

From Our Members.....

Building My Credo, Living My Credo *by Bill Mahony*

The world is busy - and distracting. How can one hold onto "the spiritual" in the course of living one's daily life? One answer for me has been through my participation in a covenant group. Through the intimacy of a small group and the power of living intentionally through an agreed-upon covenant, I've gratefully appreciated this unique opportunity to share deeply in community and to grow spiritually.

My covenant group would offer a more specific answer to this question of how to hold tightly to one's core values: Through the spiritual practice of what might be called *building my credo, living my credo*.

Our group, *Tending to Spirit*, was born at Eno River UU Fellowship, Durham, NC in November 2008. We spent a good part of our first year exploring our UU Principles. The intellectual understanding of our seven Principles morphed into colorful, complex, and sometimes difficult challenges when interpreted through the personal life experience filters of nine very different individuals. We listened to each other...and then moved forward on a growing foundation of trust and fellowship, addressing a myriad of issues including loneliness, mindfulness, gratitude, fear, loss, joy, and prayer.

Last May our shared reflections, stories, and viewpoints took an unexpected turn. Several of us attended our Fellowship's Coming-of-Age service when our high school youth bravely shared personal credos - self-descriptions of who they are and what they believe - with the larger congregation. Inspired by the service, one member posed this question to the group: "Wouldn't it be a useful exercise for each of us to write a personal credo and share it with each other?" This question was the spark that ignited a flame. The answer was an immediate, unanimous, and passionate "Yes!" And off we went. Five meetings, spread over several months, were devoted to our "credo project."

Session I: *Moral Values and Our UU Faith*

As a prelude to identifying our essential core beliefs, each of us reflected on where our personal moral values have come from. Have these values been affected by our UU faith? And, since we're not a creed-based denomination, what motivates UUs to follow the seven Principles? What single core value among UU Principles might we identify as particularly essential to our fundamental beliefs?

Session II: *What is a "credo" and how shall I proceed in building mine?*

We were beginning to understand just how difficult it would be to define specifically who we were, and what, exactly, constituted our essential values and beliefs. We committed to continued reflection on this question. As a point of focus, we agreed to condense and distill to a final product of no more than 250 words. There would be no constraint on format, thus allowing a listing of "I believe..." statements, a personal narrative, or the use of descriptive prose or poetry. We also set up a timeline for subsequent related sessions.

Session III: *Our Fellowship Mission Statement: What does it mean to me, and how do I personally relate to it?*

Wouldn't the meaning of a church's mission statement be self-evident? As it turns out, not exactly. Some liked the current emphasis on "community;" others longed for a greater emphasis on "personal journey" and "individual freedom." Questions arose as to its clarity and specificity. The unexpectedly passionate discussion that unfolded validated the suspicion that a close examination of the stated mission of one's church can provide a useful stepping stone to resolving, defining, and prioritizing one's

core values and beliefs.

Session IV: *Sharing My Credo*

Following many weeks of reflection, we met and read our credos, spaced by some moments of silence between readings. A powerful and moving session!

Session V: *Living My Credo*

With credo in hand, we dedicated a final session to the question: "How are we, at this moment, living out our stated core beliefs and values in the course of our daily lives?" A challenging related question also emerged: "What real-life circumstances pose special challenges for translating my beliefs and principles into tangible, specific actions?"

Post-Credo

Our credo project has impacted us positively, including how we've approached our post-credo sessions. Simply put, we've no longer been able to address issues or topics - ranging from remembering loved ones who have died; to reflecting on the "what, why and how" of forgiveness; to reflections on how money impacts our lives - without viewing them through the lenses of our self-defined core values and beliefs.

Building our credos has impacted us in broader ways too, spilling into our workplaces and into our daily routines and relationships. Several of us have shared instances where we can no longer indulge in certain behaviors or attitudes. We are "hounded" (unrepressed smiles noted) by our heightened awareness of what we believe, which in turn pushes us to stretch in the direction of showing our better nature.

In the end, we came to realize that what we had just completed was only one cycle of a process that is ongoing, never-ending. We accept that, at the time of sharing our credos, we offered no more than a snapshot of where we were at that moment. Consequently, we plan to regularly re-visit not only our credos, but also how well we are doing in the living of them.

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