

## **The Haunting Church**

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, Rev. Virginia Jarocho-Ernst, September 2006

### Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

We arrive out of many singular rooms, walking over the branching streets.

We come to be assured that our brothers and sisters surround us, to restore their images upon our eyes.

We enlarge our voices in common speaking and singing.

We try again that solitude found in the midst of those who with us seek their hidden reckonings.

Our eyes reclaim the remembered faces; their voices stir the surrounding air.

The warmth of their hands assures us, and the gladness of our spoken names.

This is the reason of cities, of homes, of assemblies in the houses of worship.

It is good to be with one another.

- Kenneth L. Patton, UU minister

### Reflection/Personal Sharing/Prayer (approximately 30 minutes)

(The facilitator should briefly remind the group of confidentiality/anonymity, that this is not the time for cross conversation, etc.) (Include the ritual sharing of meaningful objects to welcome newcomers to the group.)

### Focus Reading:

Adapted from "Owning Your Religious Past: The Haunting Church" by Bonnie Stauffacher

The majority of Unitarian Universalists come into the denomination from other religions; often there have been several stops along the path into our societies. Some bring with them angry and unresolved feelings about experiences in other religious institutions, others have warm memories. Some move easily into an identity as a Unitarian Universalist; others experience a traumatic estrangement from family and from the center of their culture. Our congregations have frequently neglected to understand and acknowledge the widely varying needs of members regarding this process.

We can be most fully and completely present in our religious identity when we see our path as a continuum rather than a series of unrelated episodes. People who feel whole in this identity are more likely to make solid, healthy commitments to religious communities.

Because we are usually more certain of what we left in another religion than what we bring forward from it, some tools are needed by which people may establish connections, bridges, and

resonances between past and present. Such activity also provides clues about the possible future direction of those paths.

These questions are not just for “converts.” Long-time and life-long Unitarian Universalists also experience change, sometimes profoundly, in their religious identity. This conversation is enriched by the participation of people of varying tenure as UU’s.

#### Focus Questions:

What are all the religious labels that have ever applied to you?

What are some of the significant moments you have experienced in your religious history?

What are some of the positive aspects of your religious past?

What are you still seeking? How might you get it?

#### Checkout/Likes and Wishes:

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

#### Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

Let us go our ways,  
Knowing not the answers to all things,  
Yet seeking always the answer to one more thing than we know.

Let us be seekers together;  
Be adventurers in ways untrod.

Let us hold the hope of discovery high within us –  
Sharing the hope, and whatever discovery may come, with others.

- John W. Brigham, adapted