



The Unitarian Society

A Unitarian Universalist Congregation

May 15, 2020

A Message from Rev. Karen

Can you believe that we are just about to hold our 10th online service together? We could not know, even in the midst of our very real missing each other in person, that our online services would help us to feel this sense of community and connection.

While it may not be what we wanted to have happen, there have been little wonders and surprises – seeing old familiar faces, having more folks in attendance, still being able to share our joys and sorrows. Learning that is not the building, which we love and just recently rededicated, that makes us who we are – it is the people and our principles, and how we live them out: that’s what makes us who we are.

I have been paying attention to many sources of reliable information. Science-based information. Local, national and global. I have been creating models for what our shared life looks like going forward: creating them in my head and some on paper. Some basics stay the same, some change with the latest news. All of them tell me that this is not just a few months and then “back to normal.” All of them tell me that we are in this for the long haul.

I’ve been talking with the Board President, other Board members, and other lay leaders. I’ve been talking with our staff. I’ve been communicating with colleagues of other congregations. I have been reading the information our Unitarian Universalist Association has been generating to support our congregational life.

Time for a deep breath.

My guides in all this have been

1. The safety of our whole community
2. The centrality of science
3. The full inclusion of everyone, including those most vulnerable

Based on these values, it’s long been clear that we would not return to in-person services through the summer. And likely longer, though it seemed too early to make that decision. As I watched other UU congregations make decisions to stay virtual until a vaccine is found and widely in use, I began to get a sense that this long haul we are in for, is much, much longer.

Yesterday, May 14, the UUA released [guidance](#) that made us face up to this long haul. Their recommendation: plan to meet virtually through May 2021.

Another deep breath.

As my colleague, Rev. Gretchen Haley wrote recently, the UUA's "reasoning includes the acknowledgment that this pandemic will have a long trajectory, dependent on a number of critical factors like testing and tracing, and effective treatments [and] is based in the fact that a large portion of our communities are considered 'high risk,' and the fact that religious gatherings – especially those with singing and with multiple generations present – are considered highly contagious events. You can find their [whole guidance here](#).

I believe that the UUA guidelines make sense. Too much sense. Because I really wish they didn't. And maybe you do, too. There is a swirl of emotions and thoughts running through me, and I can only guess this is true for you, too:

- **Grief** at losing something dear to us: gathering in community in-person
- **Relief** to hear validated conclusions you had already come to yourself
- **Overwhelm** for what this might mean for the other parts of your life
- **Numbness** because it's all just too much
- **Anger** at all of it

Please know that the Board and I will be figuring out what our next steps are, taking into account this recommendation from the UUA, and other factors, as well, keeping central issue of the safety and health of the people who make up The Unitarian Society. Our Annual Meeting is on May 31. While there may be new details between now and then – we intend to share an update of how the congregation has fared so far in these first two-plus months of sheltering-at-home, as well as what our best guesses are about the near future, and what we know of our plans further into our future.

For now, here are some key points:

- Our Sunday services stay online through at least August;
- Our building is closed at least through the end of June, and likely longer;
- Our Montessori School is closed for the rest of the school year (while providing online enrichment through the middle of June) and there is no summer camp;
- Rev. Karen will be on leave for the month of July, and on call for pastoral and congregational emergencies;
- Our summer services are a collaboration with three other nearby UU congregations (more about that at another time) – very exciting development;
- **We still have each other – through the losses, the grief, the confusion, the boredom, the joys, the delights, the connections to nature, the online connections with each other.**

One last thing: a few weeks ago, if your name is in our 2020 directory, you received an email about your Care Ring – TUS folks who live near you and with whom we encourage you to make deeper connections. If you have not reached out to that group of people – an email to see about starting a text group, sending a hand-written note, I encourage you to do it now. You might remember, on February 23 I preached Beyond the Apocalypse and I said that robust social networks need to be built before they are needed. Well, they are needed now and you can strengthen them now. Build on your TUS connection into something more. These Care Rings are only as strong as you make them. A thing like this just needs one person to start things rolling. Perhaps that is you.

Once we know what our longer plan is – what next congregational year looks like – the Board and I will share that with you, as well as what it will take to be as vibrant and robust as we possibly can be. We are all trying to make sense in uncertain times. We will figure out what this all means, together.

I am blessed to be on this journey with you,

Rev. Karen