

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry
Dealing With Difference
First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA May 2022

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting:

“if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself.”
- *John Lewis*

Check-in/Sharing: This is the time to mention briefly any major issues or events on your mind that you would like to share. Please choose a community service project.

Topic: Dealing with Difference

We all exist in a network of relationships, personal and public. Some we get to choose, like friends or activities, others are involuntary, such as family or work connections. In these relationships we encounter people very like, and very unlike ourselves.

“Difference” is at the forefront of the cultural conversation these days. Many institutions, such as businesses or academia, promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) messages, which are embraced or resisted. Political conversations can be divisive, serving to highlight the issues which divide, rather than unite us. There can be many sources of difference: personality, national culture, values, experience.

As we navigate the “tossed salad” of existence we must negotiate this wealth of human difference. Some are eager to engage and explore difference, while others are more comfortable avoiding the conflict that can come with difference. Putting aside the “what,” this topic asks us to explore the “how,” that is examining and sharing how we navigate those differences in our various relationships.

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences. “ - *Audre Lorde*

“There is little difference in people, but that little difference makes a big difference. The little difference is attitude. The big difference is whether it is positive or negative.” - *W. Clement Stone*

“So, let us not be blind to our differences - but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved.” - *John F. Kennedy*

“It is understanding that gives us an ability to have peace. When we understand the other [person’s] viewpoint, and [they] understand ours, then we can sit down and work out our differences.” - *Harry S. Truman*

“Difference is of the essence of humanity. Difference is an accident of birth and it should therefore never be the source of hatred or conflict. The answer to difference is to respect it. Therein lies a most fundamental principle of peace: respect for diversity.” - *John Hume*

“Strength lies in differences, not in similarities.” - *Stephen Covey*

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- From your family of origin, how did you deal with differences with siblings, with parents and extended family?
- Is publicly/openly disagreeing with others difficult for you? How do you cope? Do you push forward or retreat to avoid open difference?
- In different aspects of your life such as work, volunteer, friends or family, how do you work with others when there is a difference of opinion?
- In different environments are there people whose opinions are taken more frequently than others? Why?
- How do you react to unresolved or unacknowledged differences?
- Are you able to accept difference? Are there points at which you cannot accept difference? How do you feel about compromise?

Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share).

Wrapping Up: How did you like this topic and session?

Closing Words

“Just because they're not on your road doesn't mean they've gotten lost.”
- Dalai Lama