Democracy is Essential

BY STEPHANIE MAY, MINISTER, FIRST PARISH IN WAYLAND, MASSACHUSETTS

Imagine…if you believed democracy were essential. Not just a "choice" among variations of how to govern a group of people, but an essential structure. This is the claim authors Frances Moore Lappé and Adam Eichen make in their new book, *Daring Democracy: Igniting Power, Meaning, and Connection for the America We Want*. They write:

> *Creating democracies truly accountable to their citizens is essential to our very survival—to the flourishing of societies supporting human life, and now, because of climate change, to the survival of the Earth as we've inherited it.*
>
> *This is a colossal claim, we know. But there's one point on which human history makes us absolutely certain: it's not the magnitude of a challenge that crushes the human spirit…. What most defeats us is feeling useless—that we have nothing to say, nothing to contribute, that we don't count.*

Imagine that each of us could play an active, meaningful part in shaping the world we want to live in. Imagine a system in which the people share power. *All* the people—without limit or ranking according to race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or the amount of money in their accounts.

Or, maybe we should imagine instead what it would be like to not live in a democracy. In some ways, it's not too hard to imagine. Perhaps, like me, you have a fondness for period TV shows and/or for historical fiction. Any other fans of the PBS show *Victoria*? Over the years, there have been many such shows depicting life under a monarchy. I watch mesmerized by the beauty of palaces and gowns, feasts and gardens. And yet, I wonder—why do such portrayals of inequality of wealth and power have such a draw for me and for so many others in our democratic nation?

On an episode of *Victoria,* the young queen decides to visit the French king. Although the English prime minister seems wary, Victoria confidently exclaims that she would think that a self-made king should be very pleased to receive a visit from an anointed queen. I know it's just TV, but think about Victoria's attitude. What she says reflects the centuries-long belief that the authority to govern came from God, the Universal Ruler. Anointing a ruler was the sign of this divine blessing, this divine choice. So, this offhanded comment of Victoria's reveals her clear bias that a ruler chosen by God would be better than a self-made ruler.

Yet, what is democracy if not a collective of self-made rulers? At its best, the democratic process allows people to "rule" themselves by sharing the power of governing. Choosing how to share power, how to govern, is of course the purview of politics. And yet, underlying these political choices are assumptions about who or what is the source of authority and power. In other words, underlying the choices of politics are ideas about human nature and the nature of the universe. Such ideas reflect religious commitments about the ultimate nature and purpose of existence.

For example, if the God of your understanding is an all-knowing, all-powerful Creator of the Universe, then the source of all power must be understood as coming from that God. God holds the power and can divvy it out to those God chooses. This theological point of view supports the notion of the Divine Right of Kings that *Victoria* alludes to. Such a view of God as a power *over* others, who is due allegiance and obedience by "His" creation, generates an acceptance of *hierarchal* power as the natural order of the universe. When one accepts hierarchy as natural, the application of the same principle among human beings can be vast. Aristocrats with land are better than landless

Quest

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Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion is.

—Mahatma Gandhi

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT POLTICS & RELIGION

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peasants. Men are higher than women. Whiteness is superior to people of color. And so on.

Of course, not all views of God support such a hierarchal understanding of power. For some, God may be all-powerful, but God created humankind as equal to one another. In my own training in feminist Christian theological discourse, I learned to rely heavily on Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." In this view, God remains unquestionably superior to humankind, but among humans there is the expectation of equality. Indeed, this kind of just society is the fulfillment of God's plan for humanity.

And what of us as Unitarian Universalists? As inheritors of a Unitarian legacy, we hold fast to the individual capacity of a person to make moral and religious decisions. We have faith in our reason and in our ability to do good. And, as inheritors of a Universalist legacy, we claim an inclusive vision that values *all* persons, in a love that embraces people universally. Together these threads of individual capacity and universal inclusion emerge in our fifth principle: "the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process in our congregation and in society at large."

> I believe that religion is bigger than politics.

