



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

**Your Own Religion and Politics
Hayward, CA, Kathryn LaMar, October 2021**

OPENING SONG: Vicar of Bray (Traditional song, arranged and performed by “Sheet Music Singer:” <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ev5wcGTsKx4>>

CHALICE LIGHTING / OPENING WORDS **1.0 min**

Reading in the Round: 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.

Thomas Merton

MEDITATION / CENTERING **1 min**

The first sound of the gong brings us to silence. Please take time to center yourself, and temporarily push aside whatever might be preventing you from participating fully in this session. The second sound of the gong returns us to each other’s presence.

CHECK-IN (2 ROUNDS) **40 min**

Please share some thing(s) about your life since last we met.

INTRODUCTION **5 min**

From the article 5 Ways Religion Can Influence Political Beliefs by Nicholas C. DiDonato (Patheos, June 18, 2013): Typically, when people think of “religion and politics,” they think of social issues such as abortion, contraceptives, and gay marriage. However, this approach starts at the group level rather than focusing on individuals. Wanting instead to see how religion can affect political beliefs at the individual level, Ryan LaMothe found five ways in which this can happen.

1. In the first type, religion has a “lingering influence” on a person’s political beliefs. Because they were part of a particular religion early on in life, that religion’s symbols and narratives have been engrained in their mindset, even though they may have abandoned the tradition.
2. The second type reverses the first: a person starts with no religious affiliation and converts to a religion, with the net effect that their political beliefs shift.

3. The third type simply consists of children applying their family’s religious lifestyle to the political sphere in a way foreign to their family.
4. The fourth type places the primacy on the political rather than the religious experience of an individual. Although a person may derive some inspiration from religion, what ultimately drives and motivates this person are political stances. Religion takes a backseat to politics.
5. The fifth and final type places absolute primacy on the religious over the political--religious experience leads people to reject the political realm altogether. Here, individuals have a religious encounter that convinces them to estrange themselves as much as possible from the political happenings around them.

These five types make clear that religion has no clear or necessary connection with political beliefs or activism [on the individual level]. Sometimes religion leads to more political involvement, sometimes none at all, and still other times the political involvement affects religion. If anything, the mix of religion and politics should be loathed not because one corrupts the other, but because the result is so unpredictable.

QUOTES ABOUT RELIGION AND POLITICS

10 min

I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.

Galileo Galilei

Religion is what keeps the poor from murdering the rich.

Napoleon Bonaparte

I would rather live my life as if there is a God and die to find out there isn't, than live as if there isn't and to die to find out that there is.

Albert Camus

The more I study religions the more I am convinced that man never worshipped anything but himself.

Richard Burton

Science can purify religion from error and superstition. Religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes.

Pope John Paul II

The World is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion.

Thomas Paine

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness.

Dalai Lama

No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says: He is always convinced that it says what he means.

George Bernard Shaw

There is nothing evil save that which perverts the mind and shackles the conscience.

Saint Ambrose

Religion kept some of my relatives alive, because it was all they had. If they hadn't had some hope of heaven, some companionship in Jesus, they probably would have committed suicide, their lives were so hellish.

Octavia E. Butler

The God who existed before any religion counts on you to make the oneness of the human family known and celebrated.

Desmond Tutu

We must seek the loving-kindness of God in all the breadth and open-air of common life.

George A. Smith

All religions must be tolerated ... for every man must get to heaven in his own way.

Epictetus

Disturbances in society are never more fearful than when those who are stirring up the trouble can use the pretext of religion to mask their true designs.

Denis Diderot

When we blindly adopt a religion, a political system, a literary dogma, we become automatons. We cease to grow.

Anais Nin

Religion is at its best when it is a long way from political power The founders of the Christian religion ... Jesus and St. Paul -- were both clear about this. "Blessed are the meek." "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." St. Paul is perfectly clear that the highest Christian virtue is charity, not patriotism, not martial valor, not exalting your class, your group, your race above others, but charity ... When religion remembers that and acts accordingly, it does good.

But religion, at various points in human history ... has acquired political power, and put its hands on the levers of social authority. It decides who shall live and who shall die. It decides how we shall dress, what we shall be allowed to read, whether we shall go to war, and so on. When religion acquires that power, it goes bad very rapidly.

