

The Questions from The "Questions & Thoughtful Answers" Service

- questions which were "left out" of the service, due to time constraints -

1. We recite the unison affirmation: "Love is the Spirit of this Church..." nearly every week. Do you feel this particular affirmation needs to be recited most weeks, or can the affirmation vary?

To be answered in a sermon sometime this year. Great question!

2. Where/when would you like a "do-over"? Is there one time or place you'd like a second chance?

There are many I'd wish to do in my life. One that comes to mind much of the time was in 1979 when the woman with whom I lived and I decided that an unplanned pregnancy had to end with an abortion. We weren't really adult enough to have a family. I think of that decision 30 years later and how those twins would have been about 31 now. It's very sobering.

3. How do you pray? How often?

Another sermon topic but I don't pray to a deity. I do daily meditation and that's sometimes a little like prayer except as a constant blessing starting with myself, then to others, and then to the whole world as metta (lovingkindness) practice.

4. Do *you* change things, or use consensus? I would like 11 am services to be one hour max. ☺

My response is that personally I wonder if moving the schedule back a bit would be helpful to the life of the Fellowship. It's a very late time to have a formal service at 11 and I wonder if it would be more supportive to friends, members, and visitors to have a Sunday morning with a format like this:

Reflective Service 9:30 - 10 a.m. in Social Hall with chairs in circle

Regular Service 10:00 - 11:10 in Sanctuary

Coffee Hour 11:10 to whenever

People would then be able to plan for their days earlier and then also have time for a combined coffee hour/refreshment time. I'd love to hear more about how people would feel about such a change.

5. How can we, as peace-loving Unitarians, confront & counter the negative imagines of us propagated by neo-conservative Christians?

Another sermon topic - don't forget the Universalist half of us, however. Conservative Christians would be astonished to learn that our Universalist heritage included folk who were evangelical liberal Christians.

6. Have you ever conducted a service near St. Francis Day for the "Blessing of the Animals?"

No, but have always wanted to do so. Anyone up to helping do it this year or next?

7. When is your birthday?

December 29, 1949

8. What does Buddha say about forgiveness?

To be part of the sermon this coming Sunday - August 22.

- questions asked & responded to (By Alex) during the August 15th Service -

1. What is your favorite word?

My favorite word is "hope" because it expresses the positive possibilities of life and the future without saying it's predestined or so idealistic that we assume things will be fine.

2. What are your thoughts about the use of the democratic process in the running of the church?

The democratic process is messy. It doesn't work well with consensus and the democratic process usually means there will be winners and losers at any given point. That's a reality of democracy but I think it's a lot better than leaving the governing and decision making to one or two or five people behind the scenes. I wonder sometimes if we UU's fear the potential conflict of winning and losing in the democratic process in churches. I'd add here that congregations elect boards of trustees to represent them in the democratic process.

3. How big a tent can we create when some of us are unmoved by religious or spiritual expressions that are unable to embrace peeing, pooping, and sex while others are genuinely pained by such religious delight in the fullness of the physical world?

This question to me speaks of a dynamic tension between the lofty headiness of theology and religion on the one hand and an earthy appreciation of body and intuitive religion on the other. Western society and religion has wrestled with this tension for thousands of years. Some of you probably have read Karen Armstrong who is a feminist scholar and theologian. She wrote a fascinating book recently called "The Case for God" guaranteed to annoy both fundamentalists and atheists. She argues that the Western world has seen God as Logos (rationality, head, intellect driven) rather than Mythos (body, intuition, heart, senses). So the question becomes for me at least whether we can understand religion to be as much sensate as it is rationality and intellect.

4. Last Sunday you spoke of reverence. Reverence for the body and reverence for the irreverent. What were the other two?

The others are reverence with mind and reverence with spirit or heart. I will be speaking further of all four types of reverence later this fall.

5. With so many community needs, when does a church know when it is reaching a point of overwhelming its members in the call for time and money? Somehow churches must recognize that time & money is finite, just as a family does. How does a church define its limited resources versus its community needs?

One answer is that everyone needs to know when to say "no" but that also means we need to move beyond any idea that we are indispensable. That's true whether one is a minister, person in leadership, board member, coffee maker, or anyone who has been heart and soul of a community. I'd also suggest that we need to ask what one or two things we really do well. There are plenty of 'faults' or areas of improvement in any religious community. Those are important but we always have to start with 'what do we do well here?' that's positive. Then we go on to another thing we do well and so on. Communities can't do everything and UU's are excellent at coming up with many great ideas and themes - they have to be prioritized and really understood as options and not necessities unless and until the congregation wants to take them on.

6. What profession other than your own would you like to attempt, which you have not yet attempted?

I'd have wanted to be a parent. I never got around to it and it's too late now in this lifetime to be a parent. It's powerful profession and I suspect my life would have been much richer for it.

7. If Heaven exists (*a big if*) what would you like to hear God say when you arrive at the Pearly Gates? ☺

"You got off the wrong exit," is probably what She'd say and I hope she'd be willing to give me a probation status for awhile and not demand I pay a toll.

8. The sculptor Eric Wright said, "I've learned that the quality of my life is the result of the quality of the questions I ask." What questions have you asked that greatly increased the quality of your life or set you upon a course for the better, that you otherwise would not have taken?

When I was a child on a farm in Maine, I used to love to lie on a haystack of old hay in the very early spring sun in March. The snow would be melting and the sun would be warm enough to warm that old hay and bring out the aroma of the grass. I remember lying there in the sun on that hay and so appreciative of the world. I'd think "how could it be so wonderful?" and I think that question has possessed me my whole life to understand and feel how wonderful the world can be.

9. What are your thoughts about "conversations" aka "talk back" at the end of the service? To what degree should the comments be?

I personally think that 'conversations' are best after the service is over. This is why: first, I've never seen a group of UU folk who haven't had a wonderful dialogue start and then be happy it's over in 10 minutes. It's really hard to start a good conversation and then have to end it due to time. Second, I know that people have to pick up their children and go home so I really wonder if it is serving the whole community if just a few folks speak up every Sunday that it is done. Third, I've seen options where the talk back or conversation is after the service when people can get refreshments and come back to have a really detailed and fleshed out conversation about the service. That appeals to me much more than a truncated commentary. And finally I'd say this even though you might get angry at me for saying it: I suspect that conversations in the service keep a lot of people hostage when they really want the service to be done or to reflect silently.

10. What will you do to increase the participation of young couples & college

students?

I'd have the website and service format as user-friendly and interactive as possible. Millennial Generation folk are very skilled at rapid and sensory input from the internet and I'd use that skill to help create a multi-media approach to Sunday services and to our presence on the Web. I'd also include them in the Communications Task Force meeting we'll have next week to brainstorm ideas about enhanced communications here.

11. How will you keep visitors involved in the activities of the Fellowship?

That's probably a question that the Membership Committee and I need to address. I suspect that giving them options for adult RE classes, making sure that their children are cared for, and given them some good stimulation on Sundays and other days will be helpful. They should also be able to attend small group ministry (aka covenant circles) if they wish.

12. What outreach ideas do you have for our congregation to be active in the community?

To be answered later as I get to know the culture here and listen to you and your committees.
