

Prez Says ... January 2012

“The system is broken.” This is a phrase many of us are saying with increasing frequency and volume. In November, I had the good fortune to visit the Occupy Wall Street site in Zuccotti Park in Manhattan just days before the police came to shut it down. One of their goals was to create a system that worked, even as they protested the brokenness of the larger systems in which we all live. From the outer edges, it looked like chaos and the disenfranchised and/or hangers-on were griping, wondering when they were going to get *their* share of the donations people had been bringing to the Occupy movement. As we explored closer to the center of the protest, we were able to see there was quite a bit of organization and planning which was keeping people safe and warm while respecting the landscaping and inherent nature of the park. Tents were placed in rows, with small paths between them. There were signs asking people to stay off the flowerbeds, a request which was amazingly respected, even by day visitors. The Occupiers had created an entire little community with organized departments of sanitation, legal services, press and media center, free kitchen, library, conflict mediation, art studios, and self-policing. They had regular meetings, called their “General Assembly,” in which decisions about money, rules, direction, and programs were placed before the group. Because microphones and bullhorns were prohibited by law, they created “The People’s Mic” which is basically just one person speaking and others repeating several times until more and more people are able to listen to the message. The Occupy Movement in Wall Street was clearly well organized at its core, and the basic intention of giving power back to the people was readily apparent, especially when we explored closer to the middle of the park. And yet, their system was already broken.

All systems are broken. This is not cause for distress or alarm; it is simply a fact that everything in the world has cycles of order, chaos, and entropy. We like to think of cycles being linear, but many times order is created in one area while entropy is enveloping another. Because of this, we have never lived within a perfect system and we never will. Perhaps when we embrace this idea and give up our disappointed expectations, we’ll be able to get to the real work of creating systems that we know will not be perfect, but ones that better match our principles and values. The people at the core of the Occupy movement seem to grasp this, along with the idea that any system worthy of our attention requires work and participation from everyone in the system.

So, welcome to the brokenness of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Grand Valley, a system worthy of our time and attention, and based on shared principles. Although we’re working on building structures to get things done as a community, we’re never going to be perfect. And neither are you. We know this and embrace the work of creating a safe place to work on ourselves and a system based on empowerment, love, justice, reason, and compassion. There are many opportunities for getting involved in UUCGV. To learn more, come to our monthly team potlucks on the first Thursday of every month, or visit with Reverend Henson and/or any Team Leader or Board member. You can also contact our new Volunteer Coordinator, Floyd Joramo. Knowing how gratifying it is to work to create our community, we would love to find a meaningful position with you.

Another opportunity to help us build better systems in our community will be the annual Town Hall meeting, a time when we dream big together. This will start with a potluck immediately following the service on Sunday, January 29th. A minor amount of the meeting will be informational; the purpose of the meeting is to give the congregation the opportunity to name some dreams for our community and some structure and energy to make those dreams reality. See you there!

~Jana Rossier, President