



Horizons Journal

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix

October 2014



Forgiveness Isn't So Simple

Reverend Susan Frederick-Gray

As October begins, the Jewish High Holy days are drawing to a close. They end with Yom Kippur. Throughout the month preceding Yom Kippur, Jews are asked to look back and do the work of forgiveness in areas of their lives and relationships that need repair. Yom Kippur is the first day of the New Year, a day to begin again after relationships have been repaired. Throughout October at UUCP, we will be exploring the meaning and work of forgiveness.

Forgiveness touches everyone's life. No life has never been touched by hurt. No relationship is completely free of mistakes or hurt feelings. What would it mean if no one ever forgave? How isolated we would be if we could not forgive. And so forgiveness is a key religious principle. Yet it occurs

to me that we can't really talk about forgiveness without also wrestling with anger. Anger is not something we talk much about; not with our friends, not with our families and certainly not in our congregations. Yet, anger and forgiveness are often wrapped up together.

What is anger? Anger is the reasonable response to having our values or our person violated. Did you hear that word, reasonable? When we get hurt, when something or someone threatens us, injures us, or violates something we hold dear, anger is a reasonable response to the hurt. However, we generally think of anger as volatile and destructive, so it's difficult to know what to do when we are angry. Often we bottle it up.

For some, we are afraid of anger, so we try very hard not to get angry. Sometimes the violation

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Why Forgiveness Matters

Reverend Linda Lawrence

For most of us, ideas about forgiveness stem from our Jewish and Christian roots, which are also the roots of Unitarian Universalism. Yahweh, the god of the Hebrew bible, was described as a forgiving deity. Yahweh provided ways for his followers to remain in right relationship with him and a means for reconciliation when they broke his laws or offended him. This understanding of god as forgiving was magnified in the teachings of the Christian church that declared Jesus to be god's gift to humanity and Jesus' death a sacrifice to atone for human sin. Christianity linked god's forgiveness to one's profession of faith in Jesus as god and to a person's efforts to live according to Jesus' teachings.

Fast forward through centuries of history, and the notion of forgiving others because god forgave us loses much of the power and meaning it

once had, particularly for Unitarian Universalists. In the 1700s Alexander Pope wrote, "To err is human, to forgive divine." UUs are more apt to agree that to err is human and to forgive is...well...human, too.

The Buddhist and Humanist perspectives offer some nontheistic views on forgiveness. Meditation teacher Phillip Moffit put it this way:

So you practice forgiveness for your own sake, to not be locked in anger, fear, and resentment. Resentment, whether cold fury or smoldering rage, hardens your emotions, narrows your options in responding to life, clouds your judgment, locks you out of experiencing the flow of life, shifts your attention from those who matter to you to those whom you disdain, and deadens your spirit.

It's difficult to live mindfully when focused on anger and revenge.

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In Concert for Equality

Benjie Messer

Music Director

I'm excited to invite our community and friends to a special concert in our sanctuary on Sunday, October 26 at 7:00pm. As part of our continuing desire to see all people treated with love, dignity and respect, UUCP has joined a public education and organizing campaign called Why Marriage Matters Arizona that builds support for the freedom to marry in Arizona. As part of our support, UUCP is hosting a benefit concert by nationally known singer-songwriter Carrie Newcomer. Tickets are \$20 each and all proceeds will go directly to Why Marriage Matters Arizona to help pave the way for marriage equality here in Arizona. To reserve tickets, go to WMMAZ.org/PhoenixUU.

Why Marriage Matters Arizona works to change hearts and minds, help people accept LGBT people and overcome homophobia. Their work is part of a broad change in Arizonans' attitudes about marriage equality. A poll in March of this year for the first time showed that more Arizonans now support marriage equality (49% to 41%, with the remainder undecided), which is a 9% shift since just three years ago. We're lucky to have sponsors for this concert, so all of the proceeds from ticket sales will go directly to fund WMMMA, and if we can pack the house, we'll be making a difference!

Carrie Newcomer has been described as "a soaring songstress" by Billboard and a "prairie mystic" by the Boston Globe. A Quaker from the Midwest, Newcomer has become a respected artistic voice for the progressive spiritual community. Her rich alto voice and elegant arrangements showcase

lyrics that draw comparisons to Mary Oliver and Wendell Berry. She has been a strong voice for social justice, including co-founding The Soup Bowl Benefit, which has raised more than a million dollars for Indiana's hungry families. Recently, Carrie participated in a public interfaith service on marriage equality in Indiana and led songs at the state house before sessions, so she's no stranger to this struggle.

