

Preparation for Session G34 – The Need for Religious Community

"[T]he common elements in affiliating with a community...are the impetus toward belonging: toward associating with those sharing a common heritage, belief, and way of life, and toward the human need to share. Although it may not be reached, the ideal embodied in community is the movement toward unity and union with others: community and communion."

- Maria Harris, Fashion Me a People

This is the first of two sessions in which we invite you to reflect on the role of the church in your life, and your role in the life of the church. The topic for this session is how you benefit from being a part of our religious community—your personal reasons for being here. Please choose any of the following readings, questions, and exercises to assist in your exploration of the topic.

1. Name 3-5 things about our church community that most interested or excited you when you first started attending and that made you want to keep coming. What are the top 3-5 things that keep you here now? What has comparing these lists revealed to you?
2. From "Inclusion and Alienation: A Questionnaire," written by Maria Harris in Fashion Me a People: "The following characteristics have been found to be reasons for attraction to particular parishes.
--The opportunities to participate in community service
--Living in the neighborhood
--Friends and/or relatives belong to this church
--The quality of friendliness and/or concern among members
--The quality of preaching
--The prestige or status of the church in the local community
--The opportunities for leadership by the laity
--The quality of pastoral care and concern provided by the church staff
--The style of worship in the church
--The attention given to children by the church."

Do any of these resonate with you? If so, could you rank the items from 1 to 10? And what about the importance of specific beliefs or ideas in your choice of religious community?
3. At what point did you realize that you were going to stay with this community, that you belonged here? If you're a member, at what point did you decide to join?
4. Can you give 2-3 examples of times in the past few months or years when you received a direct benefit or blessing from this community? Why were they special?
5. "Would you classify yourself as a traditional church person for whom the church is essential, an involved person for whom it is central, a contemporary person for whom it is special or privileged, an independent person for whom it is valuable, or in some other way? Why do you see yourself as one or the other of these?" (Maria Harris, Fashion Me a People)
6. "The possibility of growth and change, of transformation, is the real basis for participation in a religious community. We have all experienced losses and disappointments, pain and grief. We have been broken by life and need healing. The closest that contemporary Unitarian Universalists may come to a concept of salvation is to offer opportunities for growth and transformation, for becoming more whole. As one of the great ministers of the past century, Rev. A. Powell Davies, memorably put it, 'Life is just a chance to grow a soul.'"
- Belonging: The Meaning of Membership, report of the UUA's Commission on Appraisal (www.uua.org/coa)

How has being a part of this church community transformed you or changed your life?