



“Generosity as an Act of Love”

Rev. Paige Getty

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Food and water for our bodies. Breathable air. Shelter from the dangers of the natural elements.

There is not a whole lot that we humans require for mere survival. And yet, despite our basic animal nature, the mere survival of our bodies and the procreation of our species is not what most of us live for. Most of us are motivated also to learn, to grow, to connect, to express ourselves. We seek companionship; we want to be known for who we truly, uniquely are; we long to belong, not to be excluded and lonely; we yearn to be understood, and we seek to understand. We are meaning-makers. And so we write music and stories; we build things; we explore and experiment and create; we read and watch and listen; we make art; we make *religion*.

We humans make religion—its scriptures, its traditions, its rituals, its institutionalization, its countless variations. We have made religion—and continue to craft it, just as it continues to shape us—in our effort to make meaning of our human lives, as we explore questions of our origins, where we came from, why we are here, what is right and wrong, what we deserve from one another in our human relationships, what does this life mean, what is the point of it all?

All over the world, and for as far back as we can see in our human history, we humans have made religion. And in our tiny little part of the world here in Howard County, Maryland, we humans have made—and continue to craft—this particular expression of that religious impulse, in the form of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia.

Every year at this time, as we invite each other to reflect thoughtfully on how we will invest in the financial livelihood of the congregation in the next fiscal year, I ask myself, does this congregation really matter? So what if we don't continue to contribute financially? If UUCC ceased to exist as an institution, would the



world as a whole—or even this local community—be worse off? Are our lives better because of UUCC?

Inevitably the conclusion is the same: Life in general would go on—and our specific lives would go on; we as individuals would survive UUCC's loss. But we would lose something vital that sustains more than just our bodies—although our physical forms benefit from the nourishment of our connections, too. This vitality is an ineffable thing—not concrete in itself, and greater than the sum of any parts. This vitality isn't a person or a program or a small group; it can't be located on an organizational chart or contained in a single catchy slogan. AND it is alive and evident in so many specific, and often very personal, ways. Each of you has your own examples, but here are a few ways that I've observed the vitality of UUCC just in the past year:

- The extraordinary response of staff and loads of volunteers to the reality of a pandemic shutdown a year ago—moving live worship to an accessible virtual platform and organizing members to stay in touch with one another when we knew we'd be physically separated for a long while.
- The entirely revamped functioning of our Chalice Choir, learning new technology and techniques and spending an abundant amount of time performing and recording virtual anthems—another one of which we get to experience in just a few minutes.
- The presence in worship of friends and members across the continent (and sometimes around the globe!) who wouldn't be able to gather if not for our pandemic-inspired use of technology.
- Staff facilitating monthly sessions for parents to explore how best to raise healthy children who are well-informed and nurtured in their sexuality
- The dozen or more members who restock the Little Free Pantry twice a day, and who pack bags to give to neighborhood families—and those who donate food and funds to make this effort possible.
- UUCC staff and members' ongoing involvement in the Howard County Courageous Conversations project.
- The person who finally expressed their queer identity in their 6th or 7th decade of life—only after finding this spiritual community who will embrace them fully, without judgment or ostracization.
- The dedication of those who show up month after month to bear witness that Black Lives Matter.



- The innovations of our staff members who, again and again, create new content to keep us connected with one another—through regular mailings to families with children; monthly family chapel productions; weekly Rooted & Reaching podcasts to help us learn interesting things about one another that we might not ever otherwise know.

UUCC's vitality is evident in the dedicated investment of time that our Trust & Reconciliation Committee has demonstrated over the past six months as we strive to heal wounds and strengthen relationships; it's evident in the work of our Building a Beloved Community Committee who is leading an effort to be even more just and loving and compassionate; it's evident in the work of all those who are working with our Climate Team, and were involved in UU the Vote, and who care for each other through our Karuna pastoral ministry and our Reflection Groups' small group ministry; and it's evident in the visceral, emotional response that many of us experience when we see pictures of the Owen Brown Interfaith Center, or recordings of our musicians performing in Sanctuary C.

And not only are our lives better—more vital—because of UUCC, but UUCC is more vital because of each of us who invests of our resources—our resources of heart and mind, of time and talent and care, and of course our resources of money ... to keep the building functional and beautiful; to compensate our staff fairly; to provide supplies and curricula and sheet music for religious exploration through education and artistic expression; to provide some sustenance and comfort to our hungry neighbors; to ensure that our physical plant is as sustainable and environmentally friendly as possible; to fund the technological resources that are keeping us connected and on which we'll continue to depend, even when most of us are able to gather again in our beloved sanctuary and classrooms.

Over the next few weeks as our pledge drive team invites you to make a financial commitment for next fiscal year—so we can craft a budget now—I encourage you to think about all the things you love about UUCC and that make it a vital part of your life and a vital part of our community. Does UUCC matter? If the answer is yes, then make your pledge *matter*.

In some very real ways, our lives depend on it.



[pause]

As our celebration continues this morning, we're going to hear a new recording of a beloved anthem from our Chalice Choir—who are currently performing as the UUCC Stay-at-Home Choir. And our Music Director Michael Adcock is going to give us a little bit of background to make the experience even richer. But BEFORE that, we have something to say to Michael...

Michael has been working for UUCC for more than 30 years, bringing his music and his heart and his all-around brilliance to us on Sunday mornings and in Chalice Concerts and in the delicious foods he prepares and shares. He is long overdue for a sabbatical, and I am very pleased that we've finally gotten our collective act together to give him that well-deserved and much-needed break ... beginning tomorrow. Michael, you are a treasure. We will miss you and will be so glad to welcome you back to the UUCC keyboard in August. In the meantime, may this sabbatical be restorative and meaningful. Take care of you, with our heartfelt blessing.