

Quest

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We have all known the long loneliness, and we have learned that the only solution is love, and that love comes with community.
—Dorothy Day

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT COMMUNITY

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The Light of the Faith

BY HEATHER JANULES, ASSOCIATE MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR PASTORAL CARE, CEDAR LANE UU CHURCH, BETHESDA, MARYLAND

Imagine stepping into the sanctuary of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Geneva, Illinois. With narrow rows of wooden pews and the bright glow of stained glass along each side of the meet-

inghouse, you might think you had gone back in time. In this gathering place, it is easy to get a sense of the generations taught, married and memorialized; the countless songs, prayers and words that have rung through the air. Gathered in 1842, the presence of the Society's "cloud of witnesses" is almost palpable, even when the sanctuary stands empty.



Photo: Jim Frazier

With its classic architecture, this sanctuary could be a museum, a home for artifacts from a distant era. But it is, instead, home to a congregation—a living community in this historic structure. Their chalice at the front of the sanctuary rests on a glass pillar that tells *this* story.

The pillar is a column of thick circles of translucent glass. Between each circle of glass, like a leaf pressed in a book, rests a page from the Society's membership register. Each year, church members make an archival copy of the most recent page from the membership book, place it at the top of the pillar and add a new circle of glass. With such a pillar supporting the flaming chalice, its members—literally and figuratively—hold the light of the faith.

This pillar affirms a truth that transcends this particular place and congregation. No matter what town or what denomination, the spiritual strength of the religious community is just that, its community. To the government, a church is a non-profit organization. To an architect, a church is a building with pews and stained glass and sometimes a steeple. But to those seeking a people to sustain their lives and to remember them when life is done, a church or a congregation is a community. The community is the church because, through seeking and finding, through mutual giving and receiving, its members hold the light of the faith.

We in religious leadership often share the observation: "No one joins a congregation to join a committee." While the work of serving a faith community can be spiritually fulfilling, most often newcomers find their way to our congregations because they are hungry for connection. Seekers want what they cannot find in the secular world, a world often so obsessed with consuming that even our integrity and humanity are easily spent. They want what they cannot find on Facebook or in a book group or the local chapter of the ACLU: a community gathered by shared values and purpose, with practices born of a unique faith tradition and understanding of the sacred. They want a place where they come to know others deeply and where they can become known, where they become part of something greater than themselves—greater joy and greater pain. A minister from the United Church of Christ, the Rev. Lillian Daniel, created a stir when she posted an open letter in affirmation of religious community. She writes:

On airplanes, I dread the conversation with the person who finds out I am a minister and wants to use the flight time to explain to me that he is spiritual but not religious. Such a person will always share this as if it is some kind of daring insight, unique to him, bold in its rebellion against the religious status quo.

Next thing you know, he's telling me that he finds God in the sunsets. These people always find God in the sunsets...

Like people who go to church don't see God in the sunset! Like we are these monastic little hermits who never leave the church building.... As if we don't

hear that in the psalms, the creation stories and throughout our deep tradition.

Being privately spiritual but not religious just doesn't interest me. There is nothing challenging about having deep thoughts all by oneself. What is interesting is doing this work in community, where other people might call you on stuff, or heaven forbid, disagree with you. Where life with God gets rich and provocative is when you dig deeply into a tradition that you did not invent all for yourself.

Or, put another way, it is in the joy and challenge of living deeply among one another that we hold the light of the faith.

If we gather for our needs alone, our souls will be left hungry, as strange as that may seem.

Doing spiritual work in community is, in itself, a spiritual practice. When we engage in spiritual practices we invite change and growth. We meditate to become more present; we pray to name our fear and our gratitude and live our lives with greater acceptance. In the same way, with intention and with commitment to stay engaged even when we feel hurt, angry or afraid, living in community becomes a spiritual practice, a vehicle for our own transformation. In the simplest terms, this transformation is the light of the faith.

A member of my church once asked me, "You believe that congregational life changes us. Are you trying to change us?"

While every religious leader, lay and ordained, has a responsibility to guide the congregation in the direction of the community's mission, the goal is not to change people. Yet the understanding

is that, in service to our mission, people will be changed. Changes rarely come in those who just pass through community life. Changes do not come at our command or in ways we can control. Whether one is humanist or theist or agnostic, however we understand their origins, these changes come through moments of grace, moments when we are invited into a broader understanding of who is at the open table and what it takes to be in right relationship with one another.

