

The Spirituality of Service

The Moment

Do you remember the first day you walked into your Unitarian Universalist community or the first time you attended a Sunday morning worship service or a new member class? Perhaps you had “the moment”? The moment can be a profound feeling; it can be a sense of clarity or excitement, and maybe a little nervousness; it can bring a sense of commitment to something larger than yourself alone. You may have had a moment or several in which you have said or thought to yourself, “Yes, these are my people. Yes, this could be my spiritual home.” It is a special moment that is cherished by Unitarian Universalists, young and old, generation after generation. Do you remember that moment?

After *the moment*, a likely next step for many is to wonder how to get more involved in the congregation. In all of our religious communities across the country, there are going to be lots of things you can do to get involved. But before you jump right in to the deep end or offer to fill a need, even a very important need, within your congregation, it’s a good idea to ask some questions about your gifts and passions in life. It can be meaningful to return to that profound moment and try to remember clearly why this community began to feel like home. In other words, when it comes to serving within our congregations, we need to get down to the heart of the matter—we need to return to our hearts—so that the service we do can be truly life-giving.

Let Your Life Speak

What if we changed our starting point around conversations of service and lay leadership by asking first, “What is really at the heart of it all for me? Why am I here? Why did I say yes to being a part of *this* community? And what are my gifts and passions that I can offer to others?” It is important to ask these questions because ours is a living tradition, one that is made up mainly with volunteers like yourself who care about its future impact in the world. Therefore, the service must be meaningful not just to the congregation but to you as well.

Author and educator Parker Palmer believes that we must listen deeply to the truth that already exists within us. By doing so, he says, you can let your life speak and remind you of the things that are life-giving and renewing. You can hear a different *call*, a call from a voice inside you that can point you on your way. Because let’s be honest: Not all service and leadership within the religious community will make your heart sing. For example, you might not be the most outdoorsy kind of person. If that’s the case, weeding the garden or removing poison ivy might not really bring out your best! Instead, when you give yourself the gift of silence and let your life speak, you might begin to hear a way that you can serve your community with the gifts and passions you have always had. What makes your heart sing? Let your life speak and let’s get started.

Serving with Love, Growing in Spirit

As a Unitarian Universalist minister, I have talked with so many members, some long-term but mainly newer folks, who are excited and eager to get involved in the congregation. After encouraging people to listen deeply to what their gifts and passions might be, I invite them to be

creative in thinking how they can serve with love and grow in spirit. Look at the ministry areas that already exist in your local congregation. You might feel drawn to share your gifts in an area in which you are already skilled, or perhaps to spend more time serving and learning in an area that would help you explore something interesting and new. Some options might include singing in the choir, caring for the building, mentoring young people, working on a congregational social event, or organizing a group to work on some aspect of the congregation's social justice mission.

Sometimes the actual activities you are involved in will help you grow, but what I have noticed is that more often than not, the deep meaning and growth come from the connections you can make with others along the way. It's sort of like that saying about the journey being more important than the destination. I marvel at the beautiful relationships that are nurtured when people come together to serve the community. Each of us can grow as individuals, but service in a religious community offers spiritual growth in meaningful relationship with others.

But what happens if you feel that the options for serving in your community do not bring out your best when it comes to your gifts and passions? Sometimes there just isn't a program or leadership opportunity that is aligned with your gifts. The beauty of our living tradition is that it is *living*, which means it can grow and change with the gifts we each bring to it. If there is not a way to serve in the way that will best help you grow, consider the kind of program that would help you grow and find others who can help you make it happen. The creative spirit of service can unleash a wellspring of untapped human possibility. When you listen deeply to your inner voice, you can not only share your gifts and grow in spirit but also open the doors to a more vibrant congregational life for others in your community!

The Long and Winding Road

Getting more involved in your congregation is a wonderful opportunity. And it is just the beginning. Enjoy and trust that the road is long and winding. Know that there is a time and a place for all things. Right now, you might be interested in focusing in one area of church life. And that's great. You do not have to do it all. Over time, your spiritual growth and involvement in the church will change and the relationships you nurture along the way will offer you sustenance. And the best part is that there will be new members and volunteers following your example of serving a community that you love.

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For Further Reading

These books, as well as packs of 25 copies of this pamphlet, can be purchased at inSpirit: The UU Book and Gift Shop at uua.org/bookstore.

Kathleen Montgomery, Editor. *Bless the Imperfect: Meditations for Congregational Leaders* (Skinner House)

Erik Walker Wikstrom. *Serving with Grace: Lay Leadership as a Spiritual Practice*
(Skinner House)