

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;

Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love;

Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;

Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;

Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;

Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

That Which Holds All

Nancy Schaffer

Because she wanted everyone to feel included

in her prayer,

she said right at the beginning

several names for the Holy:

Spirit, she said, Holy One, Mystery, God

but then thinking these weren't enough ways of addressing

that which cannot be fully addressed, she added

particularities, saying, Spirit of Life, Spirit of Love,

Ancient Holy One, Mystery We Will Not Ever Fully Know,

Gracious God, and also Spirit of This Earth,

God of Sarah, Gaia, Thou

and then, tongue loosened, she fell to naming

superlatives as well: Most Creative One,

Greatest Source, Closest Hope ---

even though superlatives for the Sacred seemed to her

probably redundant; but then she couldn't stop:

One Who Made the Stars, she said, although she knew

technically a number of those present didn't believe

the stars had been made by anyone or thing

but just luckily happened.

One Who Is an Entire Ocean of Compassion, she said,

and no one laughed.

That Which Has Been Present Since Before the Beginning,

she said, and the room was silent.

Then, although she hadn't imagined it this way,

others began to offer names:

Peace, said one.  
One My Mother Knew, said another.  
Ancestor, said a third.  
Wind.  
Rain.  
Breath, said one near the back.  
Refuge.  
That Which Holds All.  
A child said, Water.  
Someone said, Kuan Yin.  
Then: Womb.  
Witness.  
Great Kindness.  
Great Eagle.  
Eternal Stillness.

And then, there wasn't any need to say the things  
she'd thought would be important to say,  
and everyone sat hushed, until someone said

Amen.

## *Our Theological Landscape*

Rev. Peggy Clarke  
Hastings on Hudson, NY

A few months ago, I had a very powerful dream. So powerful, I still remember it in great detail. I was here in our Sanctuary. There was scaffolding covering the wall behind me and it was over my head. My vision was obscured in part by it. During the service, I offered communion to anyone who wanted it. Some people came up. I broke bread and we drank wine. I left the room after the service and walked into what was either GA or District meeting or some other embodiment of the UU institution. We were outside and the sun was bright and warm. Jim Howe was responsible for a workshop but his presenter was unprepared so he asked me to speak. I wasn't prepared so I talked about InterGenerate and our great success and my hope for changing the way we live. InterGenerate, for those who don't know, is a small non-profit I founded a few years ago. We create equal access to food that's good, clean and fair. We give people land on which to grow their own food. We make honey and have chickens. We are feeding people and when I am working with InterGenerate, I am alive deep in my soul. So, in the dream, I'm outside and I'm talking about that work. I then go back to our sanctuary for worship again. Again, I offered communion with bread I baked and more people came up to the front to receive it. I did it a third time and even more were coming up. This time, they weren't just coming for communion; they wanted to be Eucharistic ministers, hoping to give communion to others.

A fourth time. I was going into worship again but this time I wanted to preach about this communion we've sharing. We hadn't talked about it and I wasn't sure people understood it and I didn't know why I kept offering it and we hadn't grounded it theologically and I was uncomfortable doing it again without talking about it with you all first. At the beginning of the service I said the word communion by way of wanting to talk about it, but people started to come up. I tried to explain that I wasn't offering communion, but people were coming up in great numbers. So many of them and they were hungry. A few people were in their seats and got angry at me, yelling at me, saying "we don't do this here" and all I could reply is "But they are hungry."

Last summer during our Board retreat, one of our members told me that she's been disturbed recently by

so much talk about spirituality.

Two weeks ago, I contacted a member we haven't seen in a while to find out why she hasn't been here. She told me that when she comes to worship, she needs prayer to be part of the morning. Nothing long or fancy, she told me, but she has to know that God has been invited into the room.

I met with a young adult for lunch recently. He told me he doesn't come here because our services are too formal for him.

When I was preaching in White Plains last month, I ran into two of our members who have now officially left our congregation to join there. They told me they needed a service that was more formal.