When I think of people who engage in congregational life as a spiritual practice, I often turn to a man celebrated in a meditation by the Rev. Victoria Safford. She writes:

I knew a man once who came to church every Sunday.... Busier than any of us still holding full-time jobs, he was committed, effective, clear about what he could and would... contribute to the causes that he cared for.... But what set him apart from all of us was that he came every single Sunday, and (because of hearing loss...more than any sense of his own importance), he sat in the front row.

"Why do you come, John? In all kinds of weather, when you're well and when you're not, when you like the guest speaker and when you know you won't, why do you come every Sunday?" I asked him not long before he died. His answer was straightforward... "I come," he said, "because somebody might miss me if I didn't."

...He worked hard on Sunday mornings, he got up on Sundays expecting to work hard to make others feel at home.... And he was right – after he died, we missed him when he didn't come.

And do you know what happened? The Sunday after his memorial, someone new...walked right in and sat down in his empty place in that front row.... They came hoping

there was room, and John himself would have been delighted.

Perhaps the greatest lesson from John's story is that whatever sustenance we receive from spiritual community is guaranteed to be temporary. The truth of our mortality reminds us that, one day, we too will join the "cloud of witnesses" that inspires, counsels and challenges the next generations. In the end, all we give to our faith community will one day serve everyone but ourselves.

People come to sanctuaries week after week, historic sanctuaries like the UU Society of Geneva, sanctuaries like the place where John worked hard every Sabbath, online sanctuaries where people gather in community without ever seeing one another's faces.

Why do we come? I ask the question Victoria Safford asked her faithful congregant. *Why do you come?* We gather for inspiration, for solace in times of trouble, to celebrate our joys—personal and collective. We gather to expand our thinking, to build meaningful relationships, to engage in ministries of justice, to deepen our connection to all that is greater than ourselves. We gather to worship. We gather to mourn. We gather to give thanks for one more day.

If we gather for our needs alone, our souls will be left hungry, as strange as that may seem. But if we can look across our open table and find sincere joy in the happiness of someone we disagree with, maybe even someone who "calls us on stuff," someone who has needs different than our own, then we are truly in spiritual community. And if we can enter deeply into the gift and challenge of congregational life, open to the changes that come through our intention and the mysterious hand of grace, we will grow.

I give thanks that you come, that I come, that people gather week after week. For, in our gathering and our shared life together, we hold the light of the faith. ■



Dreaming in Circles

BY MYKE JOHNSON,
MINISTER, UU CHURCH OF
PORTLAND, MAINE

It is said that if a group of people sleep arranged in a circle—heads at the center and feet out like spokes—they create a dream circle. Two or more people in the group may have the same dream at the same time. I tried this once with a group of friends, but I must confess, it didn't really work for me. Mostly I just had a rather poor night's sleep.

But I like the metaphor. The word *dream* is used to describe both our strange nighttime adventures and also our waking hopes and visions for our lives. For me, dreaming in circles is about sharing those waking dreams, entering into the magic that can happen when we join our visions together. We talk and we listen. We plan and we act. We are energized by each other, and we grow strong and bold. When we dream in circles, anything is possible. As Margaret Mead famously said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

And here's the important thing. When we dream in circles, the circle itself becomes the greatest magic of all. We wake up to the reality of our profound interconnection with all people and all beings. The circle is a symbol of this interconnection. In a circle, every person is linked to every other. Every person is equally valued and appreciated. Human beings cannot thrive as random individual strangers in a crowd; we are connected to one another at the deepest level, and we can only find wholeness through loving and mutual relationships. By sharing our dreams, we can come home to a community of love.

Activist and writer Mab Segrest writes in *Born to Belonging: Writings on*

Spirit and Justice, about a South African word that describes this essential need for community: *ubuntu*. "*Ubuntu* translates as 'born to belonging.'" *Ubuntu* expresses the African idea that our human dignity and fulfillment is dependent upon our links to each other in community.

In contrast, modern American society bases itself on the idea of individualism. John Locke formulated a theory of society as a contractual type of relationship freely entered into by individuals. Locke proposed that in the original state of nature all humans were free and autonomous individuals, and from that state they agreed to give up certain aspects of their independence for mutual benefit and protection.

