



# UU Congregation of Phoenix

## March 2019

### *Connections*



### *A Reflection on Connection*

#### *Rev. Margret A. O'Neill*

In my ministerial, pastoral and leadership role, I find myself thinking often about connections in various ways – the quality of connectedness among the members of congregation, connections across ages and stages of life, across cultures, across interests and core commitments. What are the ways in which we are isolated individuals, and how are we united as a congregation – how are we connected? How much connection is healthy, how do we maintain a strategic balance between individuality and unity?

I understand the essential nature of reality as everything being connected in some way to everything else. As physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson says, “Not only are we in the Universe, the Universe is in us.” There exist only a limited number of elements, so that we are made of the same stuff as other creatures, the same stuff as plants, rocks, even the same elements as stars.

Connection unites at the level of our sub-atomic particles. The experience of connection is vital to our lives; we know that human infants, even if their physical needs are met, cannot develop and thrive in the absence of physical and emotional contact with other humans. We are born into families and tribes for a reason, since our very being depends on those crucial and ongoing connections.

As we mature, we connect in new ways, by observing, by listening, by exchanging our thoughts, ideas and emotions with others. We have much to gain by deepening our connections with those closest to us, and perhaps even more with those who live or believe in different ways than we do.

Congregational life is built and sustained by connections. Sharing a meal, playing together, engaging in a small group discussion, exchanging ideas in a class – all of us are nurtured in so many ways by this UUCP community. May we be attentive to the connections that sustain us, and so may we learn to grow and thrive into our human potential.

## Why We Are Wired to Connect

(Excerpt from a conversation with scientist Matthew Lieberman)

By Gareth Cook, *Scientific American*, October 22, 2013

When we experience social pain — a snub, a cruel word — the feeling is as real as physical pain. That finding is among those in a new book, *Social*, and it is part of scientist Matthew Lieberman's case that our need to connect is as fundamental as our need for food and water. He answered questions from *Mind Matters* editor Gareth Cook.

### **You argue that our need to connect socially is “powerful.” But just how powerful is it?**

Different cultures have different beliefs about how important social connection and interdependence are to our lives. In the West, we like to think of ourselves as relatively immune to sway of those around us while we each pursue our personal destiny. But I think this is a story we like to tell ourselves rather than what really happens.

Across many studies of mammals, from the smallest rodents all the way to us humans, the data suggests that we are profoundly shaped by our social environment and that we suffer greatly when our social bonds are threatened or severed. When this happens in childhood it can lead to long-term health and educational problems. We may not like the fact that we are wired such that our well-being depends on our connections with others, but the facts are the facts.

### **What is the connection between physical pain and social pain? Why is this insight important?**

Languages around the world use pain language to express social pain (“she broke my heart”, “he hurt my feelings”), but this could have all just have been a metaphor. As it turns out it is more than a metaphor – social pain is real pain.

With respect to understanding human nature, I think this finding is pretty significant. The things that cause us to feel pain are things that are evolutionary recognized as threats to our survival and the existence of social pain is a sign that evolution has treated social connection like a necessity, not a luxury. It also alters our motivational landscape. We tend to assume that people's behavior is narrowly self-interested, focused on getting more material benefits for themselves and avoiding physical threats and the exertion of effort. But because of how social pain and pleasure are wired into our operating system, these are motivational ends in and of themselves. We don't focus on being connected solely in order to extract money and other resources from people – being connected needs no ulterior motive.

This has major consequences for how we think about structuring our organizations and institutions. At businesses worldwide, pay for performance is just about the only incentive used to motivate employees. However, praise and an environment free from social threats are also powerful motivators. Because social pain and pleasure haven't been a part of our theory of “who we are” we tend not to use these social motivators as much as we could.

*Read the entire interview at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-we-are-wired-to-connect/>*

## Connections

*Science is beautiful when it makes simple explanations of phenomena or connections between different observations. Examples include the double helix in biology and the fundamental equations of physics. - Stephen Hawking*

*Language is handy, but we humans have social and emotional connections that transcend words and are communicated - and understood - without conscious thought. - Leonard Mlodinow*

*Love, friendship, networking - these are all critical connections and the foundation of a healthy, happy life. - Whitney Wolfe Herd*

*I think... if it is true that there are as many minds as there are heads, then there are as many kinds of love as there are hearts. - Leo Tolstoy*

*Look at the sky. We are not alone. The whole universe is friendly to us and conspires only to give the best to those who dream and work. - A. P. J. Abdul Kalam*

*Not only are we in the Universe, the Universe is in us. I don't know of any deeper spiritual feeling than what that brings upon me. - Neil deGrasse Tyson*

*You are not IN the universe, you ARE the universe, an intrinsic part of it. Ultimately, you are not a person, but a focal point where the universe is becoming conscious of itself. What an amazing miracle. - Eckhart Tolle*

*Eventually everything connects - people, ideas, objects. The quality of the connections is the key to quality per se. - Charles Eames*

*Even a brief interaction can change the way people think about themselves, their leaders, and the future. Each of those many connections you make has the potential to become a high point or a low point in someone's day. - Douglas Conant*



Session Plan  
***Theme: Connections***  
***March 2019***

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:**

*You are not IN the universe, you ARE the universe, an intrinsic part of it. Ultimately, you are not a person, but a focal point where the universe is becoming conscious of itself. What an amazing miracle. - Eckhart Tolle*

**Brief Check-in**

**Focus Reading:**

*Even a brief interaction can change the way people think about themselves, their leaders, and the future. Each of those many connections you make has the potential to become a high point or a low point in someone's day. - Douglas Conant*

**Focus Questions:**

- When you think about your connections to other people, to networks or communities, which are the first connections that come to mind?
- How is human connection important to you? What do you do to maintain it?
- When do you feel most connected to the universe? What words do you use to describe that sense of universal connection?
- How have your restored connections in your life when they have been disrupted?

**Checkout/Likes and Wishes**

**Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:**

*I know there is strength in the differences between us. I know there is comfort, where we overlap. - Ani DiFranco*