

Tee Shirt Theology Sunday
A Service for All Ages, Sizes and Fabric Blends

Family Minister's Homily:
Standing on the Side of Love for Immigrant Families

Sunday, July 25, 2010
UU Society of Sacramento

Opening

Good morning! It's good to see all of you, including those I've never seen before. Welcome. Please pardon me for being dressed in a style unbecoming the clergy at a time of worship! But today is our second annual Tee-Shirt service, so today instead of trying to decide which tie to wear on my neck, I had to decide which message to bear on my chest. This is a service for all ages, so you can expect more wiggling, whispering and walking around in church today than usual, but maybe not as much snoring. But you may like to know that we also provide professional child care during the service, as we do every Sunday, in classroom 11. If you have a baby with you during the service, you might also want to know that we have a Baby Comfort Room back there, in the church library and bookstore. The audio from here is piped into the library, so you can listen to the service. Our summer youth and children's Religious Education ArtWorks program will continue next Sunday during the service.

I am sorry to announce the death of one of our elders in the congregation. Marjorie Dayton passed away just over a week ago at her home, at age 83. She was found on her sofa, where she had apparently drifted away, with no apparent distress. We extend our condolences to family and friends of Marge, and we invite you to a Memorial Service, likely to be on the last Sunday afternoon of August. Now if you will please rise as you are comfortable and join in singing hymn #305, De Colores. We will sing the Spanish verse last. Number 305.

Hymn "De Colores" (#305, Singing the Living Tradition)

Invocation after Hymn: May freedom, connection and joy bless our gathering at this time, and bless us all in the days to come. Please be seated.

Hymn "The Lone Wild Bird" (#15, Singing the Living Tradition)

Prayer

Please join me now for a time to invite contemplation, as I offer these words of prayer. We will follow the prayer with an invitation to a time of silence together.

Great Spirit, rest in us now as we gather side by side in recognition of our common humanity and in care for one another across age groups, life situations, and other categories of difference. In our struggle and loss, concern and worry, doubt and confusion, may each one find comfort and hope. In our times of celebration and moments of awareness, may each one feel inspired and grateful. May wisdom be ours as we navigate life's transitions and challenges.

Breath of Love, breathe in us. Bless us and all those we hold in our hearts. May we enlarge the reach of our compassion to embrace all those with us here, all those beyond these walls, all who share with us this miracle of planet earth. May we have the courage to reach out in kindness and attention, and the courage to ask when we are the ones needing support or a listening ear.

River of Life, move in our hearts. Flow through our souls and refresh us. Renew our sense of possibility. Connect us again to our deep longings, visions and commitments, and connect us to our deep strength. Move in our hearts, and move us into lives more abundant, lives more full with hope, wisdom, compassion, and courage. So may it be. Blessed be.

Meditation

Now let us take a minute of silence together, for our personal meditations and intentions. I will close the silence, and afterwards we'll be enlivened with music. For now, just be aware of being here, knowing that sounds will arise from among us, and letting those sounds come and go. Our silence is not the absence of sound, but the practice of noticing. If you wish, close your eyes. Notice your bodies in the chairs, notice your fingers or toes. Notice your breathing... your neighbor's breathing, our common breath, which is the breath of life.

Now let us take some time together.

[1-2 minutes]

May peace be in our hearts, peace be in our lives, peace be in our world. Amen.

Offering

Our offering this morning is shared with the Center for Community Well Being, a Sacramento organization which runs the [Birthing Project](#) Clinic. Thank you for making a difference.

Homily

Most of my tee-shirts which display a religious message, philosophical outlook, or a social-justice commitment are those I've bought from vendors in the exhibit hall at a General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Here's one that says: Freedom, Reason, Tolerance, and Love, in a circle, with our UU Principles on the other side. [Now Judy steps up behind me and strips my tee shirt off over my head, showing one of the others I am wearing.]

Here's one that says "Jesus is a liberal." Around the outside it has a definition of liberal: "Not bound by established positions in political or religious philosophy; independent in opinion; often having a tendency toward democratic forms." [One more time, Judy steps up and strips this tee shirt off over my head.]

The hot seller at this year's General Assembly, held in late June in Minneapolis, is this tee-shirt: "[Standing on the Side of Love](#)." I didn't buy it, however. I thought I had enough tee-shirts. I didn't realize I'd want to talk to you about it--or how good I would look wearing it. Fortunately, our member Seya was also at GA, and she did buy one. If enough of you decide you want one, you can sign up at the Connection Central table after church, we can do a bulk order. Standing on the Side of Love is the slogan of our denomination's multi-faceted advocacy campaign. While it has only one young adult as a paid coordinator, the Standing on the Side of Love volunteer network is extensive. Different congregations around the country have used

Standing on the Side of Love for local demonstrations, such as rallies calling for justice and compassion for immigrant families, and on behalf of marriage equality for same-sex couples. The senior minister from All Souls Church in Washington, DC, spoke to the city council about the district's bill to grant marriage equality. He said that in the face of division or exclusion, his faith tradition/ calls on him to stand on the side of love, and he asked the city council to stand there too. In some cities, where a crowd of UUs shows up at a rally all in these yellow shirts, we stand out, and people say, "Look, it's the Love people!"