Today, this individualistic understanding is endemic. But Mab Segrest challenges individualism, and she begins her argument with the experience of motherhood. She writes,

It was after watching Barbara give birth to our daughter, Annie, ... that it occurred to me the degree to which this Original Individual was a ridiculously transparent...fiction. None of us start out as individuals, but as fusions of sperm and egg, embedded and growing in the mother's body for nine months. For months after birth, our consciousness is still merged with its environment, and a sense of the particular and separate self emerges only gradually.

We start out in relationship, and our individuality grows out of that circle of relatedness. Not the other way around. We all need each other in order to flourish and to thrive in life.

To give Locke and others their due, the philosophy of individualism was created in rebellion against the authoritarian structures of an earlier age, the tyranny of church and monarch. To affirm relationship is not to deny the importance of human dignity and freedom. But we must recognize that relatedness comes

first, and we find our inherent worth and dignity within that circle of relatedness.



One great purpose of spirituality is to restore our connection to each other, or rather, to wake up our awareness to the connection that already exists. We are always connected, but we forget, we lose hold of it, we suffer from the illusion that we are separate. Spirituality is our experience of being a part of the larger whole. Spirituality is restoring our awareness of our connection to the earth, to other people, and to the Mystery at the heart of our vast universe. All of it is one.

When we choose community, when we practice loving a particular group of people, we are letting the reality of the universe enter our hearts—we are learning how to experience the reality that we truly are all part of one another. Of course we don't always get it right. Otherwise we wouldn't need to practice. We are not here to try to fix everything in order to create some sort of *perfect* circle—we are the circle right now, trying to wake up together. Every person is sacred, and we are all one circle. ■

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All Our Relations

BY RANDY MILLER,
CLF MEMBER, INDIANA STATE PRISON



Community has been lost in today's world. People have become so engrossed in their own wants, dreams and desires that they don't worry about helping anyone else. One of the truest definitions of community is fellowship, and we can't have fellowship going about life on our own.

Amongst Native culture, the importance of community is prevalent throughout their history. This becomes evident as you learn of the many different Native customs and beliefs, yet come across one common expression in nearly all Native nations and tribes. For the Lakota people the expression is *Mitakuye O'yasin*, for the Cherokee it is *Ahwensa Unhili*, and in English it translates to *All Our Relations*.

All Our Relations is exactly what it sounds like, yet much more than it sounds. *All Our Relations* isn't just about your family, loved ones or those biologically linked to you. It is much deeper than that. *All Our Relations* is the acknowledgement that each and every person you encounter throughout life is from the Creator and thus, related to you. They are your brothers and your sisters. They are an extension of you because the Creator lies at the heart of both of you. You are more than family; you are spiritually linked to each and every person, and each and every person is dependent upon you to experience their sense of community.

Just this brief description of *All Our Relations* can bring to light the importance that Native people place on community, but it goes much deeper than this. To Native people, each and every living thing, whether it be animal, plant, reptile, mineral, all the way to the atom, is a living thing created by the Creator. In accepting that the

Creator lies within each of these things, you accept that the Creator is inside of them the same way the Creator is inside of you. These things, too, become your relations.

Even in everyday routine life, Native tribes exhibited community in all things. They hunted, not for the sake of one household or family, but for the benefit of the entire tribe. Children in Native villages were allowed to wander from house to house. They could enter any lodge and would be welcome guests. Every woman cared for each child, every man protected each child and all of the elders taught each child. To each child, every woman became a mother or grandmother; every man became father or grandfather. Children were shown from birth that people were not meant to have to survive on their own.

I have found community and fellowship within a place most people fear more than anything else.

So where have our communities gone today? Why the need for the separation of the classes and the masses? When did we lose the ties that once bound us so closely together? I believe we haven't lost those ties; we have just lost sight of them.

I have found community and fellowship within a place most people fear more than anything else. For the last nine years, I have been incarcerated at Indiana State Men's Prison, a maximum security hellhole. Yet, while living with the worst of the worst, I have found the best of the best and a place with true community and fellowship.

I am a graduate and now an aide/mentor of the Purposeful Living Units Serve program, or PLUS program. This program is designed to help inmates to correct their thinking and behavioral patterns through a series of classes and projects. But the most

successful way we have found to heal ourselves and the victims of our crimes is through service to our community. Through this service we have found that we depend on each other, help each other, teach each other, and that we succeed or fail as one.

We go to classes, eat, sleep and many of us pray together. We do service projects for the prison and the local community together. In a prison filled with what the state calls animals, we have found community and fellowship and have come together to create something positive. We have found success through service to our community and are striving to help others learn to do the same.

