

What I believe

As a child of Jewish progressives and atheists, I was quite comfortable staying home or playing on weekends. That worked well until about 34 years ago, when my daughter Dana came home upset after being told that her that her mom and I would go to Hell if we didn't go to church. Uh oh! Since Dana's mom Claudia had gone to a Unitarian church as a child, off we went to May Memorial Unitarian Society in 1983.

It turned out to be a very good fit for me particularly, and I became a member, partly to be able to vote for sanctuary for a Central American family. At May and at First everyone is welcome to come as they are, with their beliefs and their doubts, and no one is told to follow any particular god or dogma.

I don't believe that people are born for any divine purposes, but I do believe in people very strongly. One of the key Unitarian-Universalist principles is to value the dignity and worth of all human beings. As someone who fights for civil liberties and social justice, I take pride in following the tradition of Samuel J. May, because he actively fought for the abolition of slavery and the rights of women.

I am also proud to be a member here at First U-U because I see Rev. Jennifer as another leader who both teaches and demonstrates by her actions her commitment to human rights, to justice with love, and to gender and sexual orientation equality and pride.

I have always thought that we need to separate church and state, and insist on everyone's right to freedom of religion (more accurately freedom *from* religion). We must have a strong, independent and free press, and encourage citizens to protest publicly when they believe their government is wrong. I find these values are shared with my fellow members of First's Community Outreach Ministry.

There is another Unitarian-Universalist principle that speaks strongly to me: It talks about the interdependent web of all living things. For as long as I can remember, nature has been sacred to me, as it was to my dad. Wild animals and flowering plants hold a special place in

my heart. I used to entice my then young children to come along on nature walks by promising them candy bars if they saw deer, great blue herons, snakes and other somewhat unusual and interesting creatures.

The play of sunlight on water entrances me. I am sometimes mesmerized watching the peak spring flow of water at Chittenango Falls. The colors and the glittering sun reflecting on the water at Green and Round Lakes moves me as well. And when a friend and I walk around Beaver Lake we both notice the beauty around us. I recently spoke in a class about the spiritual, mental and physical healing power of exercise in nature—How true and fortunate that is.

By listening well and sharing my love, encouragement, appreciation and values with others in the broader community, I continue to build friendships that grow over time. They provide a wonderful contradiction to the isolation that male oppression can lead to. My vision of an increasing network of close, caring relationships throughout our community gives me hope that some day we can have a much better world.

I want to spend the rest of my life building friendships and creating peace and justice. This way I can imagine, along with John Lennon, a world without any wars where we can all share, be empowered, be validated for who we are, and grow together into something the world has never seen before. Human beings have an amazing capacity for intelligence, empathy, love and cooperation that has yet to be fully developed. I strongly believe that people can achieve a world that is paradise right here on Earth.

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