Our commitment to conscience and democracy emerge because of a long religious tradition that values the worth and dignity of every person. When we take these values as foundational to our understanding of how the world *is*, this is a religious claim.

I believe that religion is bigger than politics. I believe religion is about answering the biggest questions about who we are as fragile, fierce creatures; about where we find ourselves in this complex, beautiful, maddening world; and about how to navigate the ever-shifting dynamics of being who we are in the world in which we find ourselves. I believe religion is making sense of life by naming the landscape of how things are and values that will help us chart a course. I have chosen to be a part of the Unitarian Universalist religious tradition that values the capacity for moral choice as well as the dignity of each life, that promotes equity in human relations and the use of the democratic process in an effort to share power.

And it is from the basis of these moral commitments, these religious commitments, that I then take political action. It is from the basis of my humanity, my effort to craft a meaningful life in a shared world that I engage both my religious life and my political action.

And so I think that as religious persons and as a religious community we can engage in actions that seek to shape the kind of world we want to live in. We can promote and support issues that align with our inclusive values of human worth and dignity, of equity and justice in human relations, of the use of the democratic process in our larger society. We can live our values and religious commitments through our actions—through public social witness and the political process as well as through direct compassionate care to individuals in need.

There are limits to what we can do and to what we should do. By law, engaging in partisan politics endangers our non-profit status. Neither the congregation nor I can endorse or denounce political parties or candidates from the pulpit during an election. Nor do I think we *should* do this—even if it were legal. As a religious organization, we are exploring a much larger and bigger world than that of politics. We are reaching out to understand the expanses of meaning and the contours of moral action. I would never want who we are and what we do to be reduced to any political party's platform.

And yet, I also do not want us to be curtailed in our relevance because we fear engaging in issues and actions that seem political. I believe that we can act in a public way as Unitarian Universalists with a *religious* voice, that we can call any and every political party to uphold certain shared values in their proposals and in their votes. We come together with a commitment to valuing every person—even those from a different political party. *And* we come together to live out those values in our actions—some of which may be to engage the political process.

We may not always agree on how to live out our values. It is a bold thing for a congregation to take a public

position on an issue—to hang a Black Lives Matter banner, to offer sanctuary for a person facing deportation, to fly a rainbow flag on our steps. But, it is something we can choose to do as a *religious* act. Deciding what we *should* or should *not* do as individuals, groups, or as a congregation—that is a matter of conscience and the use of the democratic process.

Democracy is essential not because it is the only possible form of government. Democracy is essential because it is shared power that aligns with valuing the right of conscience and the worth and dignity of every person. Democracy is essential because to live out the fullness of who we are as human beings we need to feel like we can meaningfully shape the world we share.

Imagine what kind of world you would like to live in. Imagine believing, really believing, that you can be a part of making that world come to be. Imagine that democracy is essential. ■

What Matters Most

BY CHRISTIAN SCHMIDT, CO-MINISTER, FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

The Unitarian Universalist minister David O. Rankin liked to relate a story from his career. In 1968 he preached a sermon just before the presidential election in which he was not thrilled between the choice of Richard Nixon or Hubert Humphrey. Instead of making the case, however subtly, for either candidate, he chose instead to recommend that everyone vote for the most intelligent, experienced and compassionate candidate. Moments later, in the receiving line after the service, he was confronted by a man loudly and angrily shouting at him, "How dare you use the pulpit to support Hubert Humphrey!"

I endorse no candidates here, nor even stake a position on individual items on any ballot. No, let's talk politics, but not parties. For decades now, we have repeatedly been told about values voters, and the moral majority, and the religious right, and family values and "pro-life" voters and so on.

It's time to change the script.

Because friends, I'm a values voter. And the values I hold dear are taking care of my fellow human beings, ending oppression, and making sure that people have healthy food and a safe place to live. My values support people of all gender expressions and sexual orientations, people of all races and ethnicities, of all national origins. My values are truly pro-life, not just pro-birth.

