

## **11/01/09 Sermon**

"Connected and Respected"  
Rev. Paul D. Daniel, Minister

"Connected and Respected" has been chosen as the theme of this church year. It unites our worship and MCY efforts to focus on a sustained and coordinated effort to enrich our communal life based on our mission and shared values. Its goal is to unite us in one strong body that is inclusive of us all – adults, children and teen alike.

These concepts – Connected and Respected – are like the strands of DNA entwined with each other, vital to the existence of each of its parts. Each in its own unique way creates the body and soul of this church and defines the nature of an engaged membership in building healthy relationships.

The business of this community is about creating, developing and living a shared mission and vision. It is about being present and alive – "awakened" as the Buddha would say – to the world and people around us. If we live in the past or the future, we are unable to fully savor the moment in the present, to truly hear the heart of another, to honor their integrity, and to be in a real respectful relationship.

To live with integrity calls us to be true to our inner voice and expect there will be a safe environment with appropriate boundaries in which to function. Personal integrity is assuring that you and all others have the same rights to safety and respect. We all have a right to expect we will not be abused, to commit ourselves to not abuse others.

Communities are fundamentally about relationships. The rules of encounter call us to respect each other, to listen well and intently. We each have the right to be heard. We strive to bring to meaningful life the maxim, "Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you."

UUMAN and all others across the UU spectrum of belief can create this beloved community if we unite in shared faith in our seven principles and mission and remain open to the wisdom traditions of many cultures and religions.

New learning and spiritual growth is ever possible. We are ultimately the source of our own faith and not some supernatural external presence. The God that is, is within.

Over the centuries, the UU Association of Congregations has become an affirmation of an embodied human faith that honors the heart and mind in their combined capacity to create something new and vital, build on the ruins and bones of the past.

We have molded this faith out of the hard clay of the centuries of struggle for free religious expression, infused it with life and created a broader vision of faith, not limited to Christianity, Judaism, Islam or Hinduism but open to something more, a faith uniquely human and new, built on our inherent trust of humanity and our capacity to grow, evolve and serve the greater good.

Our faith is based on hope independent of any supernatural external God. Rather, we have created our own Spirit of life – our human potential, which animates our existence, devoid of the dictates of others, the dogmas and creeds of faiths that no longer speaks to us. Over time we have come to trust our intellect and each other in respectful community. We have learned to respect our abilities to think, decide and communicate our beliefs in ways that support true dialogue and healthy relations.

This process begins in UUMAN with our children and youth through their own faith development curriculum. They – like us – teach each other how to be in a community that values diversity and celebrates both differences and similarities.

Our children often struggle with connection and respect because we do. We attempt to connect with each other, but often ignore the fundamental rules of community – don't triangulate, speak directly from your own experience, and use all the tools of healthy communication. We often fail because we are still behaving like a small church, with limited goals, a narrow vision of what we can be together.

We still make decisions but neglect to inform all the stakeholders, act like lone cowboys with private agendas, without regard for the greater good. As a result, we frequently need to apologize for our actions. Such behavior shows a lack of respect for other people and does a disservice to the greater community. We need to remember what we are called to be – the beloved community – and to act in ways that can bring that about. Nothing else will do.

We need to intentionally put structures in place to prepare for growth and change. While smaller congregations can be run during coffee hour, a larger mid-size church like UUMAN needs a network of communication modes built on a firm foundation of respect and intentionality. Only then can we effectively serve our members and the wider world. We must truly live our

values through the seven principles of our faith. If we do that, there would be far less hurt feelings, less confusion and anger over "No one told me" ... "I didn't know." You get the picture.

While I believe that connections, self-respect and good communication comes first, no relationship can last and prosper without respect for each other. In a UUMAN setting, we called to "give up the need to be right" for "the need to cooperate and compromise for the greater good." We must learn to keep our ego in check in the face of disagreement. We must look beyond our own needs and agenda. We value and respect the inherent worth and dignity of all others within the web of existence. It calls us to go beyond saying the words, to making a conscious effort to live what we believe, mindful of our own and the others' needs, in a manner that serves the beloved community.

This is what we are trying to teach our children and youth, and what we are trying to make into an affecting reality in worship and in our communal life. In some ways, it is fair to say it is time for us to grow up religiously and stop talking about these issues, and start living them.