

Thoughts About Integrity and Our National Character



REV. CLOVICE LEWIS, JR.
UU minister

Integrity is not a trait that can exist on its own. The word is a noun that refers to an entity, quality, state, action, or concept. Whether describing a trait of character or expressing a property of strength, integrity is always related to something else. However it is used, an essential quality of integrity is its role in describing completeness and soundness for what it refers to.

As applied to people, integrity is the quality of being honest and having strong principles. By extension, integrity implies that any organization of persons is more vital when honesty and a striving towards principles promulgated for the good of the whole. These attributes are a source of pride for Americans. We like to believe we define our character as rugged individuals who, by sheer will of force, carve out for ourselves and our families a superior way of life that attracts other such people to form a "more perfect union" governed by fairly applied laws.

James Burke wrote a book in 1985 called *The Day the Universe Changed*. In the book, Burke describes how seemingly small random events, or isolated moments, can radically change our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

I believe such a moment occurred on July 27, 2016 after the Republican National Convention concluded.

My wife and I watched an interview with former speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and CNN's Alisyn Camerota. We were horrified to hear Gingrich explain what we now all understand as "alternative truth." When confronted with the fact that crime in the United States had decreased, he insisted that facts don't matter as much as feelings about crime. He said, "The current view is that liberals have a whole set of statistics which theoretically may be right, but it's not where human beings are. People are frightened... As a political candidate, I'll go with how people feel, and I'll let you go with the theoreticians."

I believe that was the instant that heralded the death of truth and the political weaponization of fear in our country. It is when temptation overtook our national ethos. We succumbed to fear and ran willingly into the darkness of disenfranchisement, supremacy, and othering. We have been damaged by the false narrative of "exceptionalism" that denies our actual past and obscures our present. Our nation is imperiled because many of us are willing to sacrifice integrity and the rule of law for authoritarian power.

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Quest

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"Be faithful to that which exists within yourself."

ANDRE GIDE

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Clovice Lewis

INTEGRITY
Multiple authors

THE UNKNOWN
Ultra Violet

FROM MEMBERSHIP TO STEWARDSHIP
Lead Ministry Team

**SIGN UP FOR FALL
CORRESPONDENCE COURSES**

INTEGRITY

What does integrity mean to you?

MICHAEL

CLF Member, incarcerated in TX

Integrity, according to Webster's New World Dictionary, is, "completeness; unimpaired condition; soundness; honesty, sincerity, etc." Some of the synonyms in Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus are "honor, uprightness, goodness, principle, probity, purity, righteousness, virtue, simplicity, stability and unity."

To me, integrity means being true to oneself, with actions of uprightness and goodness towards others. By being true to yourself you remain the same when you're alone as with others. There is a saying: "who are you when no one is looking?" The "you" that your family, friends, classmates, co-workers see — is it the same "you" as when you are by yourself, or are you a different person altogether in both worlds?

By letting your actions be upright and good towards others, family or friend, stranger or foe, it makes no difference, for those actions show the world who you really are, the character that is built in you and the love that engulfs your heart. "Actions speak louder than words" has always been a true statement.

Some people are born with integrity, others have to work to integrate and

cultivate it into their lives. Some have to work harder than others. Nevertheless, it's a virtue and principle that everybody can have and should want to have.

Everybody, I believe, should practice having one percent more integrity with every new dawn and day we wake up to. It could make a difference. ■



PHOTO BY NANDA DIAN PRATAMA ON UNSPLASH

CHRISTIAN

CLF Member, incarcerated in IL

Integrity to me means standing solid and firm in one's own beliefs. Exhibiting good faith in a certain set of morals, principles, and values.

I hear that the pen is mightier than the sword; the tongue has been

known to dismantle empires. The quality of a person's integrity can only be measured through the weight of that individual's actions. Though we are all animals at the end of the day, language and our intentions are two of the most fundamental elements in which the value of integrity

is allowed to manifest itself within the physical realm.

The ability to connect and communicate with all, in pure harmony, in my opinion represents integrity in its highest form. ■

RANDE

CLF member, incarcerated in CA

A building or any such structure having integrity means that it is not only whole but sound. For a person, integrity is defined as the quality of being honest and having strong moral values. These definitions are closer than they appear. Let me tell you how.

Integrity, to me, is not only recognizing the wholeness of oneness of everything, but realizing that I am in unity with that oneness. And therefore, everyone is unified with that oneness.

This reminds me of one of Buddha's revelations: that if we have lived many, like hundreds of thousands of incarnations, then it could be very likely that anyone you meet could have been your mother, in a previous incarnation. In addition, Jesus stated that he came to give one commandment: to love the oneness and each other as the oneness.