I consider myself both moral and part of a majority. I try to live a good life, to not harm others as much as possible, to do the right things and to be a good person. And I believe that the majority, perhaps all of us, are doing those same things, even if we might sometimes differ on how to accomplish them.

And I hope it goes without saying, I'm religious, though not right. I'm tired of the conversation about religion in this country assuming that religious people span the gamut from fundamentalist Christians to conservative Christians. There are liberal and radical people of faith, and there are Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and dozens of other religious groups who are here and politically engaged! If we could get this word out to the major news networks sometime soon, that would be great.

I think I have great family values. Those values include supporting same-sex couples in living their lives the way they choose, with the same access to rights and privileges I have as a heterosexual, cisgender man in an opposite-sex marriage. And I have family values that say children should grow up in a home where they are loved and cared for and supported, and that matters more than other concerns.

And I'm pro-life, but not in the narrow, nonsensical way I often hear used by those who claim that title. I support life—I want to support the flourishing of all human life. I recognize that women have a better understanding of their own bodies and decisions than I do. I oppose the death penalty—again, because I support life. I'm anti-poverty and pro-prison reform, because I'm for life. I'm pro-medicine and pro-science, and even pro-socialized medicine, because I'm for life.

I'm even, and here's something you probably didn't expect a minister to say, pro-gun. At any rate I'm not totally anti-gun, and that feels radical in an age where there's precious little middle ground. Though I don't own any, I'm not opposed to guns. I've lived in places where guns are important, and not as a symbol or for some inflated sense of self-defense. I lived in rural Mississippi and spent time with people who hunted, for whom guns were part of a way of life, with people who each donated hundreds of pounds of meat a year to a local children's home as part of a program called Hunters for the Hungry. So I'm pro-gun, and I'm pro-responsible gun ownership, and I'm pro-sensible gun control—something this country lacks right now.

Maybe you think at least some of these same things about yourself. Perhaps you cringe at the destructive, divisive policies and platforms you hear from people who are too eager to lift up their moral framework as the right, and proper, and only one for this country. You might see the US as a country too large and too diverse and too amazing to be contained by any one system of thinking or seeing.

We follow the prophetic calls of those who have come before us, like Frederick Douglass and Barbara Jordan and Rosa Parks, and those like the Rev. William Barber working today. Barber has called upon people of faith to lift up and defend the most sacred moral principles of our faiths. We support pro-people and anti-war policies, equality in education, healthcare for all, fairness for all people in the criminal justice system, and rights for all people, especially people of marginalized identities.

The work that Unitarian Universalists around the country and the world are doing in the political process, the work we do in our local communities, all of this is part of the same work of creating the beloved community. And whoever we elect, this work will continue.

Friends, vote for the most intelligent, experienced, and compassionate candidates. And then go love the hell out of the world, each of us in our unique ways. The world cries out for our efforts, and no election alone will end that. ■

The Heart of Democracy

by Sue Browning, minister, UU Fellowship at Easton and at UUs of the Chester River, Maryland

Do you trust democracy? In your bones, do you trust it? Do you trust yourself and your fellow citizens?

Have you ever feared the democratic outcome?

Rhetoric is high and relentless these days. While we like to claim our openness to difference, I sense there are times we feign deep listening. Or maybe it's just me. As the posturing and gamesmanship barrages our senses, we retreat to our corners, sure in our truth. Or we may even retreat to our well-honed middle position.

We duck as the messiness of ideas fly back and forth. "They" are not listening and are not going to listen. It feels tough to engage—there is a hopelessness in the political climate of today.

Religion on its own, or politics on its own, is each fraught with triggers. Mixing the two is dicey, and yet the spheres aren't separate.

Our 5th UU principle directly states that UU congregations will affirm and promote "the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large." Right there—we view the democratic process as a principle of faith.

It's not new. When the Unitarians and Universalists merged in 1961 it was stated this way: UU congregations "affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, the dignity of man, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships."

