

Changing Together



CHRISTINA RIVERA
Lead Ministry Team,
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When I think about transformation, I often think of when people say they had a “transformational experience,” or when, as religious professionals, we look for the ways in which ministry can be transformational for our congregants.

And it gets me thinking: What is all this transformation about? In my experience, a lot of people really don't like change. Even people who say they want to be “transformed” also can really not like change! Why would we seek that which we can't actually embrace? I tend to think it is because our entire human experience is leading to an ultimate transformation which we cannot know the result: death. So sometimes we are, at best, ambivalent, and other times outright hostile to change.

Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* is one of my favorite books about Change. Because in the book she explores the idea that God is not some distant almighty spirit, but rather the very up close and real experience of Change (capital C.) What an exciting idea to explore! Her most often quoted refrain from the book, and that which the central characters revolve, is “All that you touch You Change. All that you Change Changes you. The only lasting truth is Change. God is Change.”

When I first read that phrase as a young adult, it blew my mind! I loved it. I loved the capitalizations which conveyed the idea that what we're reading in the capitalized word carried with it the reverence of the word God. Here was a religion I could get behind. The idea that I could continually be both transformational and transformed?! Wow!

This idea helped me look at the changes in my young adult life in a new way. It helped me realize that while there was change that I couldn't control, I could still make that change part of my life. And it helped me realize that I had a deep responsibility for the Change that I created in the world. That Butler chose to capitalize the Y in “All that you touch You Change” was something I thought about frequently. That I continue to think about when faced with difficult situations and decisions.

In *Parable of the Sower*, the people who couldn't change, couldn't adapt, those who desperately clung to racism, sexism, and fascism, did not survive the new climate changed landscape. They met the ultimate Transformation while resisting the very changes which could have helped their survival. And when I think about the difficulties we face as Unitarian Universalists, I think about what it is we are resisting and could

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Quest

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“When you become the image of your own imagination, it's the most powerful thing you could ever do.”

RUPAUL

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Christina Rivera

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Multiple authors

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TRANSFORMATION

How do we remain open to change and transformation?

JACK

CLF Member, incarcerated in MA

Transforming is the action of changing every day, and each and every one of us is witness to transforming experiences whether we know it or not.

For those of us in prison: we meet new inmates, new staff. We are exposed to expressions of concern, love, happiness, sadness, sorrow, and even fear. Every one of our senses meets something new or different, something we had not noticed before,

something we had not heard before or smelled before, and we can be open to being transformed by them.

So often we think over the years that nothing is new, and prison life never changes; one day in prison can seem like any other. You know what day it is only by what food is served. But each day is new, each day is different. Each day has the opportunity for us to think differently, discover something new, something we didn't know before. You may discover someone you had only passed in the hall, someone

different from those you talk with every day.

Journaling is one of the best ways of always looking for that one thing, that one day that was new. It may be the one thing that transformed your day into something different, or that offered you the opportunity to be transformed in ways we had never thought possible. Use your senses. Look around. Let your mind out of the cell around you. Let your thoughts roam. Dare to be transformed, to welcome change. ■

JACOB

CLF Member, incarcerated in AR

Being open to change and transformation is an important part of growing spiritually, maturing and succeeding in life. Transformation is to change or alter in some way shape or form. To remain open to this means to put yourself in situations, to experience new things, to learn — especially to learn of other cultures and religions and practice the knowledge you've gained.

By keeping your mind open, you stay open to growth, change, and transformation, but you have to want to. ■



PHOTO BY SUZANNE D. WILLIAMS ON UNSPLASH

JASON

CLF member, incarcerated in IL

Transformation is an interesting word, especially for someone who has been in institutions for as long as I have.

As I write the word transformation, it makes me think of who and what I used to be. When I was younger, I was full of hate and fear. I acted impulsively and reacted to what people said or did towards me, which got me into a lot of trouble, as well as a number of fights.

Now, I'm no longer filled with hate, and though I still have some fears, they are nowhere near as bad as the ones I used to have. Now, instead of reacting to what people say or do, I take a mental step back, think things through, and then respond to them.

Now, because of the changes I have made and continue to make as I work to transform myself into the person I want to be, my life is a lot less stressful than it could be. ■

Your Transformations

FRANCES KOZIAR

CLF member

Our transformations
are our own, paths we choose
but are never forced to take.

