

Our Spiritual Beliefs

Countryside Church UU, Palatine, IL adapted from other sources, April 2006

Pre-Meeting Preparation

At the end of the previous session, or sometime before this session, give to group members the preparation page for this session (attached at the end of this document.)

Preliminaries

Chalice Lighting and Reading (read together):

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person.
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- The right conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Check-in.

Transition Meditation

Help the group move from check-in preliminaries to silence with directed deep breathing, soft words, music, or other meditative techniques.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

In a spirit of listening to and supporting each other, we'll be sharing our reflections on our spiritual beliefs. For your "prethinking," you were asked to think about these questions:

1. Why are you a Unitarian Universalist, or attending Countryside Church UU?
2. What in your spiritual journey brought you to this place?
3. What is spiritual life for you? Does "God" have a place? If so, what does that mean?
4. What spiritual practices do you have?

You don't have to address all these questions, or any of them. Feel free to share only what you're comfortable sharing.

Optional Questions or Activities for Facilitator

- Did anyone's story remind you of something more you'd like to share about your own journey?
- Did you notice any commonalities in these stories?

Check-out

Closing Reading/Extinguishing the Chalice

Reading:

Blessing – by Carol Meyers

May we open ourselves ever more fully to that Eternal Mystery which lures us onward toward life and creativity.

May we find the courage to live our faith, to speak our truth, and to strive together for a world where freedom abounds and justice truly does roll down like water.

May we know the fullness of love without fear, and the serenity of peace without turmoil.

May we hold one another in the deep and tender places with compassion, and may we grace one another by sharing our own vulnerabilities, being ever mindful of the divinity within that makes soulmates of us all.

So May We Be.

Preparation for CCUU Session: Our Spiritual Beliefs

Every year at Countryside Church, the Coming of Age Group celebrates a worship service for the congregation. During that service, each student gives a short presentation of what they have come to believe. One of the most marvelous things about these presentations is that each and every one is different.

Last year, one young man talked about his belief in reincarnation. Another witnessed to a belief in the Christian God and Christian scriptures. A young woman professed to believe in a God of all religions, a universal spirit. And yet another told us that she still didn't know what she believed. Each of these affirmations described a young person on a spiritual journey.

We, too, are on the same journey. At our next covenant group meeting, we'll try to do half as well as our Coming of Age group, by sharing what we feel comfortable sharing about where we are on our spiritual journeys. At the end of this material is a segment of Elizabeth Gilbert's new novel, "Eat, Pray, Live." In this segment, Gilbert tells us how she relates to "God." It's included to give you an idea of things to think about—NOT to give you an example of what you need to do for prework!! You're not being asked to write an affirmation. Rather, to consider what your beliefs are and what you might want to share. The following questions may help.

Food for Thought

1. Why are you a Unitarian Universalist, or attending Countryside Church UU?
2. What in your spiritual journey brought you to this place?
3. What is spiritual life for you? Does "God" have a place? If so, what does that mean?
4. What spiritual practices do you have?

Meditation Reading

From Elizabeth Gilbert's Memoir, "Eat, Pray, Love"

What happened was that I started to pray.

You know--like, to God.

Now, this was a first for me. And since this is the first time I have introduced that loaded word--GOD--into my book, and since this is a word which will appear many times again throughout these pages, it seems only fair that I pause here for a moment to explain exactly what I mean when I say that word, just so people can decide right away how offended they need to get.

Saving for later the argument about whether God exists at all (now here's a better idea: let's skip that argument completely), let me first explain why I use the word *God*, when I could just as easily use the words *Jehovah*, *Allah*, *Shiva*, *Brahma*, *Vishnu* or *Zeus*..

Alternatively, I could call God "*That*," which is how the ancient Sanskrit scriptures say it, and which I think comes close to the all-inclusive and unspeakable entity I have sometimes experienced. But that "*That*" feels impersonal to me--a thing, not a being--and I myself cannot pray to a *That*. I need a proper name, in order to fully sense a personal attendance.

For this same reason, when I pray, I do not address my prayers to The Universe, The Great Void, The Force, The Supreme Self, The Whole, The Creator, The Light, The Higher Power, or even the most poetic manifestation of God's name, taken, I believe, from the Gnostic gospels: "The Shadow of the Turning."

I have nothing against any of these terms. I feel they are all equal because they are all equally adequate and inadequate descriptions of the indescribable. But we each do need a functional name for this indescribability, and "God" is the name that feels the most warm to me, so that's what I use. I should also confess that I generally refer to God as "Him," which doesn't bother me because, to my mind, it's just a convenient personalizing pronoun, not a precise anatomical description or a cause for revolution. Of course, I don't mind if people call God "Her," and I understand the urge to do so. Again--to me, these are both equal terms, equally adequate and inadequate. Though I

do think the capitalization of either pronoun is a nice touch, a small politeness in the presence of the divine.

Culturally, though not theologically, I'm a Christian. I was born a Protestant of the white Anglo-Saxon persuasion. And while I do love that good teacher of peace who was called Jesus, and while I do reserve the right to ask myself in certain trying situations what indeed He would do, I can't swallow that one fixed rule of Christianity insisting that Christ is the *only* path to God. Strictly speaking, then, I cannot call myself a Christian. Most of the Christians I know accept my feelings on this with grace and openmindedness. Then again, most of the Christians I know don't speak very strictly. To those who do speak (and think) strictly, all I can do here is offer my regrets for any hurt feelings and now excuse myself from their business.

Traditionally, I have responded to the transcendent mystics of all religions. I have always responded with breathless excitement to anyone who has ever said that God does not live in a dogmatic scripture or in a distant throne in the sky, but instead abides very close to us indeed--much closer than we can imagine, breathing right through our own hearts. I respond with gratitude to anyone who has ever voyaged to the center of that heart, and who has then returned to the world with a report for the rest of us that God is *an experience of supreme love*. In every religious tradition on earth, there have always been mystical saints and transcendents who report exactly that experience. Unfortunately many of them have ended up arrested and killed. Still, I think very highly of them.

In the end, what I have come to believe about God is simple. It's like this--I used to have this really great dog. She came from the pound. She was a mixture of about ten different breeds, but seemed to have inherited the finest features of them all. She was brown. When people asked me, "What kind of dog is that?" I would always give the same answer: "She's a brown dog." Similarly, when the question is raised, "What kind of God do you believe in?" my answer is easy: "**I believe in a magnificent God.**"