Lifting up "democracy" as one of our religious principles goes back even further. In the 1940s, Rev. A. Powell Davies, minister at the All Souls Church, Unitarian in Washington, DC, had the democratic method identified as a nationwide core value of the faith.

Davies was born in England at the turn of the century, and in England was trained as a Methodist minister. He came to the US in 1928 and was a persistent public advocate for civil liberties, government accountability, family planning and desegregation. In time he shifted and in 1933 was fellowshipped as a Unitarian minister.

Consider his context. He was raised during WWI in Europe, lived through the Depression in the US, and was developing these Unitarian values well into WWII. He'd experienced fascism, was part of a world struggling to respond to communism, and he still held his long term social justice concerns.

In the mid-1940s Rev. Davies was appointed to a national committee charged to "advance" the Unitarian faith. The group focused on rejuvenating and growing the Unitarian faith, in large part by clarifying its purpose.

The committee only agreed to five principles, and one was Unitarian faith in "Democratic process in human relations." It stuck. It is still around.

Recall that Rev. Davies was the spiritual leader of congregations around the DC Beltway, the center of the US government. A decade later, he still was expounding on democracy. In a sermon in 1954 he offered:

> *"[Unitarianism] is an inclusive, not an exclusive faith, based on individual freedom of belief…finding salvation not through someone else's martyrdom, but by education and the disciplines of democracy….*
>
> *A …commitment of the Unitarian faith is to democracy—not merely as a political system but as the just and brotherly way in human relations….*
>
> *We think that discussion is the path to true agreement. We are educators one of another, and all can learn from each.*
>
> *We are well aware that democracy can be a discipline—sometimes a harsh one. But this is part of its value. We grow by learning to get along with other people. We grow even more when we learn to respect and like each other, to have a concern, each for all, in the words of the New Testament, to "love one another."*

For Rev. Davies, democracy was not only a public institution, but was a moral institution as well.

He worried democracy would be taken for granted. He saw modern democracy needed advocates and protection. It was not a squishy niceness. Davies had seen the alternatives, and put his trust in an engaged democracy. An *engaged* democracy. Not *a vote and move on* democracy. He saw the best method of protection was to live into the deep ideals of democracy by working through difference.

And differences we will have. While humans have a propensity to cooperate with one another in social groups for survival and fulfillment, we also have a propensity for violence within and among groups.

I sense our trust in the institution of democracy is slipping.

Our founding documents, adjusted over time, have checks and balances that spell out the processes for self-government. Let's be real here—the initial set up was for white, male, landowners to do the deciding and the governing. But slowly these principles have changed. The democracy created was to be deliberate and slow.

This foundation is sturdy, but not a guarantee. Frustrations are high and cynicism festers. Our democracy is not a guarantee. I hear this as Davies' central point. The imperfect institution needs to be protected, and improved, and this is the mantle we are called to carry.

Modern democracy offers a path toward affirming the inherent worth and

dignity of all. It is a moral assumption. It is a moral aspiration.

What are we individually and collectively ready to risk for democracy? To heal democracy?

Democracy is about voting, but it has to be more.

For democracy to work we need to bring our whole selves to the process—head, heart, and energy. We have to be in connection across our differences. Yet, as challenges have mounted, many have pulled back, often living in echo chambers with those who agree with them.

We are called to deeply engage, even knowing that probably means our hearts will break. Will our hearts break open to possibility instead of breaking apart? Parker Palmer, in his book *Healing the Heart of Democracy,* suggests that if we gain "greater capacity to hold the complexities and contradictions of human experience, the result may be new life."

Isn't that what it takes to live in democracy? To authentically participate. To listen, and to speak up. To risk to trust in a democratic system we know as imperfect, but which in its most engaged forms may be our best hope to get through the challenges of human relations.

