

Minister's Musings – September 2022 - BELONGING

And so, you began seeking a beloved community:

*A people that does not put fences around love.
A community that holds its arms open to possibilities of love.
A heart-home to nourish your soul and share your gifts.*

Rev. Kimberlee Anne Tomczak Carlson

It's the beginning of a new congregational year, an excellent time to consider what **belonging** means for each of us and for us as a congregation.

Belonging: our Soul Matters theme for the month. What does **belonging** mean for you? What has it meant in your past? What could it mean as you stretch into now as we build toward the future of our longing?

What does it mean to belong to this congregation? This is different than asking what it means to be a member. I think belonging comes first, then there is the intentional choice to become a member. One must first feel as if one belongs before one can say yes to the rights and responsibilities of membership. And sometimes, some people belong without ever choosing to become members.

What does it mean to belong to this congregation? Is it feeling a sense of resonance or recognition? Of being perceived as whole and holy just as you are? Of being spiritually nourished? Is it the opportunity to share one's gifts and have that be appreciated? Perhaps belonging offers a sense of home, whether the home of our background was gentle or rough with us.

Unfortunately, too often, there are folx with marginalized identities who might resonate with Unitarian Universalist principles and values, but not feel a sense of home. What if the sense of belonging we aspire to create includes a felt validation of one as oneself in the midst of the collective? Especially in a world that demands harmful conformity or practices painful, systemic exclusion?

I think this is where the relationship between belonging and congregation enters the picture. In the dynamic tension between belonging and community, the question emerges: What does it mean for all of us to act as if everyone belongs to the congregation? Even folx who are not here yet but are very much a part of Beloved Community?

CB Beal, one of our faith movement's most innovative and influential Religious Educators, has developed the concept called **Pre-emptive Radical Inclusion (PRI)**. It's an adaptive set of perspectives and practices which require of us **"to presuppose that everyone is already, and always, in the room."** It's one of the best ways I know how to live into our congregation's commitment to live into the 8th Principle which we adopted last February and which we are called, this year and every year going forward, to make into something

more than lip service or window dressing. The 8th Principle asks us to covenant and affirm that we are *"journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions."*

As we begin this new congregational year, I hope that you will think about ways that you can grow the sense of belonging to this congregation in someone else – offering a wide welcome, moving outside your comfort zone to engage someone you don't know well or at all, asking in meetings how we are doing when it comes to pre-emptively and radically including the wide human family. My guess is the more effort you spend on helping to grow the conditions for others to belong, the deeper sense of belonging you will feel.

Given the past two and a half years we all have experienced because of COVID-19, we could all use a little and loving help when it comes to finding or strengthening our sense of belonging to this scrappy congregation.

I am blessed to be on this journey with you,
~ Rev. Karen

P.S. Feel like listening to a song about belonging (home)? [Click here!](#)