So why is it that society can't come together and find fellowship themselves in the free world? Whether it's a Native path and you accept all living things as an extension of yourself through the Creator, and show all things the respect you would show yourself, or whether you follow the lead of a bunch of convicts who have come together and found the healing power that community and fellowship bring with it, each and every one of us is responsible for bringing back our fellowship with *All Our Relations*. Each of us has the power within us to take the first steps to repairing the damage done by today's society on our communities.

All we have to do is make the choice to change our way of thinking, our way of dealing with people and focus on the whole rather than the one. We need to live in the essence of *All Our Relations*, to look back at the days when family and community came first, and when the things that bound us together meant more than the objects we allow to tear us apart.



I pray you will find the spirit of *Ahwensa Unhili*, *Mitakuye O'yasin*, *All Our Relations*, and *Walk in Beauty* with the Creator. ■



On Going to Church (Excerpt)

BY REV. A. POWELL
DAVIES (1902-1957),
MINISTER, ALL SOULS

CHURCH, UNITARIAN, WASHINGTON D.C.
FROM 1943-1957

I come to church—and would whether I was a preacher or not—because I fall below my own standards and need to be constantly brought back to them. It is not enough that I should think about the world and its problems at the level of a newspaper report or a magazine discussion. I must have my conscience sharpened—sharpened until it goads me to the most thorough and responsible thinking of which I am capable.

I need to be reminded that there are things I must do in the world—

unselfish things, things undertaken at the level of idealism. Workaday enthusiasms are not enough. They wear out too soon. I want to experience human nature at its best—and be reminded of its highest possibilities, and this happens to me in church.

In a congregation we share each other's spiritual needs and reinforce each other. In some ways, the soul is never lonelier than in a church service. That is certainly true of a pulpit, for a pulpit is the most intimately lonely place in the world—yet it is a loneliness that has strength in it. Perhaps this is because the innermost solitude of the human heart is in some paradoxical way a thing that can be shared—that must be shared—if the spirit of God is to find a full entrance into it.

We meet each other as friends and neighbors anywhere and everywhere, but we seldom do so in the conscious-

ness of our souls' deepest yearnings. But in church we do—in a way that protects us from all that is intrusive, yet leaves us knowing that we all have the same yearning, the same spiritual loneliness, the same need of assurance and faith and hope. We are not merely an audience, we are a congregation.

I doubt whether I could stand the thought of the cruelty and misery of the present world unless I could know, through an experience that renewed itself over and over again, that at the heart of life there is assurance, that I can hold an ultimate belief that all is well. And this happens in church.

Life must have its sacred moments and its holy places. The soul will always seek its nurture. For religious experience—which is life at its most intense, life at its best—is something we cannot do without. ■

Who Knows You?



BY KATHLEEN
MCTIGUE,
DIRECTOR OF THE
UUA'S COLLEGE OF
SOCIAL JUSTICE

Some of the old New England graveyards are serene little pockets of neglect. Their slate tombstones lean at odd angles and the elegant calligraphy is barely legible, spelling out obscure colonial names like *Ozias* and *Zebulon*. Some of the inscriptions that can still be deciphered tell poignant stories of sons and husbands fallen in long-ago wars and young wives lost in childbirth. Clusters of brick-sized stones mark the deaths of children in some catastrophic winter. The engraved cries of lament—"Farewell, Beloved Daughter"—evoke a tug of grief even now, though the people named have been dust and earth for two hundred years or more.

One of these graveyards in my town evokes a sadness of a different sort,

held in the inscription on a modern tombstone marking the resting place of Franklin F. Bailey. He was born in 1901 and buried in 1988, so he lived a long time. His epitaph says, "Here lies a man that nobody really knew."

What a strange message to leave echoing down through the years—and what a freight of sadness is held in that short phrase! It tells of isolation, loneliness, a life lived invisibly, a voice unheard. "Here lies a man that nobody really knew."

Who knows you? We each move through the world caught within the bubble of our own mind, circling around each other like small planets on which each of us is the only citizen. Spiritual practices are meant to turn us directly into that inner landscape, so we can know it well and without illusion. But their larger purpose is to show us pathways to one another, because with practice we come to know a bedrock truth of this human life: However different each inner landscape is from the others, the same

winds blow through us all. They are the winds of longing and fear, doubt, hope and regret. No one is exempt. That simple recognition opens a deep well of compassion, both for our own struggles and for those taking place behind all the faces that surround us.