We're called as citizens in a democracy to hold life's many tensions consciously, faithfully, until our hearts are opened. It is in doing so that we sustain and build trust so we may live into the responsibility of governing ourselves. ■

Politics and Religion

by Daniel S. Schatz, minister, Unitarian Congregation of West Chester, Pennsylvania

One hundred years ago the state of Maine was sharply divided between Republicans and Democrats. The little lakeside town of Naples suffered animosity so severe that the village had two stores, two libraries, and even two schoolteachers, a Republican and a Democrat. Unfortunately, they only had one schoolhouse. The Democrats and Republicans took turns locking one another out. In the middle of this political turmoil, a reporter asked a five-year-old boy whether he and his family were Republicans or Democrats. Thinking hard, the little boy scratched his head and said, "I think we're Baptists."

Politics and religion.

In the South about twenty years ago, a group began growing in power and influence within local conservative churches. The movement soon spread to other parts of the country. They published voting guides, and surreptitiously (and sometimes not so surreptitiously) supported candidates, until ultimately the Christian Coalition was told by the Internal Revenue Service that if they did not curtail their political activities, they risked losing their tax-exempt status. That status was indeed taken away in 1999, and with it went several local congregations. Meanwhile, hundreds of other churches have been left in tatters, irreconcilably divided between those who wished to pursue partisan agendas and those who decried the loss of the spiritual core of the faith. The little-known side effect of the infusion of politics into their religion was schism and grief.

Politics and religion.

One hundred seventy years ago, a Unitarian clergyman named Theodore Parker developed a vision of American democracy, one with no remaining elements of aristocracy, monarchy, or that scourge he saw as the largest obstacle to the human spirit, slavery. He criticized the Mexican War from the pulpit, and at great personal risk preached openly his resistance to any form of government that fell short of "direct self-government, over all the people, by all the people, for all the people," a phrase that would later be adapted by President Abraham Lincoln.

Politics and religion.

Only five or six decades ago, Unitarian and Universalist churches struggled with the issue of civil rights. Many who resisted change did so not because of open bigotry, but simply because the change itself was uncomfortable. It was too much to keep hearing about integration and racial justice. They wanted a feeling of comfort and refuge from church; they didn't want to be challenged. Others felt the challenge should go further than it ever did. We owe part of who we are as a religion and as a society today to those courageous Unitarians and Universalists who decided that sometimes justice takes precedence. Some, like Rev. James Reeb, lost their lives for what they believed.

Politics and religion.

Politics and religion—these are the two proscribed dinner table conversations, the topics to be avoided at all costs. Like it or not, though, you can't ignore politics, or separate political views completely from religious views. We live in a political age, no less so than Theodore Parker or James Reeb or Susan B. Anthony, or anyone else. Our lives are infused with politics, and to ignore that fact is to waive the responsibility our faith calls us to. ■

From Your Minister

BY **MEG RILEY**
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

I grew up in a deeply political UU family. From the earliest time I can remember, we talked about politics and religion at the dinner table. I don't know if my parents did this to counteract the influences which were coming at us from our conservative Baptist neighborhood, or if it was simply what they liked to talk about, but my three siblings and I were all weaned on political discourse.

By the time we were adolescents, my siblings and I had done things like make lobby visits on issues we cared about, campaign for chosen candidates, put unpopular bumper stickers on our bikes, argue with our schoolmates during recess about the issues of the day and write letters to the newspaper. It has been surprising to learn, especially as an adult, how rare this experience was. Many of my friends have told me that they never thought about politics, and that their parents never talked about the subject.

The small UU fellowship in West Virginia where I spent my elementary school years in the 1960s was awash in the political issues of the day, mostly connected to civil rights. It was, after all, Adlai Stevenson who helped my parents find Unitarian Universalism. Stevenson, who ran for U.S. President in 1952 and 1956, shared that he was a Unitarian. My parents had never heard of Unitarianism, but they decided if Stevenson, whom they loved, was a Unitarian they wanted to check it out. The story goes that my mother went to church in Houston, Texas in 1956, while my father stayed home with the three of us kids, aged baby to five. When my mom got home, she said, "Church was fine, but *coffee hour* was great! I have found our people!" They spent the rest of their life as UUs, though not as Texans.

