



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

### **The Arts**

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, April 2013

Rev. Margie Allen and Rev. Dr. Linda Anderson

#### **Opening words "Matisse's Dance" By Natalie Safir (1990)**

A break in the circle dance of naked women,  
dropped stitch between the hands  
of the slender figure stretching too hard  
to reach her joyful sisters.

Spirals of glee sail from the arms  
of the tallest woman. She pulls  
the circle around with her fire.  
What has she found that she doesn't  
keep losing, her torso  
a green-burning torch?

Grass mounds curve ripely beneath  
two others who dance beyond the blue.  
Breasts swell and multiply and  
rhythms rise to a gallop.

Hurry, frightened one and grab on--before  
the stich is forever lost, before the dance  
unravels and a black sun swirls from that space.

## **Chalice lighting and silence**

**Covenant** (optional)

**Check-in** (optional focus - spring has finally arrived, how is your spirit?)

### **Topic Introduction**

Creating art and responding to beauty has occupied humanity for millennia. Maybe for as long as we have been on this earth. Art has been defined as "the expression and application of human skill and imagination." What is art to you? More important perhaps than a definition of art is the effect it has on the human heart. Millions of people each year make a trip to Paris to see the Mona Lisa. What's that about? Whether literature, poetry, music, film, theater, painting, dance, sculpture, photography, or any other art form, art can move and inspire us, disgust us, delight us, frighten us, enlighten us. While each person responds in his/her unique way and not all of us respond to the same works of art, something about the beauty of art speaks to something in the human breast, responds to some universal need. What exactly that shared need may be is challenging to name. This month we will have a chance to figure it out for ourselves as we listen, think and speak together.

**Quotations (see the last page)**

### **Activity**

*(Facilitators: this activity can be done in one of two ways. Explain that this activity is meant to put us in touch with our imaginations. Read this quote -- Albert Einstein said "Imagination is more important than knowledge.")*

*1. Divide the group into small groups of 3 or 2. Give each group a copy of the picture that is part of this lesson and ask each person to make up a story about what is going on in the picture. People can say whatever comes into their heads. It is meant to be done quickly and spontaneously. Have each person share within the small group. Give about 12 minutes for this.*

*OR*

*2. Divide the group into small groups of 3 or 2. Give each group a copy of the picture that is part of this lesson and ask each group to make up a story together about what is going on in the picture. People can say whatever comes into their heads. It is meant to be done quickly and spontaneously. When about 5 minutes have passed, bring everyone together again. Have each group share their story with the whole group. Give about 10 minutes for this, for a total of 15 minutes for the whole activity.*

### **Questions for group reflection**

1. As you were growing up, what arts were you exposed to, if any? Can you recall a particularly meaningful experience?

2. What is the role of the arts in your life now? What art forms attract or move you most these days? What kinds of art no longer interest you, or never did?
3. Do you consider yourself creative? How so? What do you like best about it?
4. Are there different types of art that support your spiritual experience? What? What happens to you when you encounter art of that kind? What feelings do you have?
5. Can you think of a song, poem, a book, a film, a story that had a strong impact on you? How did it affect you?
6. What do you think the point of the storytelling activity above might have been?
7. If you could time travel and meet any artist you wanted to, whom would you choose? Why?

## **Likes and wishes**

### **Closing words and Chalice extinguishing (have everybody read a line)**

Beauty is before me, and  
Beauty is behind me,  
Above me and below me  
Hovers the beautiful.  
I am surrounded by it,  
I am immersed in it.  
In my youth I am aware of it  
And, in old age,  
I shall walk quietly the beautiful trail.  
In beauty it is begun.  
In beauty it is ended.  
(Navajo)

## Quotations

Everything you can imagine is real. ----Pablo Picasso

The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious - the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. ----Albert Einstein

And now, I'm just trying to change the world, one sequin at a time. ----Lady Gaga

Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time. ---Thomas Merton

Life doesn't imitate art, it imitates bad television. ----Woody Allen

Art without emotion its like chocolate cake without sugar. It makes you gag.  
— Laurie Halse Anderson

The arts are not a way to make a living. They are a very human way of making life more bearable. Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake. Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories. Write a poem to a friend, even a lousy poem. Do it as well as you possible can. You will get an enormous reward. You will have created something. ----Kurt Vonnegut

Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life. ----Pablo Picasso

Deliver me from writers who say the way they live doesn't matter. I'm not sure a bad person can write a good book. If art doesn't make us better, then what on earth is it for. ----Alice Walker

When words become unclear, I shall focus with photographs. When images become inadequate, I shall be content with silence. ----Ansel Adams

In a world of disorder and disaster and fraud, sometimes only beauty can be trusted. -  
---Elizabeth Gilbert

Life is a blank canvas, and you need to throw all the paint on it you can. ---Danny Kaye

Music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without.  
----Confucius

I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free. ----Michelangelo

To create one's world in any of the arts takes courage. ----Georgia O'Keefe

Photo to use for the activity

