

February 5th, 2017

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Presenter: Brenda Diebel

Today we are reflecting on our 5th UU Principle “The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and community at large.”

Ever wonder why this is our 5th principle? I didn't, until I decided to research this topic. Then I noticed something incredibly wise – do you know the difference between intelligence and wisdom? Intelligence is knowing a tomato is a fruit – wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad ... I love this definition. And our principles are indeed wise.

When you look at our 1st 4 principles they all relate to our values... where our hearts are,... inherent worth and dignity/ justice equity and compassion/ acceptance of one another, encouragement to spiritual growth/ a free and responsible search for truth and meaning; and the last two principles ... for a just and peaceful world and respect for the interdependent web -- tells us what we can accomplish with them. The 5th principle is the once that binds these two parts together – it is how we will move what we value into this world How awesome is that!

During one of the few opportunities I had to talk to Julie Stoneberg when she was here, I told her I was uncomfortable with our 5th principle – I told her that it seemed to me we were dividing ourselves into winners and losers and I asked her why we didn't support the use

of consensus decision making. Ahh, she said to me, the democratic process at its best is consensus decision. I was skeptical but willing to listen and learn. And that's when it hit me, the democratic process is about speaking, listening and learning.

In 2012, Rev. Carole Martignacco wrote a sermon called "Laboratories for Democracy – 5 Habits of the Heart. In it she shares the idea that any stable institution of democracy can only be realized if the principles of democracy are recognized and lived on a personal spiritual level, and practiced in daily private and civic life. The basic principles must first be honed in the human heart. She quotes Quaker Elder, and activist Parker Palmer's book "Healing the Heart of Democracy" where he states that "The human heart is the first home of democracy...where we embrace our questions. Can we be equitable? Can we be generous? Can we listen with our whole beings, not just our minds and offer our attention rather than our opinions?"

Palmer identifies 5 key habits of the heart needed to enable democracy to flourish first among ourselves as individuals and then widen out to embrace life beyond our doors.

1. The first key is an understanding that we are all in this together. We humans are a profoundly interconnected species, entwined with one another and with all forms of life. We must embrace the simple fact that we are dependent upon and accountable to one another, and that includes the stranger.

2. The second key habit leads from this first. It is an appreciation of the value of “otherness.” He reminds us that “us and them” does not have to mean “us versus them.” It can remind us of the ancient tradition of hospitality to the stranger – Hospitality rightly understood is premised on the notion that the stranger has much to teach us. Of course, we will not practice deep hospitality if we do not embrace the creative possibilities inherent in our differences. This leads to a third key habit of the heart...

3. An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways. Our lives are filled with contradictions – from the gap in our behaviour to observations and insights we cannot abide because they run counter to our convictions. But when we allow their tensions to expand our hearts, they can open us to new understandings of ourselves and our world, enhancing our lives and allowing us to enhance the lives of others. We are imperfect and broken beings who inhabit an imperfect and broken world. The genius of the human heart lies in its capacity to use these tensions to generate insight, energy, and new life. For this we need a fourth key habit of the heart.

4. A sense of personal voice and agency. Insight and energy give rise to new life as we speak out and act out our own version of truth, while checking and correcting it against the truths of others. But many of us lack confidence in our own voices and in our power to make a difference. We grow up in educational and (religious) institutions that treat us as members of an audience instead of actors in a drama, and as a result we become adults

who treat politics as a spectator sport. And yet it remains possible for us, young and old alike, to find our voices, learn how to speak them and know the satisfaction that comes from contributing to positive change – if we have the support of a community. That brings us to the 5th and final habit of the heart.

5. A capacity to create community. Palmer says that without community, it is nearly impossible to achieve voice: it takes a village to raise a Rosa Parks. (the black woman who would not give up her seat to a white man and started desegregation) ...creating community in the places where we live and work does not mean abandoning other parts of our lives to become full-time organizers. The steady companionship of two or three kindred spirits can help us find the courage we need to speak and act as citizens. There are many ways to plant and cultivate the seeds of community in our personal and local lives. We must all become gardeners of community if we want democracy to flourish. (End quote, Parker Palmer).

Rev. Carol challenges us to ask the question” how do we live out and practice our Fifth Principle? In what way do we succeed and where do we fall short of our vision? What changes might make us better at practicing democracy.

When our hearts change, democracy will be at the heart of all we do and are when we live the key habits of the democratic heart by:

1. Recognizing we are dependent on and accountable to each other
2. Embracing the creative possibilities built into our differences

3. Recognizing we are imperfect and broken beings in an imperfect and broken world, and use that to generate new insights, energies and life
4. Moving from being an observer to being a participant in the world and finally, by
5. Planting and cultivating seeds of community ...