I think about how it must have felt for them to find their people in those days of the McCarthy hearings, living in a very conservative place where they had just moved for my father's first job. To find a community that was open-minded and progressive, to meet other people who had similar values and commitments to fairness and democracy. And I think about all the people now who could benefit similarly, who are bereft in a world gone increasingly authoritarian, who are lonely for human contact in a world that is increasingly driven by technology, who are longing for a place to reconnect with fundamental decency and kindness. This is one reason why I am so committed to sharing Unitarian Universalism—because people need spiritual homes in hard times!

For me, politics and religion have always been inseparable, using the definition of politics which folks like the late Minnesota senator Paul Wellstone espoused: *Our politics are our deepest form of expression: they mirror our past experiences and reflect our dreams and aspirations for the future*.

But that connection of religion and politics is complicated. In the US today, politics have increasingly become equated with partisanship, with politicians seeming to dream of and aspire to nothing more than re-election. That kind of politics has no place in spiritual communities—our faith is not on the ballot.

I spent 10 years living in Washington DC and directing the UUA's justice work there. We worked in interfaith coalitions for bills that supported our faith commitments to justice and equality and democracy. I can also say that we never worked on a bill that we felt 100% good about. Every single one of them was problematic in one way or another. That, I think, is what partisan politics is about—profound compromise, and 51% of the vote.

I think that getting the necessary percentage of the vote, in the United States at least, has been part of the divisive place to which we have gotten—that all of the major cities and even the larger towns are much more progressive than the rural areas. Political parties in the US significantly wrote off rural areas because we can achieve 51% of the vote without them. No outreach, no education, no campaign efforts to speak of. I wish progressive folks spent more time reaching out to rural areas, where (again, in the US) white nationalists and other hate groups have been actively recruiting for decades.

I get why political parties use limited resources to win elections. That's their goal. Don't get me wrong; winning an election is no small thing! But faith, unlike partisan politics, is about clear and uncompromising values, and including all of the people. People of faith have a different charge around spreading our values than political parties do. Whether our chosen candidates in the elections have won or lost, our charge is to keep reaching out with values which are more clear, consistent and sharp than what is possible to pass in the legislature. It's up to us, not the politicians, to be clear about our values and to insert them into public discourse.

My siblings and I raised our own kids the way we were raised—to see the value in serving the common good, to work for a better world. This next generation lives in three countries now, and the form the work takes varies from person to person and place to place. But the values I was raised with continue on in my family, and I remain grateful for my early grounding in connecting up spiritual beliefs with work for justice, and for Unitarian Universalism's commitment to a democratic and fair world. ■

REsources for Living

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

I had a proud parenting moment the other day. My young adult daughter texted me "I have officially become the kind of annoying adult that won't shut up about politics." I replied "This makes me so happy." Yes, I do feel that it says something good about my parenting that my kid is paying attention to politics. When she was little I made a point of taking her along with me to the polls to vote, so that we could talk about how important the process of informed voting is. And yes, when she turned 18 I badgered her into actually filling out her ballot and getting it in on time. My daughter is a young Black woman, and I feel like the world needs her vote, and she needs to feel that she can have an effect, however small, in shaping our country toward the way she wants it to be.

When I was her age, I did vote—I haven't missed a presidential or congressional election since I turned 18. But I was hardly the kind of adult that wouldn't shut up about politics. Politics seemed to me something like flossing—an annoying chore that you attended to because apparently it was important. Understanding issues was complicated and the information tedious. Politicians were better or worse, but not inspiring.

Then, in women's studies classes in college, I learned the phrase "The personal is political." That began to capture my imagination. How we live our lives, the choices we make, the way we treat the people around us, the words we speak or write, the songs we sing—it's all political. Who we are as individuals shapes who we are as communities and who we are as a nation. That made sense to me. It also gave me an out. If I wasn't going to protests or writing letters or campaigning, well, I was doing other things. Personal things.