Philip Pullman

I understand we all have our differences. But while learning about history I've read about white people coming together, Jews coming together, Spanish coming together, different cultures and religions understanding and coming together despite their differences. Slavery was never something that shocked me. What shocks me is how black people have not yet overcome the odds and we're such strong smart people. Why we can't just stand together?

Jonathan Anthony Burkett

In an age when nations and individuals routinely exchange murder for murder, when the healing grace of authentic spirituality is usurped by the divisive politics of religious organizations, and when broken hearts bleed pain in darkness without the relief of compassion, the voice of an exceptional poet producing exceptional work is not something the world can afford to dismiss.

Aberjani

Healing imagery ... implies that the damage being done is primarily emotional. The goal becomes one of "getting along" better by being nicer and more tolerant toward one another, forgiving and forgetting, living in more authentic ways. ... this goal ignores the fact that a lot of the trouble ... is embedded in structures of power and inequality that shape almost every aspect of life in this society, from economics to politics to religion to schools and the family. The idea that we're going to get out of this by somehow getting to a place where we're kinder and more sensitive to one another ... sets us up to walk right past the trouble toward an alternative that doesn't exist and can't exist until we do something about what creates privilege and oppression in the first place. And that is something that needs to be changed, not healed.

Allan G. Johnson

I am willing to contribute for a grand tombstone for Political Correctness (PC). ... It has stifled frank exchange of ideas and has made debates one-sided and pre-concluded. It has given strength to ideas which cannot defend themselves in an open debate. PC ... is disastrous in public space as it makes that public space an oxymoron by making it restricted to only the "acceptable". Democracy is about competitive ideas and PC is undemocratic as it discounts the possibility of a level playing field. All growth of ideas is through cross fertilization and PC leads to degeneration of ideas by restricting the process to inbreeding. Only those who use weakness as leverage to

gain advantage without effort or have a hidden agenda will root for PC. It is the tool of the lazy and the dev-
ous.

R. N. Prasher

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*

Whenever you find yourself on the side if the majority, it is time to puse and reflect.

Mark Twain

I claim that human mind or human society is not divided into waterrtight compartments called social, political
and religious. All act and react upon each other.

Mohandas K. Gandhi

Democracy is also a form of worship. It is the worship of Jackals by Jackasses.

H. L. Mencken

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

Plato

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

PREPARATION FOR GROUP REFLECTION

1 min

Read the questions for reflection, one by one

BREAK

10 min

**Concurrent with SONG: Religion and Politics(written and performed by Urban Species with Terry
Callier)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dazNBW-0rT4>

GROUP REFLECTION (two rounds)

50 min

Please take time to express your own history of the individual and interactive elements of religion and politics.

- ◆ What types of religious experiences did you have as a child? How did these change over the course of your life?
- ◆ When did you first become aware of the political life of your local, state, and national (and interna-
tional) lives? What memories do you have of your early “political” life? How did these experiences
broaden as you got older (if they did)?
- ◆ How would you say your religious and political views affected each other over the course of your
life?
- ◆ Does government exist to keep us in line or help us live a good life?

- ◆ What moral principles help you discern your position on political issues or the responsibility of government?
- ◆ In your life outside of this UU community, do political differences negatively or positively affect your relationships with family, friends, and colleagues? Tell us about how you handle these situations.
- ◆ Which of the quotes brought you up short, or made you feel open to different ideas and/or ways of looking at things?

SESSION FEEDBACK

5 min

How did this session go for you? What could have gone better for you? Are there any changes to the group format you can think of that would help us fulfill our mission, charter, or camaraderie better?

FUTURE PLANS

5 min

Any responses to pleas for additional participants? If none, the single, continuing group needs to determine their schedule and commit for the upcoming year.

EXTINGUISH CHALICE / CLOSING WORDS

0.5 min

The Last Election (John Haines): Reading in The Round 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.

CLOSING SONG: Glory (from Selma) written and performed by Common and John Legend:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n03Jj0Q2cMI>

Much of this session plan is based on political session plans of congregations in Auburn, ME and Stony Brook, NY