It seems more and more likely that marriage will be legal for LGBT couples in Arizona soon. Today, as I edited this article, U.S. District Judge John Sedwick ruled that Arizona gay man Fred McQuire could be listed on his spouse's death certificate, saying that "the court has decided that it is probable that there is... a conflict [between Arizona law and the Constitution]" and "that [it is probable that] Arizona will be required to permit same-sex marriages." This decision comes on the heels of forty recent court decisions in favor of marriage equality, not just in traditionally blue states but in Texas, Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Ohio, Arkansas, Idaho, Wisconsin, Utah, Indiana, Florida and Tennessee. Another case questioning the constitutionality of Arizona's ban on marriages by same-sex couples is pending, so it's possible that LGBT couples will already be getting married by the time this concert happens! Regardless, our values call us to help Why Marriage Matters Arizona in their work. Please attend if you are able, and invite friends and family! Buy your tickets at WMMAZ.org/PhoenixUU. And if anyone in our community is unable to attend because of the cost and would like to be an usher, please contact me. □

You can't forgive without loving. And I don't mean sentimentality. I don't mean mush. I mean having enough courage to stand up and say, 'I forgive. I'm finished with it.' – Maya Angelou

Always forgive your enemies – nothing annoys them so much. – Oscar Wilde

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. – Mahatma Gandhi



Compassionate Communication & Forgiveness

Anne Byrne

Director, Children's Ministries

During imaginary play on the patio, Dominic poked Spencer in the arm with a stick and he cried out in pain.

A teacher responded and asked Spencer what the problem was. "He hurt me!" Spencer said, pointing at Dominic. By this time, Dominic was on the other side of the patio. The teacher called him over and asked Spencer if he had something to say to Dominic. Spencer replied, "I don't like it when you hurt me," and when prompted by the teacher about what else he needed, Spencer added, "I need you to get me some ice." Dominic responded by saying he would try not to hurt Spencer and ran off to get the ice.

Scenarios like this play out daily in our preschool, not always as neatly as this one, but we try to teach the children a protocol for resolving conflicts when there is an injured party. The person injured expresses their feelings and asks for what they need to feel better. Sometimes they ask for an apology, but not always and the teachers don't routinely prompt for one. The person who injured the other has to check and make sure their friend is okay, and if not, help to make sure they get what he or she needs to be okay.

The focus here is on getting the injured person to express their feelings and encouraging the other person to take accountability for their actions. The basis of this protocol is Compassionate Communication, also known as Nonviolent Communication, developed by Marshall Rosenberg. The benefits of this process for preschoolers and people of all ages are profound. Instead of situations that lead to people needing to forgive one another, individuals are encouraged to express their needs and be accountable for consequences of their actions.

Consider how the dynamic between Spencer and Dominic could have escalated. Suppose Dominic did something that hurt or offended Spencer the next day and the next. It would be easy for Spencer to assume Dominic didn't like him, which would make him feel bad. Without feedback,

Dominic might not recognize the consequences of his actions.

Rosenberg suggests our typical communication patterns set us up for trouble, in these ways:

- 1) our tendency to add interpretations and judgments to what we observe;
- 2) our tendency to blame or try to make another responsible for how we are feeling;
- 3) our resistance to letting others know what we want, need or what's really important to us.

Of course, the need for forgiveness, for ourselves and others, will always be necessary, but perhaps if we all learned the process of Compassionate Communication, forgiveness would become much less complicated. Consider the differences between forgiveness and accountability. *Forgiveness* is the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense, lets go of negative emotions such as vengefulness, with an increased ability to wish the offender well. *Accountability* is an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions. The focus of forgiveness is on the person offended and the focus of accountability is on the person doing the offending.

Without intervention, the dynamic between Spencer and Dominic might have risen to the level of requiring Spencer to forgive Dominic. Instead, there was an immediate expression of feelings and needs with an expectation and fulfillment of accountability.

We human beings hurt one another routinely, sometimes through minor offences and other times through life-changing trauma. Forgiveness is a complex and challenging concept, but perhaps it would be less weighty if we were all to adopt the processes spelled out by Compassionate Communication in the here and now by focusing on expressing our needs and feelings and demonstrating accountability for our actions. Preschool seems like a good place to start. □

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we experience, like a violation of our dignity, happens in a place where we can't get angry (like at work). I think of Michael Brown, the young person killed by police in Ferguson and the ways that people of color can experience from a young age having their worth and dignity violated, being assumed suspicious, because of the color of their skin. Learning to control one's anger can be necessary to survival.