What doesn't kill you does *not*
make you stronger, but—
you can choose for it to,
learn lessons from your suffering
that help you create what you believe in.

And those transformations are yours
to be proud of, no one
gets to take credit for the good inside of you
or the skills you have worked on, especially
not those who have abused you.

Because you choose your self
if not your path, and that has always
been your strength.



PHOTO BY HUMAM ON UNSPLASH

Transformation

KAY ANDERST

CLF Member, incarcerated in KS

When I read that April's theme was Transformation, I decided that it was time to share my story with the world for the first time. 2024 is a big year for me, as I have begun the Male to Female (MtF) transition process. It took a lot of prayer and soul searching to get to where I am now.

My journey begins in rural South Dakota. My parents are immigrants, I am a first generation American. We are of Eastern European and Jewish descent, so old Testament laws and morals were imprinted into me as I grew up. There was right and there was wrong with no shades of gray or alternate choices. The result of this strict upbringing was inner turmoil as I got older. I saw that my orientation and gender identity were not compatible with what I had been taught.

How can God love me, I thought, when every thought and action I took were tainted by sin? Why did He make me so broken, so against everything He wanted mankind to be? These questions haunted me every time I tried to pray.

In my 20s I turned away from God completely, going years without a single prayer. I embraced a bisexual

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Transformation

GARY

CLF Member, incarcerated in NC

Without darkness, nothing is born;
 Out of the midst of despair,
 a flame is kindled — hope.
 Prison can be a tomb,
 or a womb.
 A cocoon of transformation,
 the darkness
 becoming a metamorphosis.
 A triumph born of adversity,
 giving no counsel to the fear.
 The alchemy of hope,
 determination to survive.
 A refusal to live in shame,
 dwell in fear,
 countenance hate.
 Tenacity of the indomitable
 human spirit
 To tunnel under enemy lines
 planting mine fields of
 compassion, belief, strength,
 will, unity,
 To forever replace prejudice,
 intolerance, mistrust.
 Transformation occurs
 in the darkest of places.

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those things be the very things that can prepare us for survival?

In creating the community structures of *Parable of the Sower*, Butler relies heavily on the community building foundations seen in the “We” culture communities in which she was raised. “We” culture communities in the U.S. are most often found in Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous peoples as well as other BIPOC communities. Among many “We” cultural values, most strikingly, the requirement of putting group needs ahead of the individual needs is foundational in *Parable of the Sower*.

So I wonder: What would it look like to put the needs of our entire faith community ahead of our individual needs? What are the needs of Unitarian Universalism at large? How do we meet those needs even when it feels like we are not getting what we want as individuals? This feels a lot like the conversations which are going on right now around the proposed changes to the UU Principles and Sources, often referred to as Article II.

As we’ve written about in recent issues of Quest, our denomination is in the process of adopting new language to articulate and ground our faith community. This new language is framed as seven UU values: Justice,

Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Interdependence, Generosity and Love.

I wonder if haven’t we actually already made these changes in spirit. Haven’t we already touched, and thus Changed how we practice Unitarian Universalism? What if the proposed changes – the new UU values – are simply the language catching up to the spirit of Unitarian Universalism?

Perhaps we have already touched and been Changed. Because in the end, Change cannot be successfully resisted but it certainly can be influenced. And we can do so together. ■

Transformation, cont. from page 4

identity and found a measure of happiness. After a time, I figured out that I was transgender, and it was only then did the pieces start to fall into place.

I was then angry with God. How could he do this to me? Was he asleep at the switch the day I was born?

My turning point came when a woman I was dating told me something. She said that God didn’t make mistakes, and that He put me here on earth because she liked girls like me. I was like this to be there to love her. Something else she pointed out was that there were millions like me,

all through history. Would God have allowed so many of us to be made if not by his will?

This happened right before I came to prison. While it helped me make the final decision to make the MtF conversion, I have spent the last 4 years in hiding, biding my time until I felt it was safe enough to come out into the light. While difficult, God has helped me through this dark time. My personal relationship with Him is the strongest it’s been in my entire life.

