

You Are Not Alone

As humans, we seek communities to which we can belong, especially in times when we feel alone because of who we are or what we are passionate about. In these times, with so much polarization, it can be hard to find a place to belong, especially if one lives in an environment hostile to one's values or to one's identities. But you are not alone.

Values

Religious and ethical values that hold to the worth and humanity of all people can lead us to take moral positions on gun control, immigration, and care and service to the hungry and homeless. People who hold such moral positions are shunned and silenced in some areas of the United States. It can be difficult to express one's progressive religious values against a tide of opposing values. It helps to be with others who are concerned about these issues too. Belonging, as Rev. Robin Barlett says, is about finding like-hearted people.

Our Unitarian Universalist congregations can be islands of solidarity in the sea of fear, distrust, and polarization. Here we gather to share progressive values framed by the inherent worth and dignity of all people and awareness of our place in the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. These values place us squarely on the side of love and life.

Our congregations and other faith communities can be islands of rest and renewal but also challenge us to resist the forces of oppression beyond our communities and inside ourselves. They are places where we can shape and plan our resistance with others who have a similar vision, combining our energy and our passions to create the change we wish to see in the world. Together we work to end the evils that plague us by focusing on solutions, be they personal, local, national, or global. Our congregations provide space for us to be brave, to explore ways that we can bring justice and compassion to a bruised and hurting world. Our faith homes are places to explore ways to undo white supremacy culture, which places white males at the pinnacle of society; transphobia and homophobia, which threaten people's ability to be who they are and love who they love; religious persecution, sexism, ableism, and so many of the ways that we categorize and separate people. Our progressive voice is a cry for justice linked with thousands of others to create a world free of oppression, fear, and hatred.

We are committed to caring for one another, the communities in which we live, and our global community. Our worship services are opportunities to reflect on others' needs as well as our own. Our congregations are often engaged in social justice ministries in the local area and we understand that spirituality must be lived in the world, not just talked about on Sunday mornings.

Identity

People of color; LGBTQ people; people with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities; poor people; and those with marginalized religious affiliations—all are regularly singled out and isolated, targeted for hatred and violence.

Although no community is exempt from the forces that divide human beings from one another, at our best we strive to expand the circle of our community ever more and provide sanctuary against the prevailing winds of fear and anger, violence and hatred, which do the most harm to those whom society deems "other" and "lesser."

We work together to provide a caring environment for adults, children, and youth. We gather in

religious community for replenishment, to celebrate and sing, meditate and pray, laugh and learn, together. Our spiritual wells are refilled with the hope and promise of community coming together.

In Unitarian Universalist communities, we are anchored by mutual promises that call us all into care for one another, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another. The search for safety is a natural human drive, but congregations are not places to hide from the world and the work that we are called to do to make it better. They are not immune to the ways privilege and oppression are internalized and manifested. Nor are they places to avoid accountability for the ways we all participate in oppressive systems. But they are full of people who are called by our Principles to be intentional about offering understanding and support to each other. Unitarian Universalism is a faith centered on nurturing the most compassionate and loving versions of ourselves. Our covenants ask us to place relationships first, no matter how we differ in belief, background, life experience, or identity, and our faith is shaped by our commitment to our covenants. There are many within our congregations who can offer a supportive shoulder to lean on and affirmation that you are loved.

In these sacred places, we quest for spiritual maturity and depth, appreciation of each person's uniqueness, and love for each other just as we are. We gather, as UU theologian James Luther Adams wrote, "to practice what it means to be human" and to learn about selves in community. As we share that exploration and experience with others, we expand the circle ever more, embracing the diversity of the world in which we live. We seek to create brave space where people come to understand that we all are loved and lovable, valued and valuable. We all have talents and treasures to share from our unique experiences and identities. UU congregations create the opportunity for spiritual exploration, deeper self-understanding, and self-acceptance.

Audre Lorde wrote: "...at last you'll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking." Our Unitarian Universalist congregations welcome you, whoever you are, as you are, and hope to inspire and encourage you to live a life of integrity, service, and love.

Rev. Paul Langston-Daley was ordained as a Unitarian Universalist minister in 1997. He has served congregations large and small as settled, interim, and consulting minister in six states. He holds a master's degree in restorative practices and youth counseling from the International Institute for Restorative Practices. He has a background in organizing, social justice work, and engaging restorative practices with congregations in conflict. Rev. Paul is a transgender man living in Massachusetts with his wife Victoria and their dog Bayla. He brings all of this experience to his work with congregations and the organization Reach Our Goals.

For Further Reading

Meg Riley, ed., *Testimony: The Transformative Power of Unitarian Universalism* (Skinner House Books), available from uua.org/bookstore

Marta Valentín, "A Call to Faith in Turbulent Times," uua.org/small-group/call-faith-turbulent-times (Unitarian Universalist Association)

Nathan C. Walker, *Cultivating Empathy: The Worth and Dignity of Every Person—Without Exception* (Skinner House Books), available from uua.org/bookstore

Packs of 25 copies of this pamphlet can be ordered from inSpirit: The UU Book and Gift Shop at uua.org/bookstore