

## WHY I'M A UU - PEG MORRISON NOVEMBER 6, 2005

Good morning!

I'm thrilled to be here to tell you why I'm a UU. I put a lot of time into agonizing over the question, and then finally it hit me: "*What else would I be?*"

Like many of you, I was raised Catholic. Like some of you, my experience with the Church was pretty positive. Although I never fully bought into the Catholic faith, I met a lot of wonderful friends and role models. I remember as a preschooler asking my mother why we went to church, and who was God anyway? Would he ever sit next to us? In eighth grade I was told that the Holy Spirit would come to me during the sacrament of Confirmation. I sat in the pew with my class, waiting to feel something. Nothing happened.

I did develop an attachment to Jesus Christ. The message came through to me that He wasn't a judgmental, know-it-all type of person; he was a Radical who began a Revolution of Love. I loved that Spirit of Compassion – whether healing a blind man or saving the life of an adulteress, he showed nothing but Love, Empathy and Respect. During the 1980's when the Religious Right began to gain power in this country, I found myself taking issue with the judgmental tone of that movement. If Jesus were on earth today, I reasoned, he wouldn't be saying that AIDS was a punishment for the gay community. He had surrounded himself with the lepers of his time – in the 1980's, wouldn't that have been the AIDS patients?

As much as the story of Jesus resonated with me, however, I always thought of God as being bigger than most faiths envision. I had trouble with the narrow belief system, the sexism and the emphasis on guilt that can be strong in Catholic communities.

As a young adult I found myself married and trapped – I mean living – in the small town of Fremont, Ohio. After growing up in Cleveland and attending Kent State, I was used to more diversity, more breathing room, more open minds. There are plenty of nice folks in Fremont, but I didn't find many kindred spirits there.

I began to wish I had a faith to call my own. I attended Catholic and Methodist services in Fremont, and even an evangelical church. Nothing felt right. There was no connection.

I did find solace in Nature. I had wonderful walks with my dogs through Ottawa Wildlife Preserve and other sites. The morning light on the lake, the animals, the quiet beauty of Northwest Ohio – these were the things that sustained me. Later I would take meditation classes from Sonia Gunderson – daughter of our own Lorene Gunderson – and those were incredibly helpful as well.

Finally, my husband and I moved to Toledo. Within a couple years he began questioning our life together. Again I began to explore churches. One cold Sunday in 2003 I came here looking for a Buddhist Discussion Group a friend had told me about. They weren't meeting that day, a woman with a kind smile told me. But our pastor is giving a talk on Pacifism and Just War Theory. Why don't you join me? I was blown away by Gary's informed and eloquent style. I liked the positive energy I felt in the room. Soon I was attending services.

Overall, why am I a UU?

- Because our church validates the search for Truth; it respects the journey and nurtures the seeker.
- Because this church sponsored the one thing that went right in Toledo three weekends ago, when Nazis came to town and inspired riots here; we supported an Erase the Hate event that attracted 300 and kept them safe. And our service that Sunday was an amazing healing experience.
- Lastly - because I love the thought of having This community support me, if and when I should marry again.

For those of you who are new today – welcome. Welcome to the church of the loving heart, & the free mind.

### **Statement of Faith - Why I'm a UU - John Eichbauer 2005**

I am a UU because Unitarian Universalism embodies what I believe. The history of our faith, the seven principles, and this fellowship of like minded people all support my core beliefs yet allow me to expand and enhance my definition of truth. I grew up in a Lutheran home. I generally enjoyed going to church, the people there were friendly and I liked attending with my family and then going out for breakfast most Sundays. I belonged to the Boy Scout troop at the church, was a member of the youth group, and became an acolyte and an usher. Late in high school I started to become disillusioned with church and the religion I had grown up with. I felt hypocritical when I recited the Apostles Creed and the Lords Prayer and I was never quite sure who or what I was confessing my "sins" to and why exactly I needed to. I like many others drifted away from the church of my youth.

Throughout my un-churched years I was still interested in religion and spirituality. I even picked up the bible occasionally. I read some books on Buddhism and Shamanism but my fundamental beliefs and my spiritual paradigm didn't change. The Sermon on the Mount, the Prodigal Son, the trials of Job, these were the stories that rang true and held meaning for me. Still searching and studying a friend suggested I try the church he and his wife were attending – First Unitarian Church of Toledo. I don't remember the first time I actually attended. What I do remember was that the minister was a gentle speaking woman with kind eyes and a warm smile, a far cry from the 6' 6" giant of a man with a crew cut and a booming voice I grew up with.

As I investigated this newfound religion I embraced both the Unitarian and Universalist elements of our faith. The oneness of god, universal salvation, and the underlying freedom to make religious choices this is what I believed in all along. The Buddhist in China, the aboriginal in Australia, and the televangelist all had the same rights and freedoms to believe and worship as they saw fit and all were worthy and equal children of god.

I joined this church the first time in 1994 and have been a UU ever since. Since that time I have begun to discover the nuances of our faith and the subtle differences among us. The fellowship we belonged to in Columbia, SC counted a pre-op transgender and a former member of George Wallace's staff among its members that worked to bring down the confederate flag from the top of the state capital. It is this diversity and breadth of experiences that makes Unitarian Universalism so interesting and fresh for me today.