So now is my time for change and transformation. It’s not an overnight process; in fact it will take a couple years. I will face many challenges ahead, but I know that what I do is by

design. This is what He wanted of me. This place, this prison, is no longer my place of confinement.

It is now God’s tool of transformation and change. I am right where I need to be. I will emerge from this cocoon in 2 years and like a butterfly, I will be free to live the life and be the woman he always wanted me to be.

If anyone reading this is contemplating similar choices, or has been down this road before, your welcome to share your story with me.

You may contact me at: Kay Anderst 18611-273, PO Box 1000 USP 2, Leavenworth, KS 66048. ■

Notice of the CLF Annual Meeting

To all members of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, Unitarian Universalist:

Per Article VII, Sections 1 and 2, of the Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF) By-laws, the 51st Annual Meeting will be held via video/telephone conference call and screen sharing on **Sunday, June 16, 2024 at 7:00PM EDT/4:00PM PDT**. RSVP to attend the meeting at www.clfuu.org/joinannual-meeting.

All those who have access to the Internet or phone are encouraged to join our meeting via Zoom and participate in the discussion. Meeting materials will include absentee ballots for those unable to attend in person. Please send your ballots to our office at the address on the ballot so we receive them no later than Friday 6/14/24 to ensure your vote can be included in our process..

We will send the meeting materials in April. All incarcerated members will automatically be sent paper copies of the meeting materials and do not need to send us a materials request form. All free world members will be automatically be emailed the materials as an electronic document. If we don't have an email address we will send a printed copy. Meeting materials will also be posted on our website (www.clfuu.org/annualmeeting). Free world members who would prefer a printed copy sent to them may request that by sending back the form on the final page of this issue of Quest, or calling the CLF office at 617-948-6150.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Report on highlights of CLF activities and finances
- Vote for the following leadership positions (see nominations from Nominating Committee in the packet):
 - Elect three members to 3-year terms on the board of directors,
 - Elect one member to 2-year term on the board of directors to fill a term vacated before the term was finished,
 - Elect one member to 1-year term on the board of directors to fill a term vacated before the term was finished,
 - Elect one member to a 3-year term on the nominating committee,
 - Elect one member to a 1-year term on the nominating committee to fill a term vacated before the term was finished,,
 - Elect a clerk and treasurer for one year

We will elect a moderator from among members present to preside at the meeting.

One of the important tasks we undertake as a congregation is voting for our elected leadership, and my hope is that as many members of the congregation will participate as possible.

Aisha Ansano, *Board Chair*

If you are a free world member of the CLF and you would like to receive Annual Meeting materials by mail, please use the tear-off form on the final page of this issue to submit your request.

All incarcerated members will automatically receive these materials by mail.



UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY
VIRTUAL GA • JUNE 20 - 23, 2024

Would you like to represent the Church of the Larger Fellowship at General Assembly?

General Assembly (GA) is the annual gathering of UUs from churches across the country to worship together, learn together and make decisions about how we run the association of congregations, and what we stand for as an association of congregations. GA 2024 will be held fully online from June 20-23, 2024 and will include worship, speakers, access to on-demand workshops, and sessions for association business (called General Sessions) that this year will include discussion and voting on the new proposed Article II of the UUA bylaws.

While anyone can attend GA, only congregational delegates can vote on association business. The CLF is entitled to 22 GA delegates. GA General Sessions will be held on 6/20 from 1-2pm and 5-6pm ET, on 6/21 and 6/22 from 2:30-5pm ET, and on 6/23 from 3-5pm ET. Delegates should be able to be online to attend the majority of these General Sessions live. CLF delegates vote their conscience on matters related to the denomination of Unitarian Universalism, and are responsible for their own expenses. There is no registration fee for delegates who are attending business portion of GA (General Sessions) only and not the worship and programs.

If you'd like to participate in GA 2024 as a CLF delegate, please fill out the online application at clfu.org/delegate-application. Rev. Michael will be leading a training for CLF GA delegates later in the spring. For more information about General Assembly, visit www.uua.org/ga.

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.

What has transformation looked like in your life?

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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Request materials for the CLF Annual Meeting

If you would like to receive materials for the CLF Annual Meeting by mail, please provide us with your full name and address, and mail this slip back to us at 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston MA, 02210.

FULL NAME _____

ADDRESS _____