How are we treating each other? Is it even close to how you would treat your mother? Integrity is like that. When we treat each other with love, respect, and we "do no harm," we would not be lying, stealing and all the other "thou shalt nots." Integrity

is not being divided or separated from anyone else. Recognizing blood color before skin color, the color of their flag, or the shape of their wholeness. Use unity as the basis of integrity and all the rest will take care of itself. ■



PHOTO BY CHUTERSNAP ON UNSPLASH

The Unknown

ULTRA VYLET

CLF Member, incarcerated in FL

They wouldn't show me the path in
which to walk
Only the roads sidelined, with
bodies in chalk
Vague directions and a god that
refuses to be known
Look for me in darkness, the heart-
less child's foster home

And so I cut my own path
Became my own god
Created my own ceremonies
Ordained my own laws

Instituted my own rituals
And sent my demons to hell
From the darkness I came
Illuminating myself

I created the light
And saw that it was good, you see

For no guru
Would show their wizen face
to me

And so my own master
No generic I've become
A unique soul
The esoteric sun

Whatever comes,
I will not be disrupted; the
essence
My solar-systems spun
Spins spirit relentless

Energy vampires un-repentent
Eternally burn on my contrite
cross
For blood is an illusion
A conundrum delusion wrought
So look for my blood, if you

so choose
That which you seek your own
you shall lose
Lost in confusion are all my foes
Bound by habit circled in woes

That's a stick of dynamite
Not a candle they're holding
But what's a spiritual truth
To a creation so soulless

Pastors packing pulpit power
In their proverbial pipes
Puff puff; boom, plume!!
Eradication of life

On a nimbus cloud, I span the skys
The earth my love, the rain and I
Does everything natural not love
the storm
Water is life, is light, is lore



PHOTO BY JOSEPH BARRIENTOS ON UNSPLASH

Integrity, continued from page 1

Democracies operate on fact, science, and objectivity, along with law. When there is no basis for action, save feelings, there is no democracy. We knew that, but we abandoned our highest path because a messy democracy became too complicated for some to bear. Newt Gingrich and his ilk smashed our Achilles heel to herd us into temptation and usher us into an era of darkness.

The events of January 6, 2021, may have sealed our fate. ■

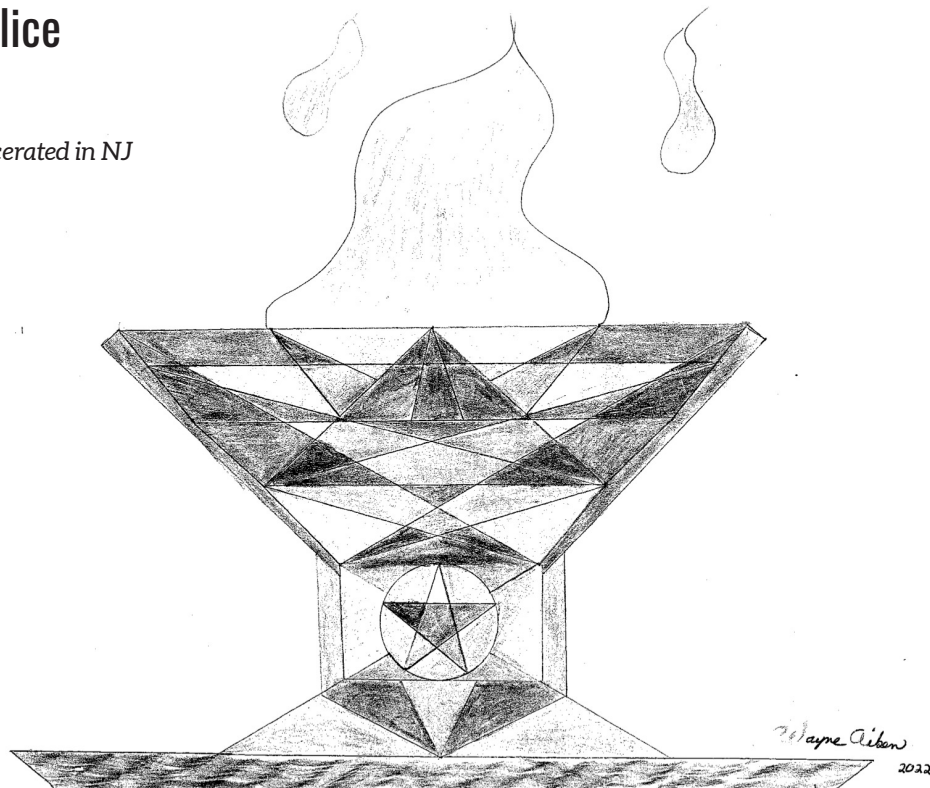


PHOTO BY LITTLE PLANT ON UNSPLASH

Flaming Chalice

LARRY

CLF member, incarcerated in NJ



From Membership to Stewardship



CHRISTINA RIVERA
Lead Ministry Team,
Church of the Larger
Fellowship

When Aisha, Michael, and I were called as your Lead Ministry Team in 2020 we were excited to learn all the behind-the-scenes workings of CLF. All of us had been affiliated with CLF in one way or another over the years, be it as members, co-hosts of the VUU, and/or CLF programs. We were and remain energized about the potential for CLF global ministry. We see the hunger for UU Faith Development offerings, Prison Ministry/Abolition programs, and of course the deep community building that happens during weekly worship service and covenant groups.

