

## **Service As Worship/Spirituality**

**May 20, 2007**

### **Volunteer Recognition Service**

As we gather this morning to recognize our many volunteers, who through their generosity assure that this church community continues into the future, we are being invited to think about volunteer service as a way to enhance our spirituality and as a vital part of worship.

If we look to translate the word worship we see that at its root is the concept of worth- ship as in glory, dignity, or having value. Service has value in part because it brings dignity to others and because it sustains us. It feels good to do something for others, it feels good to offer something that the world needs, it feels good to be able to provide some comfort and it feels good when we can use a skill, talent or interest we have in a way that gives back.

On last Thursday evening, I had occasion for the 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row to offer the Invocation and benediction at Mount Wachusett Community College for their graduation. This month was also the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my graduation from there and I have been actively involved with them for a long time, especially on President Dan Asquino's emphasis and 10 year initiative on civic engagement. On Thursday Governor Deval Patrick was the keynote speaker; it was an honor to be on the podium with him and to briefly meet with him. All the points that he made in his address were ones that I agreed with but most of all what I appreciated about his speech was his emphasis on citizenship. One of the thoughts that he expressed about citizenship seems very germane today as we think about service/ volunteerism and spirituality. This was his thought that fear keeps us from engagement with others and that fear keeps us self- centered and selfish. I make the assumption that the opposite of fear would be courage leading to selflessness. So I pose the question. Can one be of service if isolated and

fearful? Probably not is my answer. If one is not acting from a place of care and giving generously but instead is full of fear of loss, fear of not having enough to give, fear of rejection, fear of trying then how can one be spiritual? How can one be happy? I like this quote from our own courageous Unitarian Universalist Albert Schweitzer who said, “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know, the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”

Being happy is vital to a healthy, wholesome and full spirituality. Being of service to others is one way to find worth, to find dignity, to find a way to honor self and other. We read over and over of stories about those who overcome their own loss by giving. I loved this story that I recently read from the book *Spiritual Literacy*. A woman was very ill and each week for over two years had to receive intravenous treatments. She tells that about three quarters of a way through her treatments she lost her courage, and that one day both her spirit-strength and veins collapsed. On this particular day she was sitting as the nurse painfully searched for another vein to insert the needle into and she just couldn’t take it anymore. She began to cry and then she pushed away the nurse and the treatment. As she sat there crying the nurse brought to her side a young girl about age 10, who had battled cancer all her life. The little girl smiled and said, “You should have gotten one of these.” The woman looked through her tears at this child who lifted her tee shirt and showed her the hole that had been cut in her abdomen so that she could receive treatments through a permanent plastic port. The child then said to her, “You can take it.” And she did. <sup>1</sup>

To me this story tells that no matter what loss we might be facing, we can and do have the ability to assist, to serve and to give to others. If the little girl had been filled with fear she could not have given courage to the other woman. And, where do you think the little girl learned that from, for it

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<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Literacy* by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, by Nancy Burke from *Meditations for Health* P 337

is not likely that she was born with that wisdom and courage. More than likely she caught it from another.

Isn't that how it works too, by catching it? Serving/volunteering is catchy. You see someone around here pitching in and you think wouldn't she or he be fun to get to know, wouldn't she or he be someone fun to hang around with, or you think wouldn't she or he be someone who has some skills and strengths that I would like to learn about.

"Helping out is not some special skill. It is not the domain of rare individuals. It is not confined to a single part of time of our lives. We simply heed the call of that natural caring impulse and follow where it leads." wrote Ram Dass and Paul Gorman.

This church was established in 1743, it came together strictly at the will and want of sixteen men who desired to have a Godly community established to be called Leominster. They gave what little they had to build the meeting houses and to support the religious and spiritual life of the inhabitants of Leominster. The church continues these many years hence on the same principle. The principle of giving and supporting of serving and supplying so that the church can survive to meet the spiritual religious needs of those who attend, and more the church unites for the discovery of self and the improvement of the human condition. If we act as if we do not have enough to go around let me tell you we won't. If we act as reluctant caretakers of this beautiful building the glow of gracious welcome and hospitality will wear off. If we act as reluctant servants our own spiritual well being will suffer.

Born of the act of service are three deep spiritual gifts. One a seeking to make the world a better place. How do we do that here? By making this place as warm and welcoming as we can also by making it safe and clean. It sounds like such a minor thing but just tossing out trash you see hanging around, putting away tables or chairs that are blocking doors and entrances,

rearranging furniture so that all can have a seat is one way to do this. If we can practice making our own space beautiful and better we can teach our children about responsibility and then we can begin to be involved in larger world issues. Walking for justice and peace, working for equality and education, educating for sustainability, serving the needs of others through action, lend a hand. There are many of you who help around here in special ways, thank you for volunteering.

The second spiritual reason to serve is that banding together with others helps us to find meaning and purpose. Building partnerships, serving on committees, serving on teams, connecting with others helps fill a spiritual void born of isolation and loneliness. Begin here at church to fill that, get connected find one person you don't know and at Fellowship time ask them to share what they like at First Church Unitarian Universalist, ask them what brought them here and what would keep them here? Ask them what service they find joy in giving and what they need.

The third spiritual gift to be gained from service is learning how to love others and love self. Service is a way to practice loving others. Love and compassion are values to be put into effect to find the worth and dignity in each and every person. Serving is an act of love, volunteering is an outward expression of this. I suppose it is possible but I don't really know how one can practice loving others without being involved with them. Now this is not to say that this is easy, for as we know people can be difficult, they can be grumpy, rude and needy however we will never learn how to handle people's grumpiness, rudeness and need if we don't interact with them and know when to say yes I can help right now or no I am needing to take care of myself by sitting in the church pew or by singing in the choir or by working with the youth, or by attending a small group meeting then I will find that I love myself too and have even more to give away.

I am a believer that we find love by giving it away, that we gain wonderful experiences when serving.

First Church Unitarian Universalist is here to help you explore your spiritual life and needs to help you discover the gifts that the world needs and you are here to help too. Serve where you can, give what you can, love this place and all who enter here. Together we can make a difference in the world. Let it begin here and now. So be it.