

Radical Welcome: Embracing the Spirit of Transformation

Scott Redman, presented July 25, 2010 at Tahoma Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Inspired by

- Stephanie Spellers -- *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other, and the Spirit of Transformation* (Church Publishing, 2006)
- UU views from various writers in *A People So Bold* (JG Millsbaugh, Editor (Skinner House Books 2010) and “The Welcome Table” by J Buehrens and “We Are Already in Paradise” by RA Parker in UU World, Summer 2010
- Scientific views of EO Wilson in *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (Knopf, 1998)

Radical welcome is ...

Embracing everyone's voices, presence, and power with special commitment to embracing groups who have been defined as The Other – this is directly quoted from The Reverend Stephanie Spellers, an Episcopal priest and author of “Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other, and the Spirit of Transformation”

This entails:

1. Carefully attending to power and margins
2. Intend more than inclusion, and more than incorporation (make part of our body), to incarnation (making manifest the value we see in diversity and our intentions about transformations)
3. Focusing on “The Other,” that is: any group/person who is likely or would reasonably expect to experience patterns of oppression and marginalization

According to Spellers:

Radical welcome is meant to be transformative: what we are (beyond including, beyond incorporation (part of our body), to incarnation (part of our life); how we operate (especially re: power and margins)

Radical welcome will be challenging: working through our fears, working beyond our zone of comfort, and balancing the need maintain our identity and as we continually transform our identify

An embrace of The Other as a core religious and spiritual practice – from Spellers and various UU leaders writing in “A People So Bold” and Rebecca Ann Parker & John Buehrens articles in this summer's UU World.

Radical welcome is based on 3 underpinnings

First, an awareness of plenty and a practice of gratitude

- Teachings of Jesus -- loaves & fishes; parable of prodigal son
- Recognition of and gratitude for all that we have and share as part of the interconnected web; for the beauty of where we are now

Second, teachings on kindness and lovingkindness

- The 2nd part of the new covenant of Jesus: love your neighbor as yourself
- Metta sutra: may all beings be at ease; weak or strong, great or mighty, medium, short or small, seen and unseen, near and faraway, born and yet to be born

Echoes here of “hello stranger, put your loving hand in mine ... you are a stranger, but you're a friend of mine.”

And the third, underpinning – religious & secular: **E Pluribus Unum** = out of the many, one

- a. Religious perspectives
 - i. Robert Hardies (senior minister at Washington DC's All Souls Church, Unitarian) explains E Pluribus Unum for UUs as the beloved community, all souls
 - ii. Peter Morales: we are one. This comes to us from across the world's major religions:
 - a. Jesus – act of kindness to any is an act to Him
 - b. Muhammed – tribal divisions are wrong; there is only one God
 - c. Buddhism – divisions are illusion
 - iii. From Judaism, the 6th day: when the colors have (again?) separated, our common heritage will help us know that we all come from one First People
- b. Scientific perspective from Edward O Wilson: there is one underlying human species (we can be studied and understood as other species as products of evolution). In our case, cultural evolution is fast and powerful in adaptation – through our culture we can direct our evolution, the transformation of humankind into the future

Radical welcome is important to TUUC because ...

I believe we are here at TUUC to commit ourselves and to help us keep our commitment to self-transformation and world transformation.

Kat Liu (assistant director of UUA Washington Office for Advocacy): Prophetic churches proclaim and create a transformation. We must ask what will we be and for whom?

By radical welcome's focused and intentional work to incorporate diverse perspectives into our congregation we will embrace the spirit of transformation. We will heal and grow TUUC while

creating the transformations in ourselves and our part of the world. More specifically, radical welcome is important to TUUC because it can:

1. Help us on our spiritual journeys to develop relationships with others that allow us broad experiences from which to learn
2. Help us with our personal work to be positive influences in our families and congregations: in practicing radical welcome, we will understand and confront our fears, develop and express an openness that will help those around us to grow
3. By attention to power & margins, help us to transform where power exists in our congregation and how we share and work through power. I want to come back to this point – there may be lessons from some of liberal religion's social justice thinkers that we can apply to our efforts to become a more healthy and vibrant UU congregation.
4. Make what we are and what we have available to Pierce County and can open us to all that Pierce County offers us. Radical welcome would see us growing -- in diversity -- to serve more of our community and to incorporate more of our community into our journeys, and to make manifest the spirit of transformation.
5. Helps transform the world – simply by helping TUUC's friends and members with their transformations and by our open and positive presence in our community.

Adam Gerhardstein (director of the UUA's Standing on the Side of Love program) writes in “A People So Bold” about prophetic ministry – I think that practicing radical welcome would qualify as prophetic ministry. Gerhardstein says: Prophetic ministry reminds us that we are members of the great family of all souls; the prophetic church saves our souls while we work to save our world. In our lives we do some work, we make a difference, we give our lives meaning by what we do with time and energy. Coming to a community like this helps to form and center us as individuals so we can do our work here and in the world.

Practicing Radical Welcome

Radical welcome per Stephanie Spellers (the Episcopal priest) – embrace everyone's voices, presence, and power with special commitment to embracing groups who have been defined as The Other.

So, beginning the practice of radical welcome here & now, let us reflect:

- Where is “power” in our congregation?
- Are our formal power situations open to all voices and the presence of all members and potential members?
- Who is marginalized in TUUC? What can we do to integrate voices and presences from the margins?

- Who are the oppressed in Pierce County? Who is it that we should reach out to: for ourselves as much as for them?
- What do we (as UUs, as TUUC members, as the UU congregation in Pierce County) have to gain and to offer by recognizing oppression around us and embracing those who are marginalized

Spellers offers some practical points for adopting a posture and practice of radical welcome.

Guideposts that provide evidence that a congregation is becoming a radically welcoming community include reflections on if and how we are:

- a. Hospitable – offering gracious, warm space to all people
- b. Reconciling – building mutually transforming relationships
- c. Centered – possessing a clear sense of their identity as a church community
- d. Open to conversion – listening carefully to, making room for, sharing power with, and learning from The Other
- e. Intentional – engaging in training, research, active listening and strategic planning
- f. Comprehensive – recognizing radical welcome as a way of being
- g. Compassionate – prioritizing the work of creating spaces, settings, and situations where people can express and hold their dreams, stories, and fears

in advice that reflects much of what we have heard from our recent Healthy Congregations review, Spellers suggests that adopting “radical welcome” means revisiting our:

- a. Mission & vision
- b. Identity (what has been our culture, who are our neighbors)
- c. Ministries and relationships
- d. Leadership and feedback systems
- e. Worship

And, across all this Spellers suggests that a congregation make room for fear and help one another move toward transformation -- fear and all.

And finally ...

I conclude with a reflection on a wonderful teaching from Rebecca Ann Parker, from this summer's UU World magazine:

“We come to know this world as a paradise when our hearts and souls are reborn through the arduous task of living rightly with one another and the earth. Generosity and mutual care are the pathways to knowing that paradise is here and now. This way of living [springs] from a profound embrace of this world.”

I believe that Reverend Parker's profound embrace, in the form of radical welcome, can be a key to enriched spiritual journeys and a foundation for vibrant spiritual communities, and therefore this radical welcome can be a source of strength and inspiration for our individual and community efforts to transform the world.

Blessed be and amen.