A few weeks ago, one of our program groups asked us to write down the thing we were afraid we couldn't bring with us to this community. The answers were myriad, largely focusing on personal feelings like shame and anger, but not all. Someone said they couldn't bring their atheism and someone said they couldn't bring their love for the divine.

We are talking today about our theological landscape. Our congregation is theologically diverse, not unlike every UU congregation. We've followed along cultural lines fairly closely. In the 50s and 60s, there was a wave of atheistic humanists sometimes accompanied by a Death of God theology. This was generally in response to religious options that seemed narrow and limiting. The God of power and might was gone in the wake of WWII. The century had seen the depth of evil and great technological advances, both of which clarified God's uselessness. In the late 60s and 70s, much of American culture was reimagining God as Liberator, and rereading the Bible with political eyes. Some UUs were doing the same thing, although God was useful only as a justification for social change. Atheism was still the norm in many UU congregations. In the 90s, there was a shift. We see Yoga and Buddhist meditation and other forms of spiritual practice, but each one was decidedly non-Christian which helped people not feel obliged to an external, anthropomorphic god. At the turn of the century, studies reported that we had reached a state of real diversity. Our congregations were claiming Christians and Humanists, Buddhists and Eco-Spiritualists, Pagans and Jews. And today we're seeing a significant shift from atheism to theism of some brand, although the god of power and might isn't likely to return to our sanctuaries.

Let's think about this for a moment. In our Sanctuary at any given time, we are likely to have an atheist. Atheists use reason to understand the world. They take life exactly as it appears, free from superstition, available to reality as it is. Unafraid of punishment in the afterlife, they are motivated by an internal sense of what's right and wrong. Atheists often have a sense of liberation, of having been set free from an unreasonable system the dictates of which were oppressive. They strive for intellectual honesty and an ability to enjoy and even stand in awe of the mystery of the universe as it is in all its magnificence. UU Atheists call us to heightened use of our reason.

In our Sanctuary at any given time, we are likely to have a Humanist. Humanists have faith in the human condition. They search for knowledge of humans and their duties toward other people. They are deeply relational focusing their energy on the people around them. Humanists are not exclusively Atheists, although they are likely to lean in that direction. Like Atheists, Humanists rely on reason and science as primary ways to understand the world, also letting go of superstition, shifting attention to the immediate and the knowable.

Rev. David Bambaugh tells us that "Humanism ... gave us a doctrine of incarnation which suggests not that the holy became human in one place at one time ... but that the universe itself is continually incarnating itself in microbes and maples, in hummingbirds and human beings, constantly inviting us to tease out the revelation contained in stars and atoms and every living thing." UU Humanists call us to be radically present to the human condition.

In our Sanctuary at any given time we are likely to have a Christian. UU Christians freely follow Jesus. They recognize Jesus as a holy man, as the one who first understood himself to participate in what it means to be god, as one who knows we are all god. Jesus' life is a powerful example of love and sacrifice and UU Christians use that life as a way of understanding the world. They hear and heed the message about serving the poor and healing the sick and visiting the imprisoned. They read Christian Scripture for inspiration and find comfort in being part of a 2,000 year old tradition. UU Christians call us to love each other profoundly and to find god in every one of us.

In our Sanctuary at any given time, we are likely to find a UU Jew. Some of our members were born into families that had been Jewish for millennia. Some speak Hebrew and many celebrate Jewish holidays even as

they raise their children in our Sunday School. Judaism has a rich heritage and culture and a rhythm to the year. Fall is the new year, the time for renewal and reflection. Spring is when we celebrate liberation. The home is the holiest place and the family is the primary system. Jews search for meaning in history, in creation, in morality, in humanity, in suffering. And they are the meaning makers, they are the ones who create meaning using tradition and intention and community. UU Jews call us into deeper meaning and remind us of our need for tradition.

