

*Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website*

**Following Your Authentic Self (or Not!)**

*First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Delaware, by Rev. Michelle Collins, 2012*

**Chalice Lighting**

by Sarah Lammert

The element of fire represents passion, authenticity, and vitality. If the chalice is the supporting structure of Unitarian Universalism, then we are the flame. We are the flame, fanned strong by our passion for freedom, our yearning for truth-telling, our daring to be authentic with one another, and the vitality we sustain in our meeting together. In all of this there is love.

**Check In**

**Reading**

***Follow that Sweater!***

by Rev. Josh Snyder

During my sophomore year of college I faced a, shall I say, unique moral quandary. I was studying at the undergraduate library one night; a building that had earned its nickname “the UGLI.” I was seated at a square table with four chairs around it reading something about cultures in faraway lands for one of my Anthropology classes. I was by myself, until another student sat down on the opposite side of the table. She took off her sweater and hung it over her chair. I glanced up to look at her, but she was busy reading. After about twenty minutes she got up and walked to where the bathrooms were. A few moments after that, a man strode up to where she had been sitting, grabbed her sweater off the back of the chair and briskly walked away. I was taken aback at this. Had that fellow just stolen her sweater? What would he want with a woman’s sweater? It was very confusing. What just happened? I got up and walked around the table. I craned my head to see if I could spot either the woman or the thief that had made off with her sweater. I didn’t see either of them, so I sat back down and waited for her to return. I would describe the fellow who took her sweater when she came back. I went back to my book. In the meantime, the woman returned along with the fellow who had stolen her sweater! Two other students, who I had not met or seen, pulled up chairs to the table. All of a sudden they were very interested in me. For you see, unbeknownst to me, I had been the unwitting subject of an experiment they were all doing for a psychology class. It was a set up the whole time! They wanted to see how I would react if I had witnessed a theft. The man and woman acted out the crime while the other two students of the study group observed and documented my reaction from afar. And now they wanted to know why.

## **Discussion & Sharing Questions**

- Have you ever directly witnessed a crime or injustice of some sort? What happened? And more importantly, what did you do?
- How did your reaction match up with your beliefs? Did your reaction surprise you?
- What does “authentic” even mean? It’s often a catch phrase that gets thrown around a lot. What do you mean when you say that you or something is authentic?
- Many Unitarian Universalists would say that it is only through one’s deeds that one’s beliefs come into being. And that this is the window into one’s authentic self.
  - Can you think of a time that your actions did not match up with your beliefs?
  - What happened? What held you back from acting in a way that matched your beliefs?
  - What was going on inside for you?
  - If you had to do it over again, would you change anything?

## **Closing Thoughts**

A word or phrase from the discussion today that you’ll carry with you from here.

## **Extinguishing the Chalice**