

One Step, One Journey, Sunday, January 12, 2014

What Is Church For by Liz Weber

The Worship Committee has envisioned a new program, “One Step, One Journey,” in which we invite people to share for a few minutes on a spiritual topic or question such as:

- A personal spiritual practice
- A recent experience that touched you deeply
- What is your idea of god?
- Or, How do you know you’re UU when you’re not at church?

Last week we heard from Barb Seidl about her practice of writing a gratitude list. Today I’m responding to the question, “What is church for?”

Church is for a lot of things, of course.

We gather to deepen our faith, explore our spirituality, make meaning of change and loss, celebrate milestones. We work for justice, nurture our children and youth, sing, and pray. In all of this, church offers us two things: a place to bring our whole selves and a place to practice being our best selves.

First, church is where we can bring our whole selves. As Unitarian Universalists, we believe in the inherent worth and dignity of each person. Church offers us a place to be accepted and loved for who we are. We don’t have to hide parts of ourselves because there is nothing about us that needs to be hidden. As a child in the 80s and 90s, my UU church was one of the very few places where I had gay and lesbian role models. Church was the first community in which I came out; I was unashamed and safe in doing so. At church we affirm that each of us is simply a human being, living our own journey. We are welcome in times of need as well as times of plenty. I found solace in the Arlington Street community when I was grieving for my late partner Katie Tyson. I didn’t have to try to be “okay.” I could just come as I was, allowing others to be with me in my pain. Church gives us space to be vulnerable. We can share our whole selves and be affirmed for who we are in this moment.

Church is also where we practice being our best selves. Here we have the opportunity to try, to sometimes fail, and to try again. We experiment with a new role or a new way of being. In relationship, we become the person we wish to be. I learn to listen more deeply each time I serve as the Candles Coordinator. In the Candles pew, I put aside the distractions of my cell phone, to-do list, and cares from the week in order to sit with people who come to share their joys and sorrows. Being fully present in the Candles pew allows me to connect with others in my community. Church teaches us to be our best selves in communion with one another. We also learn to serve our community and wider world. When I am fully present in the Candles pew, I am practicing being fully present for my life at home as well. Within our community, we continue on our path of becoming an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, congregation. In partnership with others, we work to feed people who are hungry, to fix our country’s broken immigration policy, and more. We come to church to learn to be our best selves; then we work to make our church and world more whole, too.

We come to church to be and to grow. We bring our whole selves, and we learn how to live as our best selves. This is a spiritual practice that informs each of our other spiritual practices. This is part of what it means to be in spiritual community.