Beyond voting and the very occasional protest my politics stayed pretty personal for some time. I just couldn't bring myself to get invested in any activist way. I moved to Idaho in 1991 to serve my first congregation as an out lesbian. Surely, that was a personally political act! Well, in 1992 Kelly Walton, a local minister far into the right wing of Christianity started collecting signatures for an initiative that would stop gay people from having "special rights" like employment non-discrimination. And the personal got a whole lot more political. Somehow, two years later, when they had gathered enough signatures to get Initiative 1 on the ballot, I ended up as the chair of a faith-based organization opposing the initiative, and got out on the streets canvassing people to talk about why Prop 1 was wrong. In the end the initiative was defeated 50.38% to 49.62%, and we couldn't help but feel our efforts made a difference.

I'd like to claim that my experiences of turning the personal political turned me into a life-long activist, but that would be a considerable exaggeration. I hate calling people with a nearly phobic passion, and standing in a group of people yelling just makes me feel squirmy. I make the occasional phone call, write the occasional letter, attend the occasional march. But I read about politics, and as the political situation gets more extreme and more bizarre my reading takes on an almost frantic quality. As if by knowing more I would have more control over the political tidal waves crashing through my country. Politics has gone from being tedious, to horror movie levels of jaw-dropping terror.

And I find that I have become the kind of annoying adult who won't shut up about politics. To my friends. To strangers on Facebook, to anyone who will read what I write or engage in a conversation. Because it has become clear to me that not only is the personal political, the religious is political. Who I am as a minister is not more separable from who I am as a political person than it is from who I am as a mother.

And while it is not anywhere explicit in our UU principles and purposes, I believe that it is a central tenet of our faith that we are called to be in conversation. We are called to have convictions about how human beings are treated—with inherent worth and dignity. We are called to have convictions about how the earth is treated—as inseparable from our own lives. And we are called to talk with passion about what matters to us. We are also called to listen intently to what matters to others. We don't have to agree, but we are called to be in the conversation. And we are called to move that conversation beyond the bounds of comfort into the wider world, boldly bringing all of our personhood into the realm of the political, working for a world in which everyone's full personhood can flourish.

It isn't easy. We will never do it "right" and we will never be done. But's that's how it is in any relationship. We talk. We listen. We choose. And then we do it all some more, trying to nudge ourselves, each other and the wider world toward something that looks more like wholeness. ■

Politics and religion share the desire to make a difference in the world. The CLF makes a positive difference by connecting religious liberals around the world to one another and to resources for spiritual growth and renewal. In prisons and jails, online and in small congregations, in dormitories and rest homes and homes of all sorts, the CLF is there with support for who we are right now, and with a challenge to each of us to become what we can be. Please be part of sustaining this important work by sending a check in the enclosed envelope, or by giving online at clfuu.org/give.

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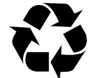

Above All, Love

BY ROGER BUTTS, STAFF CHAPLAIN, PENROSE ST. FRANCIS HEALTH SERVICES; AFFILIATED COMMUNITY MINISTER, ALL SOULS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH, COLORADO SPRINGS

Then let us first of all have grace.
Grace for those who have come before us.
Sometimes they got it right, sometimes not.
But we know more now because of them.
If not grace, then gratitude.

Next let us have some grace
for each one in their own particularity.
We must always strive for common ground
and work from there.
If not grace, then an open heart.

Finally, let us have some grace
for ourselves. Knowing, we too
can be wretched, to use a big word,
or just plain old wrong, to be more direct.
If not grace, then a bit of self-compassion.

And let us, in the end, hate the parts of us
that are warlike more than we hate the other
we imagine to be. And let us say, looking
in the mirror: Have mercy on me, have mercy
on me, have mercy on me. So that we might
have mercy on all of creation.

If not mercy, then love. Above all, love.