Today as a parent I'm proud to be able to pass on to my children the tenets of a faith that provides them a solid spiritual foundation and encourages them to search for a truth that builds on that foundation.

That is why I'm a UU.

### **ON BEING A UU - Karen Christie, 2005**

Why am I a Unitarian Universalist? Why did I sign the book to become a member here 20 some years ago? Initially I came to his church at the invitation of a friend. Our children were young and we wanted a religious education for them, but I felt at home from the first Sunday I walked through the door. Having grown up in a very strict Catholic family, I had attended church every Sunday, and lived by the tenants of the Catholic Church. Still the smell of incense inside a Catholic church takes me back to my childhood.

There was comfort in the rituals and the sacraments and the songs of that Faith. But as I grew older, I needed more than that set of beliefs provided. In Unitarian Universalist Churches it is accepted that people's beliefs change over time. There is an openness that allows a search for truth and meaning. One has the ability to learn about all different world religions, without saying that mine is the one true faith. There is an acceptance of all people including gays and lesbians, and people of all nationalities, sizes, shapes, colors and abilities. I appreciate this church's concern for the interdependent web of all existence. I am grateful for the respect the UU's have for reason and science and learning. But probably more than anything, I am grateful for this community of people. In other circles, like my department at work, I sometimes feel like the odd person out - I am know as "the liberal". Don't get me wrong, my co-workers are my friends, but this church is my loving community. Here, I am accepted and nourished and allowed to grow. I love to learn about Buddhism and practice meditation and experience a silent meal. Here, I had the opportunity to share in the Coming of Age program with a very lively group of twelve and thirteen year olds, and we got to experience that last beautiful snow of April together at Camp Storer. I can credit this church community with helping me to live more mindfully, more in the present moment, where I have learned to be more accepting of

myself, my feelings, as well as being more accepting of those who are different from myself. A member of this church made a comment a couple of weeks ago. He said that this Church community is "rare". I like that description. In this community, I look forward to continuing growth and learning and spiritual development as we travel together on life's journey "gracefully".

## WHY I'M A UU – Karen Porter - 2005

Like so many things in life, my becoming a Unitarian has been due to a series of coincidences, in addition to an evolution in my thinking.

My first awareness of anything relating to Unitarians was through a friend. We were attending a church that was embroiled in controversy around the issue of inclusive language, the traditionalists vs. the inclusive group. As we discussed the split in the church, my friend said the issue really didn't affect her, because she had once been a Unitarian, and had learned to read ahead and adjust the wording in hymns and readings to suit herself. This amused and intrigued me.

A few years later, I was co-facilitating a Confirmation class in that same church. Part of the series of classes involved attending services at other churches. For example we visited an inner-city Black church, a Greek Orthodox church, a Catholic church, and a congregation that ministered primarily to gays and lesbians. One of the churches we visited was this church, and I found the service very appealing. Following the service, we had a brief presentation, I think by Bob Rudolph, about the history of Unitarian Universalism and its principles. Right away I identified with what we were told. I had started to question everything I once thought I knew to be true, and what I heard here seemed to fit with where I was headed. The challenge was trying to hold a neutral discussion the following week with the confirmands without suggesting that perhaps we should all become Unitarians.

Not too long after that, that same church was going through some difficult transitions that made it hard for me to be there in spite of my long history with the congregation, so I started sampling some other places. Because of that previous introduction, this church was one place I started attending occasionally. I also sometimes went to St. Mark's just down the street because I liked the minister and some of the programming they provided and I had some friends there. One Sunday I planned on attending St. Mark's, but when I got there, there was no one there—apparently no service at the church that day. So I came down the street to the service here, and haven't been back to St. Mark's since. Just shows how important good communication is, even with those only peripherally involved with a church.

So I ended up here due to some spiritual searching and some coincidences. But what keeps me coming? I started attending here on a regular basis during one of Lynn Lyle's classes on the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh—I didn't want to miss a week of class.

Other things that keep me coming:

- The people who sought me out as a new face and welcomed me.
- The wonderful sermons that engage and challenge.
- The informative and stimulating RE classes by Dr. Blaine and others that are better than many classes I've paid lots of money to attend.
- The readings on Sunday that sample so much wisdom, not just that of the Bible.
- The speakers that are brought in, such as Dr. Brandon Scott from the Jesus Seminars, particularly of interest since I have been fascinated by their work through the years.
- I come because we offer a class called Building your Own Theology (what a wonderful new concept—using your brain to seek spiritual truth rather than just accepting it from others). This class guided me through an investigation of what I believe now and where my spiritual journey seems to be taking me.
- I come here because it gives me the chance to sit down after church over good food and talk about things that really matter, with people who are interested in, and care about, so many of the same things as me.
- I come because I feel supported and fed by liberal thought in a world that feels increasingly unfriendly to liberals.

The Unitarian principles and some coincidences brought me here, but it is the help with living those principles, the chance to grow spiritually finding the path that is right for me, and always of course the people, that keep me here. After a period of wandering, feeling like I didn't have a spiritual home, I've found it here. And that is why I am a U.U.