



David Rohe © 27 May 2018

We're at church, so what?!

Opening words

Here's an excerpt of a few conversations to be had tomorrow.
"So, what did you get up to yesterday?" "Me, I went to church in the morning, not much in the afternoon, just pattered around the garden here at home."

"Church, eh? What church?"

"The Unitarian Church, over in Ponsonby."

Now, the conversation can go one of many directions, but for the purposes of our discussion this morning I'll take it this way:
"WHAT?! You call that place a church? What do you guys do in there anyway? I can't imagine since there does not seem to be any real religious stuff going on. From what I have heard, there are people in there that don't even believe in God, so why in the world would you call that place a church?"

To be continued.

The Talk

You like those hymns? They are 2 of my favourites. Kinda rousing in a way. OK, now for the meat and potatoes of why I wanted to do this thing today. Minions are now coming through the congregation distributing number 2 pencils. If you have something of your own to write with that's fine, you don't have to use the pencil. These will be used on the blank piece of paper included in the order of service. If anyone needs paper I have extras here? It's important since this is a participative event.

Everyone ready? Good. We are starting with a quiz. For any visitors who are with us, you can participate as well, but you can ask a neighbour for the answer to the first question. Eyes on your paper, write your version of the 3rd Unitarian Universalist principle. No cribbing off the wall! Kibitz with one another if you're stuck, but not the wall.

Now that you have or have not written down the 3rd principle, check your accuracy from the wall.

Do OK? Bet you know it now, eh? Now, for the second question, write, in a single sentence, a core spiritual belief you have, preferably something that is still developing. It is a spiritual principle that is important to you. It is something that informs your life and a part of your spiritual journey, the journey that restarts every day.

Now you have yours written, share with an unrelated neighbour. The 3rd principle

requires us to accept one another and assist one another on our spiritual journey. Each journey starts somewhere, and if we are to assist one another along the way we at least need to know from where each is starting today. We have time. Take at least 5 minutes, ha! I'll watch and call time in a bit.



TIME

Did you learn anything so far? Learning is good, and is part of why we come here.

I submit that the sharing we just did is, at least in part, why, yes, this **is** a church. UU's make their own, personal spiritual and religious convictions and you just shared some of your own and discovered someone else's. That sharing is part of what makes us a community. That's why we like it here, AND that's why there are relatively few of us, anywhere. Having to come up with what we personally, **really** believe is just harder than accepting a given doctrine. Guiding our own spiritual journeys is difficult, but we have helpers here at church. We have a minister who provides fodder for our thought. We have guest speakers and events that can challenge and enlighten. We have times when we can challenge one another, confront if necessary, with opportunities to resolve conflicts; opportunities which are enormously strengthening for a group if successful.

But, it is the times when we can quietly explore one another's journeys that can provide the glue that cements the group into something more than a debating society, or some random organization that goes around the neighbourhood, knocking on doors for no apparent reason. That's a little joke. The intimate conversations about spiritual convictions, held between and among members of the congregation can prevent us from being God's frozen people.

But, and there is always a but, intimacy can be scary. You don't distribute it willy nilly. I suggest we may tend to withhold it a bit, right here in church. Anyone disagree? Anyone who thinks I am wrong about the state of intimate spiritual communication at Auckland Unitarian Church, look around. How many people in this room can you record an accurate description of his/her spiritual foundation? How many have you assisted along on a spiritual journey? Yes, I am getting a bit confronting here, but that's why I get the big bucks for doing

this. Perhaps there is room for improvement in some of our church activities?

Sharon and the kids and I participated in Unitarian church activities right up until July, 2000 when we left Connecticut for Cambodia, where we lived prior to New Zealand. That means, it was a 12 year dry spell until we shifted to Helensville from Taranaki, and being here has been a breath of fresh air, even with our required hike in from Helensville. Why? Because it is our church. This is a community of “similar” minded people sharing a commitment to certain principles, and working out how to explain them to ourselves and to others. Sharon still gets a bit tongue tied trying to explain why we call this a church, since we violate many of the popularly held assumptions of what goes into being a church. I joined the Unitarian movement in 1975, when Sharon was 12, so I have a few years on her in developing a comfort level with the idea that, yes, we really are a church. I think my comfort level has been developed out of some of my experiences at the Augusta, GA church where we managed to weather a congregational storm, and come out solidly together in the knowledge of what it takes to produce a spiritual community, a church. That conflict crucible allowed me to see the advantages, and challenges available in a Unitarian community. We are a Unitarian community, one that can support the spiritual development of its members/constituents/congregation. We have met the Unitarians, and they are us. So, yes, this is a Unitarian **church**. Assuming we can honor our commitments to the 7 principles, and the covenant we recite each week, I see a bright future for our church, our spiritual community. Lets hear it for principle 3. Amen.

Discussion

Final Words

The road to real spiritual growth can be bumpy, with dead ends and detours. Finding my way often ain't easy. That's what a supportive community is for. Stick together, challenge one another, support one another, continually recreating a church. Amen