

**Sources of Our Living Tradition #4**

Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, LA, Branches Group #38, January 2022

**OPENING WORDS**

The living tradition we share draws from many sources. The fourth is: Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves.

**CHECK-IN**

**READINGS**

(all quotations in these readings are from *A Chosen Faith*, by John A. Buehrens and Forrest Church, Beacon Press, 1998)

Some Unitarian Universalists, who still suffer from a religious education based upon teachings from the Bible that inspired fear rather than love in their hearts, have little desire to return to the Bible and reclaim its essential teachings as a part of their own faith. Others, Unitarian Universalists Christians, center their faith and their devotions on the scriptures. But however we gauge the nature of the Bible's authority, nearly all of us can embrace the principle of neighborliness at the heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition. ~ Forrest Church

The words and deeds of Jesus recorded in the New Testament provide the blueprint for human fulfillment. Jesus calls us to comfort and sustain one another, to lift the burdens of the oppressed, and to serve God with joy.~ Judith L. Hoehler

The bond of unity in a church is not a shared belief, but a shared worship. Worship (worth-ship) is an act of reverence for what is regarded as of great, or supreme, worth. In the ultimate analysis this is but another way of capturing the real meaning of love. What is of real worth to us, in the full sense, we cannot help but love. Love is reverence for life, to use Albert Schweitzer's phrase, and reverence is a mode of worship. ~ Phillip Hewett

[William Ellery] Channing and [Theodore] Parker preached what Unitarian Universalists have been proclaiming ever since. We believe in "neighborhood" – the universal spirit of neighborliness expressed in those Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves. ~ Forrest Church

**QUESTIONS** Please respond to any of the questions you feel moved to answer or any of the readings that you find to be particularly meaningful.

These questions are from session 5 of the study guide for the book *A Chosen Faith*, by John A. Buehrens and Forrest Church, at <https://www.beacon.org/Assets/ClientPages/AChosenFaithdg.aspx>

1. Reflect on your own experience with the Bible. Are your associations positive or negative? Do you have a favorite Bible passage or story or character? Are there aspects of the Bible which repel or anger you?
2. The phrase "loving our neighbors as ourselves" brings to mind the recently noted "not in my backyard" response to possible sitings of waste-treatment plants, prisons, shelters for the homeless, halfway houses for recovering mental patients, or other necessities of the larger community. What does the word "neighbor" mean to you? Do you think of neighborhood as an island of retreat from the rest of the world, or an open, diversified community? What persons or facilities would you not welcome "in your backyard."
3. Assuming that most people would make an "unwelcome neighbors" list similar to yours, how would you suggest meeting these needs?

### **CLOSING WORDS**

Blessed are those who know that the work of the church is the transformation of society; who have a vision of Beloved Community transcending the present, and who do not shrink from controversy, sacrifice, or change. ~ John Buehrens, from *A Chosen Faith*, Beacon Press, 1998

### *notes on people quoted*

**The Rev. Judith L. Hoehler**, Unitarian Universalist minister, retired from the ministry in 1995. She was a 1988 recipient of The Rabbi Martin Katzenstein Award of the Harvard Divinity School Alumni/ae Association, established "to honor among its graduates one who exhibits a passionate and helpful interest in the lives of other people, an informed and realistic faithfulness, an embodiment of the idea that love is not so much a way of feeling as a way of acting, and a reliable sense of humor."

- <https://my.uua.org/directory/people/142548>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Rabbi\\_Martin\\_Katzenstein\\_Award](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rabbi_Martin_Katzenstein_Award)

**The Rev. Dr. Phillip Hewett** (1925-2018) was minister emeritus of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver. He received the S.T.D. from the Starr King School for Ministry in 1969. He has written a number of books introducing Unitarianism, including *An Unfettered Faith: the Religion of a Unitarian* (1956), *On Being a Unitarian* (1968), and *The Unitarian Way* (1985). His principal historical work is *Unitarians in Canada* (1978, 2nd edition 1995). He served three terms on the board of the Canadian Unitarian Council. He was a strong advocate for the environment, family planning, disarmament, and peace. In 1992 he was given the Unitarian Universalist Association annual award for distinguished service.

- <https://uudb.org/authors/philliphewett.html>
- <https://vancouverunitarians.ca/minister-emeritus/>
- <https://cuc.ca/remembering-phillip-hewett/>

**The Rev. Dr. F. Forrester Church** (1948-2009) served the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City as senior minister since 1978 and as minister of public theology since 2007. He died September 24, 2009, of esophageal cancer. A frequent contributor to UU World, he is the author of many books.

- <https://www.uua.org/offices/people/forrest-church>
- <https://www.uua.org/pressroom/news/news/memorial-rev-dr-forrest-church-theologian-author>

**The Rev. John Buehrens** was president of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations from 1993 to 2001. He served congregations in Tennessee, Texas, New York, Massachusetts, and California before retiring in 2017. He is the co-author with Forrest Church of *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*, and author of many books.

- <https://www.uua.org/offices/people/john-buehrens>