

MINISTER'S PAGE

Trying to Help

By Reverend Virginia Jarocha-Ernst

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Monmouth County, Lincroft, New Jersey

One of the best reasons for forming small groups is the ministry that can occur in these groups. The structures we accept like check-in, deep listening without cross talk, and confidentiality allow for a ministry of mutuality. The group then becomes an interesting container for our efforts to help one another.

I, like so many, have been taught that helping should be selfless and not about me. And this is true, up to a point. It is impossible for me not to be me, with my own set of anxieties, needs, and hurts, even when I am trying to help. But, selfless or selfish, helping is important anyway. So, in congregational life, I encourage helping that makes both parties stronger, healthier and brings all into more meaningful relationship.

We each come to this act with feelings and expectations of our own. To be in need of help can be difficult and even shameful. Some of us have a hard time asking for help. And helpers must be aware of their own need to rescue, a certain distancing from our own human fragility which gives us power over another for a brief moment in time.

So helping is risky business. But this risk transforms human hearts and brings us that much closer to the beloved community we are hoping for. Healthy helping breaks down the barriers between us. It chips away at our defenses and reminds us we are alive and vulnerable, too. Healthy helping functions to strengthen the web of community.

In order to help, we have to be honest about our limits. It doesn't really help to be a sponge, taking on every problem someone has as our own. We all have boundaries, and it does not serve us well – our small groups, our congregations, or ourselves – to deny them. When we are honest about our limitations, saying, “This, I can do, and this, I cannot do”, it levels the playing field, reminding us all that we are but temporarily ‘abled.’ We are human, fragile, and hurttable, as well. We cannot do everything, but perhaps we can do something to help someone for today.

How to help each other is an important conversation to have within your covenant groups. As we build relationships, honest communication about what can help us when we are in need is essential to creating a safe container for everyone in the group. Questions to consider are: When have you received help and when have you given help? What was each experience like for you? Was there an expectation of a favor in return? How were you changed?

An even exchange of services is not what I mean by mutuality. Rather, mutual helping changes us if we step out of our comfort zone and are open to transformation. There is something wildly generous about help that can be expanded and multiplied when sent outward rather than simply returned. Give your help away without expectation of return. This help is a gift, a service, a ministry we participate in for ourselves and for the world.

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