One aspect of CLF life which emerged into clearer focus for us were the ways in which CLF operates both as a church and a non-profit:

- Sunday/Monday Worship – Church
- Staff Structure – non-profit
- Pastoral Care – Church
- Membership Structure – non-profit

As we began interviewing staff, lay leaders, and members it became clear that there is a deep desire to build the CLF as a congregational community. The reasons we gather as a spiritual community are vast but they are always centered on building beloved community.... a spiritual community, a faith, a Unitarian Universalist home.

Michael, Aisha, and I, with the support of the CLF Board, set about realigning the staff and resources to more fully embrace a structure and culture of faith. In 2021 we underwent a wildly successful staff realignment which saw staff embrace those areas of their expertise and creative expression. Today our staff continue to report how excited and fulfilled they are working in this collaborative environment. And it shows because you, our members, are showing up to worship, covenant groups, and faith development offerings in droves. Our incarcerated UUs are finding us and flocking to our prison ministry.

So now we turn our attention to our membership structure. And friends let me tell you, the CLF is in full non-profit mode when it comes to membership! To join the church all one had to do is pay \$50 and bam! you were a CLF Unitarian Universalist. Incarcerated UUs joined via membership form and then attended a 'New UU' correspondence course in order to participate in our Pen Pal program.

But what Aisha, Michael and I asked is this question "who are the stewards of CLF Unitarian Universalism?" because in a faith community we are not just members but stewards. Our incarcerated UUs are stewards of our faith by their frequent contributions to Quest and sharing the good news of Unitarian Universalism within their incarcerated community. Our free-world members tend towards the non-profit

designation of member by paying a yearly membership fee. This isn't to say that we don't have self-identified stewards of CLF, we do. It's to say that the way that we as the institution of CLF has positioned membership leads to a transactional nature rather than one of stewardship.

So we are excited to announce that beginning this summer we will launch a "From Membership to Stewardship" campaign. We will be asking folks to consider their "membership" in CLF from a stewardship perspective. We will be doing this in a variety of channels including mail, email, website, worship announcements, and faith development offerings.

We will be asking for you to think about your time, treasure, and talents as community offerings to stewarding Unitarian Universalism via the Church of the Larger Fellowship. And we will be creating opportunities to talk about stewardship, practice stewardship, and gain deeper understandings of just what being a steward of Unitarian Universalism is all about. We are sooooo excited to be on this journey with you and look forward to exploring with you this upcoming season of "From Membership to Stewardship" at the CLF.

YoUUrs in faith,

Christina Rivera
Co-Lead Ministry Team

Fall Correspondence Courses

Are you a free-world CLF member who doesn't have internet access, or prefers to connect through the mail?

As a pilot, we are opening up our Fall Correspondence Courses to all members, regardless of incarceration status. We will mail each lesson to you this coming fall, about a week apart. There are questions at the end of each lesson for your own reflection, and a final set of questions that you will mail back for review by CLF staff.

Please select only one of the classes below, and mail this page back to us (CLF UU, 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210) to register. Deadline for registration is July 31, 2022 and course material will be mailed Fall 2022.

NAME _____

ARE YOU A CLF MEMBER ? _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

What Moves Us: Each of the 5 lessons is centered around the story of a significant Unitarian, Universalist, or Unitarian Universalist. We will learn about a change of heart that person had that led them into new religious or spiritual understanding. Participants will reflect on their own faith journey.

sign me up

☐

Personal & Political: The 6 lessons of this class studies the lives of 19th century Unitarians and Universalists to see how their experiences and beliefs influences political activities.

sign me up

☐

World Religions I: In 6 lessons, this class explores how different religions around the world answer the basic questions like, "Who am I?" and "What is the best way to live?"

sign me up

☐

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

In this section, we offer questions for reflection based on ideas explored in this issue. You may wish to explore it individually or as part of a group discussion. To submit your reflection for possible inclusion in a future issue of Quest, tear off your answer and mail it back to us using the envelope included in the middle of this issue, or mail a longer reflection separately.

Do you share Rev. Clovice Lewis Jr.'s thoughts about the current role of integrity in our national politics? Why or why not?

If you would like us to be able to publish or share your writing in the future, remember to include "You have permission to edit and publish my words" somewhere on your submission.



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