At any given time, we are likely to have a pagan in our Sanctuary. Pagans know Earth alive with the divine. They celebrate the coming of the spring by dancing around the Maypole and honor the darkness of the winter by lighting the Yule Log. They chant at the full moon and drum into the night. For so many pagans, divinity is immanent and they rejoice in the power of the feminine, bringing balance to a world that has often revered the masculine. Pagans move out of their heads and into their bodies, bringing us into an embodied faith. UU Pagans call us to revel in the magnificence of the natural world and to know all of Earth is holy.

It is likely in our Sanctuary we have a UU Buddhist. UU Buddhists follow the path of mindfulness. We don't have a Buddhist meditation group here, but two other UU congregations in the county do. One or two people sit together on a Sunday or Monday. They often identify with Siddhartha Gautama's life, who, after tasting the bitterness and futility of life, came to discover a religious principle through the anguished mind and social discontent of his sensitive personality. Never again could he return to the conforming society, and instead committed himself to letting go of desire and quieting his mind. UU Buddhists use this life as a model for right living. They call us into mindfulness and to a life of compassion.

In our Sanctuary, at any given time, we are likely to have a panentheist who knows that we are greater than the sum of our parts, who celebrates the divinity that has penetrated the natural world and timelessly has extended beyond it. And we are likely to have a process theologian who knows god, like the Earth, to be becoming, to be affected and profoundly connected to evolution. In our Sanctuary we are likely to find an agnostic who just isn't sure what she believes and we are likely to have people in our Sanctuary who are more than one of these things, who identify as a UU Jew but who is also a Humanist, who has always been a Christian but is also a Pagan.

Rev. Tom Owen-Towle, a UU minister in San Diego once said "I am a mystical humanist with naturalistic leanings and receptivity to disclosures of the divine. I meander comfortably amid the Judeo-Christian motifs and stories of my heritage. My religious vision is tempered by existentialism, grounded in earth-centered spiritualities, aligned with the wisdoms of Asian tradition, especially Taoism, and bathed in trustful agnosticism. In short, as Walt Whitman, a Unitarian mused, "Do I contradict myself?" Yes, I contain multitudes."

A report on theological diversity done by the Commission on Appraisal a few years ago taught me an interesting thing. Our theological landscape is so diverse, everyone feels marginalized. UU pagans, UU Jews, UU Buddhists, UU Christians, 12-step UUs, spiritual UUs, everyone feels marginalized with the Humanists and Atheists reporting less marginalization than the others, but one that's increasing slowly. I suppose that's a reality we have to live with. If we are going to stand by our commitment to creedlessness, we're going to open our doors to many different ways of knowing and interacting with truth and the more different ways there are, the less likely there will be a center. It might be uncomfortable, but I think it's simply part of the theological and ecclesiastical experiment that is Unitarian Universalism.

Either in spite of our differences or because of them, most of us have chosen Unitarian Universalism. We have, at some point, signed our names in a book like this one. And today, we will again be adding at least one name, at least one more person is willing to engage this great experiment and discover what it means to be part of a community that has chosen not to have doctrine, that is open to many ways of knowing and being and loving. The act of signing the book comes to us from colonial times when new members signed a covenant created by each congregation in the Puritan New England churches.

At this time I invite to come forward all of those who would like to join our faith community, both those who have signed the book this year and those who have yet to do so. Please introduce yourselves.

It is a joy to welcome you into our community of memory and hope.

I have a question for you and if you agree, please answer "Yes, I will." Will you walk with us, sharing the joys and responsibilities of membership?

New Members: Yes, I will.

Minister (to the congregation): Will the members of the congregation please rise.

Will you welcome this new member into our congregation? Will you reach out to her in friendship, including her in our activities and fellowship? Will you be open to her unique gifts and perspectives?

Members: Yes.

Minister: By signing this book, you commit yourselves to a moral and spiritual purpose – to be faithful to the inherent responsibilities of religious freedom. You commit yourself to uphold the spirit of human worth and dignity and to engage in an honest search for truth. You commit yourselves to carry on and enrich the spiritual heritage we have received from previous generations. Welcome.

Everyone: Welcome!