resources

For further reflection on this theme please see this month’s Spiritual Practice Packet available online at bit.ly/faithpacket.