These keys of the human heart lead us to live our democratic principles everyday as we naturally uphold the democratic process that will:

- ensure the rights of the majority,
- protect the rights of the minority,
- defend the rights of individual people and
- safeguard those people ABSENT

We do this is through the use of our right of conscience –which is the first part of our 5th principle

There is much discussion on what the “right of conscience” means. Many UUs uphold the right of each individual to determine what is right or wrong for themselves, and to act accordingly. The UUA web site says

Reflection on the Fifth Principle

“In our religious lives, the democratic process requires trust in the development of each individual conscience—a belief that such development is possible for each of us, as well as a commitment to cultivate our own conscience. We could call it a commitment to the value of each person. In the words of [Theodore Parker](#), ‘Democracy means not “I am as good as you are,” but “You are as good as I am.”’ My connection with the sacred is only as precious as my willingness to acknowledge the same connection in others.”

Richard W. Garnett of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs adds another component when he talks about individual conscience – he says that “conscience is the intellectual capacity to identify what ought to be done (because it is good) or what should not be done (because it is wrong); it is not a personal power to define or determine what is right and wrong...” An interesting perspective for us UUs! (Ref: <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/question-1-defining-and-protecting-conscience>)

A lot of discussion is taking place about democracy these days. The largest march in history, known as the Women’s march was held this past January 21st. I believe this to be a mass undertaking of women and men using their right of conscience: a demonstration against what is believed to be inherently wrong with some of the stated policies of the newly elected President.

The current situation in our southern neighbour reflects the reality of what can happen when individuals define “right” or “wrong” differently and when many chose not to participate in the democratic process within their community.

As UUs we count on our ability to voice our opinions and be heard. You will have that opportunity in the next few months. The Strategic Planning Committee will be holding several opportunities for you to speak your heart about LUF. **PLAN TO BE HEARD.**

Because we value the right of conscience and the democratic process, our LUF Bylaw states that members meetings must be run using parliamentary procedure and Robert's Rules. These rules exist to support the principals of the democratic process. That is, they are meant to:

1. Ensure the rights of the majority
2. Protect the rights of the minority
3. Defend the rights of individual members
4. Safeguard those people absent from the meeting
5. Guard all these together.

The challenge with any set of meeting rules – formalized or not – is that they can be manipulated by people who think they know the rules and those who actually do.

I made that terrible blunder here at LUF at the last Budget meeting. A presentation was made to the budget meeting and I used my limited knowledge of Robert's Rules to close the debate. While this may have been technically correct, it was neither kind nor courteous to that individual and I don't believe it was good for the community either. A more appropriate response would have been to refer further discussion to the Board.

Robert's Rules was originally intended for government / parliament and it has evolved to be used by other large corporations. Organizations such as ours can utilize their effectiveness and efficiency but it should

not be at the expense of community – our community. And they were not intended to do that. Robert’s Rules is not a one size fits all and that is why we include additional rules in our bylaws. Our bylaws take priority.

For example, the agenda must be sent out two weeks in advance to give everyone the opportunity to read about what will be discussed. Those unable to attend can be confident about what will be discussed in their absence (safeguard those absent) and they can chose to make their thoughts known other ways. No one needs to worry about decisions being made that they didn’t know about. That is why while we may discuss something new, according to our bylaws, no vote may be taken on anything new. There are dozens and dozens of books on Robert’s Rules and they are way too detailed to go into. If we put into practice the principles of Robert’s Rules for meetings then we will be fine. We put these principles into practice by:

- Knowing what we are going to talk about
- Talking about it – after the Chair has recognized you and a motion has been seconded when appropriate
- Speaking one at a time until everyone is heard who wants to be heard
- Respecting everyone speaking – even if you don’t agree
- Speaking only to the subject being discussed
- Accepting the outcome

It is the Chair's responsibility to ensure everyone who wants to be heard is heard. It is the individual member's responsibility to speak and be heard.

If you would like to make a motion but aren't sure how – just ask . We can look it up if we don't know.

In a democracy the principle of letting the majority rule works best when everyone believes they have been heard and respected even if the outcome is different than they would have liked. We want to get to a place where we can all live with the decision – even if it's not exactly what we would have preferred. Then we are called to support that majority decision for the good of the community.

Be patient be kind. We are all in this together – learning and doing the best we can for each other.

All will be well, all will be well, all manner of things will be well.
[From our opening "All will be Well by Meg Barnhouse"]

May we trust it to be so.
[Rev. Carly Gaynor]