I wonder about Franklin Bailey every time I take a walk through that little graveyard. I also wonder about the Franklin Baileys who walk among us. Who today is living a life of unremitting loneliness, in my town, in my neighborhood, perhaps even in my own family? Before it comes time for a sad epitaph summing up their isolation, perhaps we can extend a bridge of compassion, allowing them to feel seen, heard, and touched—to be known a little, in the brief, common walk of our lives.

From Shine and Shadow: Meditations, published by Skinner House in 2011. Available through the UUA bookstore (www.uuabookstore.org or 800-215-9076). ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

By now, I have been part of too many communities to name—and I'll bet you have too!

Though the extended community of Unitarian Universalists is a profoundly important one for me, if I had to name where I've learned the most about how to create deep and grounded community, it would not be church of any kind. I would name the experiences back in my twenties when I lived in a cooperatively owned and run house for a number of years. The lessons I learned in those years, when we figured out how to deal with each other 24/7, whether we felt like it or not, have stuck with me for decades. Happily, so have some of my deepest friendships. I've been very heartened to learn about the upswing in collective living situations among younger people now. Even though it may spring from financial hardship, I suspect that the payoffs will be very strong for the next generation, as they were for me.

Here are five things I learned—if I had space, I'm sure I could list twenty-five, or rival that book, *Everything I Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten* with *Everything I Need to Know, I Learned in a Collective Housing Co-op* :

1. Some people just bug me. They always will. And it's not always particularly rational. When someone who bugs me does particular things, the things they do will probably bug me too. (Examples: Chain smoking, smiling, talking, breathing...) Someone I like doing the exact same things won't bug me. The best I can do is to catch myself when I

ascribe evil motives to the person who bothers me (As in, "He's doing that just to bug me!") and stop that mental tape. But, in all likelihood, some people are going to go right ahead and bug me. Accepting that fact lessens my stress and can bring some humor into the situation.

2. It really helps to have agreements with people about what each one will and won't, can and can't, do. Then you have something to point to when they bug you (sometimes). In our congregations, we covenant together to create communities that live out our values. In a household, agreements for cohabitation are usually very specific behavioral agreements about smoking and drinking and meat, chores and money and cooking, guests and pets and bathroom etiquette. They include what to do when agreements aren't met.

3. It really helps to have regular times for House Meetings, so that frustrations don't build up. Catching people on the fly is fine, but relaxing into the knowledge that you'll get to lift up your need or gripe each Saturday means that you can set it aside Sunday-Friday. It also helps to have times together just to hang out and have fun! Bowling is more fun if people aren't simultaneously trying to manage conflicts or solve challenges between frames. (Commitment to attend house-meetings goes right on the top of the list of agreements mentioned above.)

4. No particular way to create community is right for everyone. Figuring out what works for a particular group is alchemical and evolves over time. Our household had a 'labor credit' system. Jobs were assigned credits based on how much people liked them or how easy they were, and we all had to earn a certain number of credits each month. If you got too few, you

paid the house. If you got too many, the house paid you. The money paid was largely symbolic, but the system kept us honest. I loved it. Another friend hated this system so much she wouldn't even come over for dinner. She thought it was cruel and impersonal. Go figure. She lived in a very different kind of household, and they seemed to keep their house pretty clean, too.

5. Many people, when leaving a community, would rather be mad than sad. They will do things to make you mad at them. It's sometimes hard to admit that you're mad at people for leaving, so you pin the anger on other things. (Thank God SHE's leaving—she always scraped the butter off the top of the stick!) It's sometimes hard to feel grief about being the one leaving, so you focus on all the imperfections of the community and tell yourself you're glad you're leaving. Just being sad, and honest about that, is hard, but deeply rewarding.

Also about leaving: it's really important to plan for transitions and departures. *If you want to leave, just leave* is not a good strategy for maintaining a community. Sometimes responsibilities to a community need to extend beyond personal preference until the community is stable without you.

In my fifties, I find myself contemplating a return to community living in a few years when I am an empty nester. The rubs, annoyances, and limitations of the situation are far outweighed by the joy of having a home that is filled with life. Whether that is where my path leads or not, I am grateful for the learnings of those early years, which have helped me through many kinds of situations.



