

Seeking Justice

By Reverend Lawrence M. Henson

If one picks-up a UU World magazine or goes on to the UUA website uua.org, the first thing they will notice is that our faith finds much of its connection to the divine through seeking justice. Our sense of justice is so broad that it is often difficult to know where to focus our efforts. But, because we are a society of free thinkers we also ask questions, and a fair question is: What is justice? And the next question must be: Where does seeking justice begin?

Most religious communities are formed around a core theology that is primarily concerned with a transcendent and Immanent being. Ours is not. If anything is Immanent in our congregations it is how we bond into a congregation. If there is transcendence, it must follow that we are able to self censor and hold ourselves accountable. Though we like to talk about our principle of the inherent worth and dignity of each person, we don't always act that way. Justice must begin in our spiritual home.

What happens when one of us feels like we've been the object of an injustice within our own community? Fortunately, many of us know how to interact with someone we feel is crossing the line. But some of us don't and the reasons vary. As we bond as a community we learn to bind ourselves to covenant and practice. This bonding requires self knowledge and transformation. It seems easy, but those of us who have committed ourselves to this path understand just how difficult it really is. It would be far easier to offer fealty to a distant being and abstract theology.

Our ministry springs from our ability to bind ourselves into a community so we must learn how to protect that bond and those we love. When we learn this we also find that we practice what we've learned without really thinking. It's like riding a bicycle or learning to use a clutch. Ah, if only it were that simple. Being human, we are drawn to an ideal that is just out of our grasp and to also aspire to practice the vision that ideal engenders. Being in community and finding true peace requires self knowledge and the willingness to seek restoration to the broken or damaged. That isn't possible if we don't know the impact of our innocent transgressions.

The first course of action when we are faced with a thoughtless act is to go directly to the person who committed the act. But if we go to that person accusingly we are most often met with defensiveness and denial. Because I assume each person acts out of the best intention I also view a thoughtless act as just that; thoughtless. Neither you nor I are alone though. We have resources.

If you are shy or feel too hurt to take a perceived offense directly to the person who crossed you, rather than stewing and telling everyone else, come to me with it. I will try to help you to have the courage or to find the words to lovingly take your hurt back to where it belongs, to the offender. If that isn't sufficient, then I will ask the Committee on Ministry to determine if or what other course might be taken. This does not mean taking every little pain or grudge to me or to the Committee. A vital function of our ministry, if it is to be one of bonding us and binding us into a community, must be to help one another enhance our relationships and thus our trust. Ultimately, our ministry is relationship and growing trust in that relationship. A primary phrase in the benediction is "Be guided by your faith and not your fear." It is only through feeling free to seek justice in the community can we become a people who can seek justice and restoration and thus seek peace in the larger world. It is who we are.

Note: In the past, the Committee on Ministry has been viewed as a dispute resolution team. We split the committee into a true Committee on Ministry and separated out a dispute resolution team or as I think of it: a covenant team. Some also see the Committee on Ministry as a Ministerial relations team. The Committee on Ministry is primarily concerned with the ministry of this community as it is expressed within the congregation. There are times when that means that the COM does act as a Ministerial relations team, but mostly it is a committee that seeks to hold the core ministry of this community intact.