

Unitarian Universalist Views of Faith in the Workplace

Rosemarie C. Smurzynski, Editor

How do you express your faith in the work that you do? How do religious values and spiritual practice challenge your work life?

In *Democracy in America* (1835), Alexis de Toqueville noted the American hunger for a spiritual life. How we “steal an hour” to “lay aside the petty passions which agitate life” and “stray into an ideal world where all is great, eternal and pure.” Many recognize that same hunger today.

The five writers below tell of commitment to Unitarian Universalist values of equality, human dignity, justice, and compassion and how they have accepted the challenge to integrate them more fully into the whole of their lives, particularly their vocational lives.

Jennifer Deaderick

When I was doing stand up comedy, the joy was in making the people in the audience aware of each other. Some of my favorite memories are of nights when I decided to use no prepared material. Instead I used my ten minutes to just banter with the audience, teasing them slightly, pointing them out to each other. I think that’s why people go to comedy clubs, to be part of something, to be talked to directly and to share that with the strangers in the audience with them.

When I teach computer classes, I have an eye toward getting the class to be a group, getting them to see each other. It’s a compulsion, and I think the drive comes from being raised as a Unitarian Universalist. I have found that at work, I can spot someone who grew up UU, especially if we’re in a meeting together. We have a way of doing things, a need to make sure everyone is heard, that the procedure is fair. The training that we get through our religious education classes and our committee meetings is amazing. In every human interaction that I have, my UU faith shapes the choices I make, but it’s rarely very conscious. I don’t have a bracelet that says “WWUUD,” (What Would a UU Do?). The desire to connect flows up naturally, and because it is natural, it feels right and it works. One of our stated goals is world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. A tall order, but one we can work toward through the practice of one of our other Principles, affirming the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large. As UUs, we are taught to feel a responsibility to the world and we are encouraged to rely on our powers of reason—a solid combination.

Jennifer Deaderick is a member of the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York, New York.

Jack Cox

As an out gay man and appointed officer of a Fortune 100 financial services company, I think a lot about how I want to be treated and valued for my contributions to my employer's success. I am guided by our UU Principles. I strive to practice them with others and want them applied to me as well. These Principles affirm that personal and professional dignity is rooted in ethical behavior. They underlie my sense of fairness in hiring decisions and in coaching and assessing the performance of others. They sustain my hope that as a role model for diversity and through my voice as an officer in my company, I can help implement positive change from within. This chance is why I continue to work for an employer that does not yet include sexual orientation in its employment non-discrimination policy or cover unmarried partners in its employee benefit programs.

My faith empowers me to accept the responsibility of leading my life by example, to become bolder and more outspoken about the wrongs and lost opportunities I see in life and at work. I don't always succeed but I know I will continue to try.

Jack Cox is a member of Unitarian Universalist Area Church at First Parish in Sherborn, Massachusetts.

Cheng Imm Tan

As an immigrant Asian woman who came to the United States twenty-three years ago, I saw this country as the land of opportunity, freedom, and equality. I also saw injustices related to race and class. In 1991 I was ordained a UU community minister. Currently, I practice ministry in Boston as the director of the Mayor's Office of New Bostonians. I meet with leaders from diverse immigrant communities to address the key issues of language, culture, and immigration, as well as discrimination. There is no question in my mind that oppressive structures need to be changed.

Everyone loses when racism prevails. There is no opportunity to learn from the wisdom of different people or experience the wealth of different cultures. We find interconnection and build our capacity to care and create justice together through learning each other's histories and stories of struggle

How do activists who want to eliminate injustice and oppression avoid getting caught in their own egos, agendas, and delusions? How do they avoid recreating another set of oppressive structures? To keep moving forward, I've learned that I also need to stop and be still—to listen to the truth of who I am, be gentle in the places where I struggle with myself, and be kind to those parts of myself that I reject or judge harshly. Meeting "internal enemies" is the spiritual work of self-love. I embrace them with the same spirit of acceptance and love that I try to hold the world in. This is the spiritual work I need to

do in order to keep embracing justice in the world and embracing all of myself with a loving heart.

Cheng Imm Tan is an ordained UU community minister, formerly senior associate minister at UU Urban Ministry in Boston.

Dorothy Smith-Patterson

I have worked in many places as a public health nurse, health educator, and consultant, including a well baby clinic in Osegere, Nigeria, and a school for women in Pohnpe, Micronesia. I was a health planner in the first anti-poverty program in Washington, D.C., and I worked with Vietnamese orphans who were maimed, burned, and blinded by American bombs. I've been a nurse in a camp for diabetic children and run a clinic for Moslem women in Ibadan, Nigeria. I was a UU Service Committee volunteer on a burned church rebuilding project in Bologi, Alabama.

Everyplace I have worked, as a volunteer or as an employee, I have seen people doing the best they can to make life better for themselves and their families with the resources they have.

Now in my mid-seventies, I realize that I am fully invested in the joys and challenges of human interaction and the search for answers (although every answer I seek seems to lead to more questions). I perceive my personal and work values as indistinguishable. My family, demanding teachers, and members of my childhood Union Baptist Church told me, early on, that I had a duty to make things better. Unitarian Universalist Principles provide both a vision and an ethical base for me, somewhere between the stars and the stones. While accepting the ambiguities of my existence and my journey, I am guided by my belief in the power of one person to make a difference and by the changing social construct of history and culture.

Life matters. People matter. I am here—still questing, still working, still trying to make the world a better and healthier place.

Dorothy Smith-Patterson is a member of the Unitarian Universalist Society in San Francisco, California.

David Provost

As a young man working my way up the corporate ladder, I concentrated on perfecting my professional financial skills while looking forward to the day when I would become a “success.” I achieved my personal career goals—getting promotions, more responsibility, and larger salaries—but I felt unfulfilled.

After much personal reflection, I decided the void was caused by the lack of a connection between my career and my values. My professional life was out of sync with my spiritual life. I saw that my work efforts made a few people wealthy but did not make a meaningful contribution to society at large. I was living up to my potential as a professional, but I was not living up to my potential as a full human being.

After consulting with my wife and family, I shifted my career goals so that my work would be more in keeping with a commitment I always had to social justice. I am working now on training and advising low-income entrepreneurs and worker-owned cooperatives designed to enhance the livelihoods and lives of entire communities. Working for economic justice not only provides me with a living but is consistent with my beliefs. At the end of the day I know that I have accomplished something meaningful.

David Provost is a former treasurer of the Unitarian Universalist Association and a member of the Unitarian Church in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The editor, Rev. Rosemarie C. Smurzynski, is acting district executive for the New Hampshire/Vermont District of the Unitarian Universalist Association. She has served parishes in Sherborn, Melrose, Andover, and Belmont, Massachusetts.