■

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

What communities do you belong to? Very likely there is the community of your family, and your neighborhood might or might not feel like a community, depending on whether or not you talk with your neighbors or borrow tools from one another or play in each other's yards. Maybe you belong to the community of a sports team or orchestra or choir—a group of people knit together in the special way of folks who depend on one another to get the job done. You might belong to a community of identity—the African American community, the LGBTQ community, the community of people with disabilities or adoptees or people who have the same chronic illness. You can be a community, it turns out, with people who, for the most part, you don't even know, and will probably never meet, just because there is something important about your life that you hold in common.

Like everyone, you are a part of a natural community, the ecosystem of people and plants and animals where you live. The hummingbirds that feed on your flowers and the raccoons or rats that raid your garbage and the plants you water and even the dust mites that live in your bed are all an interrelated community, whether you like it or not. But more than that, your body itself is a community. I learned recently that the community of bacteria and other kinds of germs that live in your digestive system and on your skin and in various other parts of your body are called your *biome*. Your biome, it turns out, takes up some three pounds of an adult's body weight. The notion that so much of who you are isn't really *you* might sound incredibly disgusting—three pounds of germs!—but the reality is that you literally couldn't survive without the community of your biome. Your digestive system, your immune system, it all depends on being in re-



lationship with the tiny beings that live in and on you.

One way or another, all of us are dependent on communities, on the

networks of relationships that make up so much of who we are. So it shouldn't come as any surprise that the main reason people choose to come to church—any church—is for the community. But church community is—or at least is supposed to be—different from other types of community. Most communities are based on the ways that we just happen to be related, like our families or our neighborhoods or our biomes. Or they are based in the ways that we are alike: our shared interests or identities. But church community is based

Church community is based not just in who we are, but also in who we want to become.

not just in who we are, but also in who we want to become. We gather in religious community partly because we want to be welcomed just as we are, known in a way that is deeper than what you might find in a bowling league or political action group. But we also gather in religious community because we want to be part of something that calls us to be better than we are, more compassionate, more connected, with a deeper understanding of our place in the world. And so we gather with people who are like us in some ways and different in others, hoping that the connections we build together will help us to grow.

Of course, that isn't always the easiest way to be in community. By way of example, Jessica York relates a famous story of the theologian James Luther Adams:

In 1948, most congregations and houses of worship in the United States were segregated by the color of their members' skin. Some were

segregated by law, others by custom. The First Unitarian Society of Chicago was one of these congregations. Although their church was located in a neighborhood with many African Americans, only whites could join, according to the written by-laws of the church, and according to custom.

The day came when many members began to believe they needed to take action against racism if they really wanted to live their values and principles. The minister, the Reverend Leslie Pennington, ...and James Luther Adams proposed a change in the church's by-laws to desegregate the church and welcome people whatever the color of their skin. They saw this as a way to put their love into action.

When the congregation's board of directors considered the desegregation proposal, most of them supported it. However, one member of the board objected. "Your new program is making desegregation into a creed," he said. "You are asking everyone in our church to say they believe desegregating, or inviting, even recruiting people of color to attend church here is a good way to tackle racism. What if some members don't believe this?"...

The debate went on in the board of directors' meeting until the early hours of the morning. Everyone was exhausted and frustrated. Finally, James Luther Adams ...asked the person who had voiced the strongest objection, "What do you say is the purpose of this church?"...

The board member who opposed opening the church to people of color finally replied. "Okay, Jim. The purpose of this church is to get hold of people like me and change them."

The First Unitarian Society of Chicago successfully desegregated.

The purpose of church community is to get ahold of people like us and change us. Not into some false version of ourselves based on peer pressure and going along with the crowd, but into a truer version of ourselves, the people that we are able to be with the support and challenge of a visionary community. ■



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Reunion

BY **BARBARA PESCAN**, MINISTER EMERITA,
UNITARIAN CHURCH OF EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

One of the old ones stood up
into the morning light
and spoke to those who had come
back to the river.

—Now we have come again to this place.
My life apart from you
is not as strong.
Yes,
I have danced and
I have told the stories
at my own fire and
I have sung well, to all eight directions.

But when I am with you,
my friends,
I know better
who it is in me
that sings. ■



From Morning Watch: Meditations, by Barbara Pescan. Published by Skinner House in 1999 and reprinted in 2013. Available from the UUA bookstore (www.uuabookstore.org or 800-215-9076).