Gender adds a layer of complexity too. Anger is a reasonable response to pain, yet anger is said to be unseemly in women, and pain or vulnerability is said to be unseemly in men. And so women often internalize the pain, never giving themselves permission to be angry and name the offense, while men are more free to let the anger out, but don't have the same freedom to really name the pain and offense that underlies it. What a mess!

In the meantime, religion tells us to forgive, forgive, forgive, seven times seventy times forgive. Okay, but we know that there is much in our lives and our world that is wrong and rightly makes us angry. So, an important question is how do we use our anger and pain, how do we deal with them in ways that help us not be burdened or imprisoned by

them, but free to move our lives (and our world) forward toward reconciliation, toward the kind of forgiveness where we speak the truth and can repair our broken bonds?

Every year, we have a service on forgiveness. This year, we are taking a whole month to look at what forgiveness means: how do we live it in ways that invite truth telling and accountability, and what lessons can we learn from other people and countries who have found healing and reconciliation after even the worst offenses?

This is an emotional subject, but a powerful and needed one. May our exploration lead us to a more empowered understanding of forgiveness. □

Small Groups are beginning in October!

Want to engage our monthly themes in greater depth with a small circle of people? Small groups provide a great way to connect to others, explore meaning, and learn and grow by taking time with themes that matter to our lives. Find out more in our weekly electronic newsletter *Compass* or on our website: phoenixuu.org. Click *Small Group Ministries* on the menu bar. □

Make UUCP your Thursday Night Destination this Fall

COMMUNITY NIGHTS

▣ **Dinner at 6:00pm (\$5/adult, \$2/child under 10, \$10/family)**

▣ **Classes and Small Groups at 6:30pm**

▣ **Chalice Kids for children**

Every Thursday night in October and November!
All are welcome!

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The Buddhist perspective on forgiveness also recognizes the connection and interdependence of all beings. The practice of loving kindness to oneself and others includes forgiveness. If we can let go of anger and resentment and acknowledge the underlying pain and loss prompted by the harm done to us (whether real or perceived), we begin to heal. Our own peace and healing impacts those around us. Ideally, with healing, we achieve the ability to sincerely wish for the happiness and well-being of all others, even those who have wronged us. We might summarize the Buddhist reason for forgiveness as: Heal yourself, heal the world.

Most humanist sources refer to scientific research that shows that forgiveness is good for your health. Forgiveness, in many circumstances, lowers blood pressure, improves mental health, increases a person's general satisfaction with life, and makes for better relationships. Forgiveness embodies the humanist perspective that we humans can better ourselves and thus, in many instances, deserve second (and third...and fourth) chances. Learning to

forgive and practicing forgiveness then becomes a moral and ethical obligation for each of us for the betterment of humankind.

I believe that forgiveness is a concept and a practice that has relevance to our modern lives. The ability to forgive is necessary for our spiritual and emotional well-being. Forgiving oneself and others is a cornerstone of mature and fulfilling relationships. As Unitarian Universalists, forgiveness is important to our understanding and promotion of our first three principles: The inherent worth and dignity of every person; Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; and Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth.

I don't assume that we all have the same understanding of what it means to forgive, though. As the authors of *Amish Grace* put it: "Forgiveness is a concept that everyone understands – until they're asked to define it." I will attempt to define forgiveness and some of its nuances during our October 5th Sunday services. How do you define forgiveness? Has forgiveness mattered in your life? □

Committed to Cultural Diversity at UUCP?



Discover ways to increase your multicultural awareness by attending this unique workshop, designed to provide insights for individual skill building and help the UUCP community become more inclusive across diversities.

Facilitator Beth Zemsky is an expert trainer who helps organizations build more inclusive and culturally adaptive communities. She has worked with universities, nonprofit and for-profit organizations and faith communities.

Multicultural Training: Building Intercultural Competency

Saturday, November 1, 9:00am-4:00pm

Trainer: Beth Zemsky

Registration: \$25.00

Register at www.phoenixuu.org or 602-840-8400 ext. 200.



It's Gotta Be a Two-Way Street

Mary Dawes

Right Relations Ministry

When invited to write about the Forgiveness theme this month, I realized that this would be difficult. Forgiveness is a choice I struggle with at times. But as a member of the Right Relations Ministry, forgiveness is part of our mission in the congregation. Our charter describes our work as helping individuals and groups with growth in positive human relations and conflict resolution.

