

Embracing Our Theological Diversity

Pacific Southwest District

The materials in this packet are taken from the series of workshops sponsored by the Pacific Southwest District on “Embracing Our Theological Diversity. This packet of material on the website includes the outlines from the presentations by the Rev. Tom Owen-Towle, the questions used for discussion by the UUA Commission on Appraisal that Tom used in the workshop, the exercises led by the Rev. Ken Brown as well as our bibliography. It is our hope that you will use these materials to continue the conversation in your congregations. If you want more information about the material or our workshop contact Ken at uurev@aol.com.



MANIFESTING OUR PROGRESSIVE THEOLOGY

BECOMING UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS

BECOMING PRACTITIONERS OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

BECOMING SITES FOR SAFE, WELCOMING, AND DISCIPLINED DIALOGUE

BECOMING VOW-MAKERS AND KEEPERS

BECOMING SEMPER REFORMANDA

BECOMING AN EMBODIED FAITH

Engaging Our Theological Diversity Workshops (PSWD)

September-October, 2006

Tom Owen-Towle

THINKING THEOLOGICALLY

What does it mean for a congregation to think theologically? It means that parishioners are more conscious of a larger worldview. The logic of the marketplace or therapy might be helpful, but they are secondary to thinking rooted in ways of faith.

When we are intentional about theological reflection, we enter a conversation that began long before us and will continue long after we are gone. Theology shows us the way to claim the richness of congregational life.

People are capable of using the language of theology. In other areas of life, people use sophisticated, nuanced ways of thinking. Why not apply the same sophistication to matters of faith?

Theological reflection is a way to align what we believe with who we are. Such reflection helps a congregation preach what it practices, and practice what it preaches.

Theology is the best tool for congregations to speak the truth about the relationship between the human and the divine. We neglect the responsible use of theology at our own peril

Anthony Robinson, from his book, *What's Theology Got to Do with It?*

Three questions for conversation about Unitarian Universalism

At the workshop Tom asked three questions that were discussed by the UUA Commission on Appraisal. They are great questions for a session of your small groups or as part of youth or adult education on theme of our theological diversity.

(1) What features of Unitarian Universalism, if you took them away, would leave us with something that is no longer Unitarian Universalism? (from Rebecca Parker)

(2) What, if you added it, would make Unitarian Universalism no longer Unitarian Universalism? (Commission on Appraisal)

(3) If you had never heard of Unitarian Universalism, how would you be different from the you that you are? (COA)

GROUP EXERCISES FOR EMBRACING OUR THEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Introductory Exercise on Early Religious Experience

Ask people to self identify into the group they were raised in:

Humanist

Earth-Centered

Theist

Fundamentalist Christian or other Tradition

Mainstream Tradition(Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc)

Unitarian Universalist

Unchurched

Depending on size of the group or time you can ask the participants to gather in the group from which they were raised and talk about what they liked about that tradition and what they want to carry forward as well as what they did not like and want to leave behind. There is a recorder for each group and each group reports out to the whole. If you do not want to break out into groups you can just ask the questions have the participants respond to the questions in the large group. Often just speaking them out loud works well at keeping the energy up.

UU Theological Identity Fish Bowl Exercise

Ask people to self identify themselves in one of the following groups. It is a forced choice and folks might balk but joke about UUs not liking to have to make choices but ask them for the sake of the exercise to please do so. As a Unitarian Universalist how would you identify yourself theologically?

Humanist

Mystic

Theist

Nature Based or Earth Centered

Christian

Other

Ask them to raise hands as to which group they have chosen, this helps you get a sense of the size of the groupings for the fish bowl. In a fish bowl exercise there are two circles: an inner and an outer. Everyone sits in the outer circle. Begin by asking all those identifying as Humanist to form an inner circle. The outer circle surrounds them closely so that each inner circle is heard. The inner circle group is asked two questions:

- 1) In your congregation what do you never want to hear said about you as a Humanist....
- 2) In your congregation what is the one thing you want people to know about you as a Humanist.

The first group exits the circle and the next group takes their place.

When each group is done, you can form one large group and ask folks to debrief, what did they learn, etc.

It requires that the group have some sort of trust built, but our experience was that people willingly participated since it happened in the middle of the workshop so folks had an opportunity to connect at some level. Of course people can opt out and even if they choose to be in the fish bowl they can always pass.

Embracing Our Theological Diversity Bibliography

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Journals

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