

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Politics

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, February 2015

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Opening Words: Finding Our Place (Catholic monk, writer, activist Thomas Merton)

Humans have a responsibility to their own time,
not as if they could seem to stand outside it and donate
various spiritual and material benefits to it
from a position of compassionate distance.

Humans have a responsibility
to find themselves where they are,
in their own proper time and place,
in the history to which they belong
and to which they must inevitably contribute
either their response or their evasions,
either truth and act,
or mere slogan and gesture.

Chalice Lighting and Silence

[Covenant Review]

Check-in: Open check-in or optional topic: How do you get your news?

Introduction:

This topic offers your circle the opportunity to share thoughts and feelings about a subject considered taboo or, at least, risky in many settings. Ironically, civil discourse about the health and prosperity of American society and of the world is a critical ingredient in a productive, conscientious and wise political process. What better place could there be than this one to practice giving voice to the convictions that guide us, as individual citizens, in our participation in the American political process? Here we speak honestly from the heart, with no agenda of debate or argument, to careful listeners who want only to understand who the speaker is and what he or she holds most dear. We speak not in order to change or shame anyone else. We speak in order to learn more about ourselves in the process of deepening our relationship with others.

We ask each other during these two hours not to assume that everyone or anyone in the room shares our position on political topics. Although Unitarian Universalism tends to attract political and social liberals, the political identities of members of our congregation (and Association) span the whole political spectrum. Speak for yourself, remembering our covenant to use “I,” and to speak more from story than from theory.

Remember that what a person says out loud here is confidential to this group. If, later on, you would like to hear more from someone in the group, ask the person first if they are willing and if the time and place are right.

Quotations

Reflection:

Before we get to the questions for group reflection, let's take a few minutes for self-reflection and personal grounding. Take a few slow, deep breaths and relax any muscles that feel tense.

Think of two or three issues that have meaning and energy for you in the current political scene in this country—three particular situations in the public eye. These can be local, state or national or global matters. They can be about particular politicians, debates, platforms, policies, laws, judicial decisions, or military actions. Something you read in the paper or saw on TV this morning or discussed with your partner or a friend might come to mind.

For each, try to articulate, silently, for yourself, what it is about those issues that moves you? What is the root of your concern; what values or experiences shape your response? What feelings come up for you as you think about these issues? Who or what in the situation do you worry about? What images come to mind?

As you address the questions below, it might help to have thought about these specific examples.

Questions for Group Reflection

1. **When you were little, what do you remember about the way the adults in your life responded to the political issues of the time?** How did your family engage in the American political process?
2. **Tell us about one of your earliest memories of being personally affected by a political issue.** How old were you? How did you learn about the issue? Can you remember your feelings? Were you moved to some kind of action, on your own or with others?
3. **How engaged are you now with the American political process?** Do you read political stories in magazines and newspapers, watch political commentaries on TV, attend lectures, research political topics, meet with candidates, engage in lobbying, vote, watch election returns, talk with family or friends about the issues of the day?
4. **What moral principles help you discern your position on political issues or the responsibility of government?** Think in terms of the UU Principles and your own most deeply held values and beliefs about right and wrong, good and evil, and responsible relationships to other beings, the earth and to life itself.
5. **Are there times when the positions on social issues taken by our Association of Congregations, by UU friends or by Sunday morning speakers are not congruent with your own?** Are you able to resolve that tension? Is there value for you in that process of grappling with differences in political perspectives?

6. **In your life outside of this Fellowship community, do political differences negatively or positively affect your relationships with family, friends and colleagues?** Tell us a story to illustrate your answer.
7. **What frustrates and disappoints you most about the American political process right now?**

Likes and Wishes: (Likes: celebrations, gratitudes, appreciations for needs met; and Wishes: mournings, requests, acknowledgements of needs not met)

Closing Words and Chalice Extinguishing: The Last Election (John Haines)

Suppose there are no returns,
and the candidates, one
by one, drop off in the polls,
as the voters turn away,
each to his inner persuasion.

The front-runners, the dark horses,
begin to look elsewhere,
and even the President admits
he has nothing new to say;
it is best to be silent now.

No more conventions, no donors,
no more hats in the ring;
no ghost-written speeches,
no promises we always knew
were never meant to be kept.

And something like the truth,
or what we knew by that name –
that for which no corporate
sponsor was ever offered –
takes hold of the public mind.

Each subdued and thoughtful
citizen closes his door, turns
off the news. He opens a book,
speaks quietly to his children,
begins to live once more.

Quotations

Man is by nature a political animal. ~Aristotle

Politics, n: [Poly "many" + tics "blood-sucking parasites"] ~Larry Hardiman

Genuine politics -- every politics worthy of the name -- the only politics I am willing to devote myself to -- is simply a matter of serving those around us: serving the community and serving those who will come after us. Its deepest roots are moral because it is a responsibility expressed through action, to and for the whole. ~Vaclav Havel

A politician is a fellow who will lay down your life for his country. ~Texas Guinan

Politics ought to be the part-time profession of every citizen who would protect the rights and privileges of free people and who would preserve what is good and fruitful in our national heritage. ~Dwight D. Eisenhower

If we choose only to expose ourselves to opinions and viewpoints that are in line to our own, we become more polarized, more set in our own ways. It will only reinforce and deepen the political divides in our country. But if we choose to actively seek out information that challenges our assumptions and beliefs, perhaps we can begin to understand where the people who disagree with us are coming from. ~Barack Obama

Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect. ~Mark Twain

I claim that human mind or human society is not divided into watertight compartments called social, political and religious. All act and react upon one another. ~Mohandas K. Gandhi

Democracy is also a form of worship. It is the worship of Jackals by Jackasses. ~H. L. Mencken

At every turn when there has been an imbalance of power, the truth questioned, or our beliefs and values distorted, the change required to restore our nation has always come from the bottom up from our people. ~Howard Dean

A flourishing, morally credible media is a vital component in the maintenance of genuinely public talk, argument about common good. ~Rowan D. Williams

I always believe that ultimately, if people are paying attention, then we get good government and good leadership. And when we get lazy, as a democracy and civically start taking shortcuts, then it results in bad government and politics.
- Barack Obama

A politician thinks of the next election; a statesman thinks of the next generation. ~James Freeman Clarke (UU minister)

Although the connections are not always obvious, personal change is inseparable from social and political change. ~Harriet Lerner

A party of order and stability, and a party of progress or reform, are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life. ~John Stuart Mill

Politicians and diapers should be changed frequently and all for the same reason. ~José Maria de Eça de Queiroz

Under democracy one party always devotes its chief energies to trying to prove that the other party is unfit to rule — and both commonly succeed, and are right. ~H.L. Mencken

Those who are too smart to engage in politics are punished by being governed by those who are dumber. ~Plato

Politicians are people who, when they see light at the end of the tunnel, go out and buy some more tunnel. ~John Quinton

Mankind will never see an end of trouble until... lovers of wisdom come to hold political power, or the holders of power... become lovers of wisdom. ~Plato

If God wanted us to vote, he would have given us candidates. ~Jay Leno

Politics is supposed to be the second-oldest profession. I have come to realize that it bears a very close resemblance to the first. ~Ronald Reagan