I learned most about forgiveness in a long-term relationship. At first, we would hurt each other often, as can happen when you love another and become vulnerable to them. In any relationship, differences in meaning and expected ways of treating one another can create misunderstanding and hurt.

But to remain angry and resentful produces several negative outcomes. First is the damage and distancing that occurs between people. It is difficult

to maintain a good relationship when holding on to bitterness about what happened in the past.

Second, though, is the consequence for the person who holds the anger. When I struggled to deal with a very hurtful situation and talked to a friend, she eventually asked, "How much are you charging that person for all of that real estate in your mind you give them?" I realized that I was harming myself in holding tightly to that "offense."

Martin Luther King, Jr., stated, "We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love." There is a challenge for us.

Right Relations Ministry will offer several programs this year, the Couples Enrichment program starting in February and a workshop on Emotional Intelligence on October 2nd from 6:30-8:00pm. To participate, please register online or by calling the office. Hope you'll join us! □

Register for October 4th UUJAZ Issues/Action Workshop!

Join UUs from across the state when Unitarian Universalist Justice Arizona Network, UUJAZ, holds its First Annual Issues/Action Workshop on Saturday, October 4th at the UU Church of Surprise.

- *Building the Beloved Community Workshop* with Rev. Deb Holder, Minister of Beloved Community Formation for UUA's Pacific Western Region.
- Panel of Arizona leaders share experiences and vision on five key issues – Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, Immigration; Rev. Debra Peevey, Marriage Equality; Richard Gilman, Education; Anne Schneider, Economic Disparity; and Dianne Post, Prison Action – followed by issue groups to discuss action plans.
- November Election & 2015 Legislative Preview led by UUJAZ Policy Coordinator Anne Schneider.

Register at uujaz.org/actions

October Worship Theme:

Forgiveness

Services bring our community together at 9:30 AM and 11:15 AM

October 5: *What Does it Mean to Forgive?*

Service Leader: Rev. Linda Lawrence

“Forgiveness is a concept that everyone understands – until they’re asked to define it” (from *Amish Grace*). Honoring the importance of Yom Kippur in the Jewish tradition, we will explore the meaning of forgiveness and its importance to us as Unitarian Universalists.

October 12: *An Empowering Understanding of Forgiveness*

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Can forgiveness be a path to greater freedom and health in one’s life? How do we understand and do the work of forgiveness in ways that strengthen our relationships with ourselves and others? How can our own mistakes and efforts to find forgiveness make us stronger?

October 19: *Reconciliation and Remembering*

Service Leaders: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, Nancy McCharen and Dave Bellama

The path to reconciliation and forgiveness can require remembering. Last year, Nancy and Dave were in Rwanda during the 20-year anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. Hear their reflections on the difficult but powerful road of truth telling and reconciliation.

October 26: *Forgiveness as a One-Way Street*

Service Leader: David Weaver

Forgiveness implies relationship. But what if one party to the relationship is no longer present due to cognitive illness or death? Is forgiveness possible? David Weaver, a member of UUCP, is an ordained minister who currently works in an assisted living with residents who have dementia.

Unicare News

In remembrance:

- Betty Durse Jones, grandmother of Kim St. Clair
- Joe Bethancourt, UU musician and friend of Igor and Barbara Glenn

Serious illness/hospitalization:

- Roque Mejia, 18-year-old grandson of Dick and Sandra Schaffer was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma, and is responding well to chemo
- Heather McLellan underwent hip surgery on September 3rd
- Jen Kendall had minor surgery requiring six weeks of recovery and is happy to have family visiting to help care for her children during that time

Milestone celebrations:

- Wedding of Wendy Metcalf and Scott Anderson on August 31st
- Ray and Gretchen Manker celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary on August 27th
- Susan and Brian Frederick-Gray celebrated their 12th wedding anniversary on September 1st

Other news:

- Dale Fisher is grateful his son Jason and family were not hurt in the Napa, CA, earthquake

For more information on significant events in the life of UUCP members/friends, sign up for our Unicare email list at unicare@phoenixuu.org.



Maureen Jeffries, Unicare Coordinator

== An evening with ==
CARRIE NEWCOMER

Join us for an evening with singer and songwriter Carrie Newcomer.
All proceeds from this event benefit Why Marriage Matters AZ!
To register, visit WMAZ.org/PhoenixUU

Sunday, October 26 @ UUCP
Tickets \$20

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