General Assembly is the annual convention of the churches that belong to the Unitarian Universalist Association. During our time in Minneapolis, we held a rally as part of the city's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender pride festival. A UU minister from Iowa spoke of his pride that his state was the only middle-American state that had achieved marriage equality. Ministers from Minnesota then recounted that they had rented motor coaches to drive dozens of same-sex couples from Minnesota down to Iowa in order to conduct their ceremonies there. Of course, they call their vehicle the Love Bus.

General Assembly is a lot more than tee-shirt stalls in an exhibit hall. A few thousand ministerial and lay delegates from our congregations/ gather to consider the business of our national association, approving a budget, hearing reports from the moderator, president, trustees, and major commissions, and making revisions to our bylaws. Every year we also vote to select a social justice issue to send out to congregations as a recommended issue for study, local action, and spiritual reflection. The study and action period for each issue covers three years. At the end of this, the delegates will finalize and approve a UUA Statement of Conscience, making an official public stand. This year, we had five compelling issues vying for our selection for a three-year period of work. All five were important, and each would merit study and action in light of our UU principles and our spiritual practice of reason and compassion. Choosing one does not mean that the other issues are unimportant--after all, each one of them had been sponsored by one or more congregations, which had already studied and worked on the issue. It means only that our UU Association will provide materials and staff to help congregations who wish to focus on that issue.

We had some time for lobbying, debating, and listening to fellow delegates make champion the issues they preferred. In particular, the teenagers at GA formed the Youth Caucus, where they discussed the issues and then spoke with one voice. Then we had to make a hard choice and vote for one. After a first vote and then a runoff, a majority chose the topic of Immigration as a Moral Issue.

The topic of immigrant families, illegal immigration, migrant workers and international refugees is not limited to the United States; it is a global issue. Yet the issue of national immigration got significant attention at this General Assembly because a few months ago Arizona's governor approved a new anti-immigrant law. The law requires police officers, during a lawful stop, detention, or arrest, to "make a reasonable attempt" to determine the immigration status of a person if there is a "reasonable suspicion" that he or she is an illegal or undocumented immigrant. This is troubling because it can lead to racial profiling by the police. Most immigrants in Arizona--legal as well as illegal--are persons of color. They are from Latin America. Yet many citizens in Arizona are also persons of color. I don't know about you, but if a law enforcement official on the street asked me to prove my citizenship or else come down to the station, I wouldn't have my passport on hand. To imagine getting the question: "Papers, please!" reminds me of stories from Apartheid South Africa or the time I took a train through East Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Arizona law It forbids those without papers

from working, seeking work, or getting paid for work. Since many folks immigrate due to economic desperation, this law puts those who are already here in a bind. It also punishes people who transport or give sanctuary to undocumented residents. Laws like this compound the already strong fears that federal deportation will separate families with native-born children. Legislators in several other states are considering similar bills. These trends highlight the need for the federal government to enact comprehensive, realistic and humane immigration reform.

Long before the Arizona law was created, our General Assembly planning committee had selected the city of Phoenix as the site of GA for 2012. This fact generated conversation online among ministers and lay leaders, and at last month's Assembly. Some UUs wanted the UUA to announce a boycott Phoenix, and plan for another city in 2012. I was okay with that, since I've been to Phoenix in June before. But wait! We might pay a \$500,000 penalty if we pulled out now. Spontaneously, on the internet, many UUs pledged 100 bucks a piece to cover that cost. The UUA's Board of Trustees brought to the Assembly a resolution about the Phoenix GA for us to consider. In public meetings large and small, heartfelt views were exchanged and hearts were swayed one way and another. We heard how Arizona's law will make Unitarian Universalist Latinos, or other UUs who are people of color, fear going to their own UU General Assembly. On the other hand, ministers from Arizona told us that their local immigrant allies want and ask for church groups, education groups and justice groups to come to Arizona to help out, not to boycott it. It's hard to put in a few sentences the complexity, passion, and truly open-hearted reflections that took place during and between our official meetings. People stayed up all hours to hammer out compromises, find a wise decision, and keep our delegates from leaving the Assembly feeling divided from one another. The result? We will go to Phoenix in 2012, but "not for business as usual." Instead of expecting the creature comforts of most modern conferences, we'll make the Assembly an occasion for learning, for bearing witness, and for being present with folks who live and struggle in Arizona. We'll get our hands dirty and our tee-shirts sweaty. There will be organized visits to the border area, meetings with local organizations, and surely a demonstration against unjust policies, and in favor of inclusion.

Sometimes Standing on the Side of Love means we step outside our comfort zones, take an extra step to call for inclusion, compassion, and fairness in the larger community and our nation.

Arizona's law is due to take effect this Thursday. Already, people of faith are going to Arizona this week to be in support of those in protest. Many will get arrested. Among the Unitarian Universalists there for the demonstrations will be Peter Morales, the Latino who is the president of our UU Association of Congregations. In part, they wish to send a strong message to discourage other states from enacting similar bills, and to ask Washington to act on comprehensive immigration reform.

Of course, immigration is a complicated issue, and there is room for wide-ranging ideas and opinions. There is also room for learning more. I need to know more about the issue, to be sure. There's a need for more listening to one another, and speaking from the heart. We can use reason to separate what is factual from what is a fearful or ill-informed assumption. We can practice compassion to remember we are talking about real human beings, and that all people of all perspectives are human beings. Whatever opinions we voice, wherever we stand on matters as crucial as this one, may we stand--may we strive to stand--on the side of love. So may it be.