



ransforming Times



Community
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Ragged individualism is a phrase used by author Gregg Levoy to describe a certain misguided concept of self-reliance that keeps people from asking for help, even when they need it the most. The phrase is an apt description of the isolation and loneliness rampant in our culture today. I don't think this is quite what Ralph Waldo Emerson had in mind when he wrote his famous essay on self-reliance.

Community is the antidote to ragged individualism

Peter Morales, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, cites a study published in the American Sociological Review in 1985 and repeated in 2004. The findings were so startling they made both the New York Times and the Washington Post. One key question asked participants how many people they know with whom they can confide personal information.

Morales summarizes the study results this way: "... almost half of Americans—half—only half have a single, close relationship outside of the household. Imagine that. Imagine that."

This translates to a huge number of "ragged individuals," hungry for what a religious community such as ours has to offer. People are hungry for connection – human connection that is real and trustworthy. It's a spiritual hunger.

Morales says the we can be the religion for our time. I agree. If we at UUCT are to be the religion for our time here in Tucson, I need your help.

Don't worry. I'm not asking for money. Yes, the church always needs money, but I'm asking for something far more valuable. I'm asking you to offer the best of who you are that we might create the kind of community that feeds a spiritual hunger. I can't do it alone.

I need your good will. The church community is made of human beings. Part of being human is being imperfect, limited, and subject to brokenness. When mistakes are made, as they will be – by me, church staff, church leaders, and church members – I need you to assume good intent. These days, lives are stretched thin by economic realities and family obligations. Everyone is doing the best they can, and that's all that can be asked of anyone.

I need you to support your elected and appointed church leaders. The institution of the church relies on human effort for its maintenance. I need you to support those who do the work of maintaining the institution – even when you disagree with what they do or how they do it. They give of themselves on behalf of the whole congregation. In general, people are more motivated by praise and thanks than they are by blame and criticism. I need you to thank people who do work for the church.

I need you to do the spiritual work of making friends with newcomers. Those who come through our doors for the first, second, or third time are spiritually hungry. They come here to heal their ragged souls. They need you – yes **you** – to make a connection and help them to become part of our congregational community.

Galen Guengerich, Senior Minister of the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City says "When God is no longer supernatural, religion becomes more important, not less." Transcendence is found in those moments of loving and being loved – in relationship – in religious community.

We can be the religion for our time. Will you help me make it so?

Diane

Transforming Times is organized around theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church's offerings are by no means limited to the themes. They do provide common ground for Community conversation, a way to gain more meaning and depth. We want to hear many perspectives on each theme. You are invited to submit your original poetry, artwork, or short essays of 400 words or less. Be warned: seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

September: Vision
October: Trust
November: Community
December: Grace
January: Stewardship

February: Justice
March: Hope
April: Credo
May: Ritual
June: Beauty

Community:

My father enjoys telling a story from his time as the music director for the Georgia Methodist Pastor's Retreat in the early 1990s, when Tony Campolo was giving the keynote address. Campolo, an evangelical, red-letter Christian that served in an urban Southside Chicago church at the time, had a reputation for powerful oratory and speaking truth to power. Dad was sitting in one of Georgia's largest Methodist sanctuary's, slightly behind Campolo, in plain view of room full of preachers. And Campolo said, "Yesterday, 100's of people died of starvation in our world." He paused, and then continued, "Yesterday, 100's of people died of starvation, and you people don't give a \$!?!." The pause this time was longer, and I imagine it from the perspective of my father who stared out at the room full of people wrestling with how they would react to Campolo's assessment of their Christian charity. He finished his thought by saying, "Yesterday, 100s of people died of starvation in our world, and you people are more concerned that I said \$!?! in this sanctuary, than that 100s of people died yesterday." From my Dad's perspective looking into the room, Campolo appeared to have evaluated his audience accurately. Campolo's message to the Methodist ministers in the room was, in part, to remember that community extends beyond any church's walls, and includes those that never make it into the sanctuary. I've been thinking of this story a lot since the Tucson Medical examiner stated that 252 immigrants died in Arizona's desert in the fiscal year that ended on Sept. 30th, 2010. I wonder how many of those people died of starvation, or dehydration. I wonder, more importantly, whether or not I give a \$!&!. What am I doing to acknowledge that my understanding of my community is worthless if it doesn't rally against senseless death?

Questions like these inspired me to collaborate with Jim Marx of No More Deaths to organize a benefit concert on Nov. 6th. I sought singers from Tucson's folk and singer/songwriter community, which met with universal approval and support. The performers that could commit to the event will provide a range of acoustic guitar and vocal music to lift your spirits, and the proceeds raised will hopefully help heal and sustain humans that might die without the intervention. Please show you care, about Tucson's music community, about a ministry of our church's community, and about people who are dying needlessly on the doorstep of our community.

Tickets are on sale after church on Sundays and at the door.

Thank you,
Brian

Taking time to come into community with others who share our beliefs and values is vital for being able to live a life that honors all of our principles and is also important for our overall well being. Just recently I attended a "Cluster Meeting" of Unitarian Universalist staff in Chandler, AZ. Ohhh how I did not want to go! I am preparing for another trip this weekend for LREDA Fall Conference and have so much to do to make sure that things run smoothly in my absence. Valid as our excuses may be, we tend to forget the importance of community in the balance of our lives.

Well, I went anyway. I am back today refreshed, charged up for upcoming social action events, and have a new found confidence for doing my job. This is what being in a shared community is all about. Have you been to a church event lately? What are you missing by not being with your fellow UUs? Are you taking time to be in community?

Community is what it's all about

One of the blessings I enjoy as a musician in this church is my membership in the Unitarian Universalist Musicians Network. We exchange ideas and ask for suggestions from fellow musicians serving in UU churches throughout the U.S. and Canada. Recently I sent out an e-mail request for suggestions of anthems that have community as a theme. One musician responded by sending me a copy of her original composition titled "The Great Community." I showed it to our minister and the plans are to have the congregation sing it on Sunday, November 14th. The composer of both the words and the music is Lucy Holstedt who lives in Berkeley, California. Here are the words of the first stanza.

*Infants creep and children run, eager to discover.
Growing up, and very soon finding friends and lovers.
Parents learning in ev'ry stage, sharing wisdom in old age,
There's a place for ev'ryone. We all need each other.*

Yes, we do all need each other and it is part of our church's mission to fulfill that need. One of the sentences in our UUCT Mission Statement says it well: "We are varied as the blooms in the Sonoran Desert, yet draw strength from one another."

At the morning worship service on Sunday, October 17th, our congregation honored Rev. David Johnson by designating him as our Minister Emeritus. Rev. Diane Dowgiert, our present minister, gave a moving and well-researched summary highlighting much of the congregation's past history. Then Rev. David Johnson shared some meaningful memories of his 15 years as our minister. Both these ministers have had a dynamic role in the creation and ongoing process of molding our congregation into a community of caring persons. It isn't always smooth sailing but the storms we pass through can make us stronger. May it be so and may our community continue to be a blessing.

Agnes Paulsen
Director of Family Singers

Making Time for Community

Kathleen Hogue

I have to work. I'm in the band. I have so much homework. I have a soccer game. I am just too tired! I have heard many excuses for not being in community. I have even made some myself. But how can we honor our sixth Unitarian Universalist principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all if we do not first come together as a shared community within our congregations?