These are the questions gathered during the "Question Box" service held at UUFSCC on Sunday February 2, 2020—but were not answered at that time.

For those questions answered during the service, the recording of Rev Ryan and my answers can be found here: Click Here

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Here are my answers to questions received but not answered on 2/2/20……..Rev Russ

Q: What question are you glad didn't get asked? (Is there a subject/topic or specific question you were dreading?)
A: I was worried that we'd get very personal question(s)—but we didn't. It's always a challenge to be open and vulnerable while keeping healthy/personal boundaries about personal life issues. Such questions are challenging to deal with in an impromptu unrehearsed service.

Q: What is your response to family members who don't respond to your love? It's hard to give up on loving them.
A: My advice is to never stop loving them. Though they may not respond to your love in a manner that you'd prefer, there is no limit to the amount of love a person can give—so keep on giving it. The challenge is to switch from a reciprocity mindset (where you "expect" something in return for the love you give), to a generosity mindset (where you give without any expectations of payback/behavior/acknowledgment or thanks). The Yoga Sutras address this challenge with the concepts of Abhyasa (Never Give Up) and Vairagya (Always Let Go). Balancing these two is a key to spiritual life. Practice both.

Q: What were you doing before you were a minister?
A: I was a Rocket Scientist for 30 years.

Q: If we can't solve our problems/concerns locally, how can we ever hope to solve National/Global problems and concerns?
A: Life should not be spent trying to "solve" problems, but spent trying to do the right thing at the right time. If we view our actions as those that either "succeed" (on a criterium of your own construction) or those that "fail" (on the same evaluation), contentment will evade us, for there will always be problems in the world. If you try to solve social wicked problems, you will fail. But if we try to do the right thing at the right time, we'll succeed—in the long run. Another attitude approach (apart for successes & failures) is to spend your life "bending" the moral arc of the universe toward justice.
https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129609461

Q: What is the value of anger? When do we feed it, when should we suppress it?
A: Depends. Too big of a question to answer succinctly. There's healthy anger and unhealthy anger. Healthy anger is essential and "can provide tremendous energy to right wrongs and change things for the good." Unhealthy anger is destructive on many levels. Here's a short article on good anger: https://psychcentral.com/lib/why-anger-is-vital/

Q: What/Which is the most important UU Principle to you? Which is most challenging to live?
A: First Answer: All of them. I'm a recovering reductionist, so I work at not thinking in terms of "most/favorite/best/worst/least" regarding anything. Our Principles are not a list to choose from—but a list of aspirations that we work toward believing and living out. As our denomination continues to progress—Principles have been modified and new ones added, but none have been deleted.
Second Answer: For me (at this time) is #7 "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are apart." With Climate Changes, I find this one most challenging to live because it is not clear what I can do. I don't know if my life consumptions and use of resources is showing "respect…for all existence" or not. Mentally I agree with our Principle, but I don't know if I'm living it to the best for all beings.

Q: How can I be less judgmental….especially of people who will vote against my (and their) interest?
A: Part 1 Answer: To be less judgmental, one must move toward acceptance. Judgment is made from a position of perceived superiority, and I believe any such perception is a self-fabricated illusion. Pride is the 7th Deadly Sin (just sayin'). To move toward acceptance, a key step is developing humility---and a practice of gratitude is a great starting point to develop more humility. Not easy, but worth the effort I promise you.
Part 2 Answer: Our 5th Principle is "The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;" and I believe the right of conscience involves voting "for" your interest and not "against" someone else's. I believe that people vote "for" their interest—and their interest may not agree with yours. That's what a democracy is about—having different interests and voting to see whose interest will be pursued. I would also offer that it can be "judgmental" (see Part 1) to conclude that they are "against" you and your interest.

Q: If Trump wins the next election, what country should we move to?
A: Depends if you are trying to live out our 5th Principle or not (see above). If you support the democratic process and believe in it—then why run away? Our US history is full of pendulum swings from one extreme to the other on social/political issues—and the people who move the pendulum didn't leave. Our country is also full of people who emigrated away from oppression and hatred and violence. Before you move, ask yourself if you are personally experiencing any threat to your safety—or are you just upset? I'd say you are more valuable to stay here and bring the pendulum back to center.

Q: Brene' Brown says that her research and that of others shows that "hope is borne of courage." How does this make sense to you? How have you been formed by what scared you, by moving through experiences where you didn't always know you could get to the other side?
A: Part 1 Answer: Brown also expands that quote to say "courage is born from struggle." So I believe the message is that hope comes from struggle. She also concludes from her research that courage is always preceded and accompanied by vulnerability. This is the really non-intuitive part, for me, because our culture tells us that being vulnerable is a sign of weakness—but in fact, it is a sign of courage and strength.
Part 2 Answer: I am who I am because of all the $#!t I've been through. Every life trauma, tragedy, turmoil, and failure has formed me into what I am. The good events helped shaped me, but the other stuff truly formed me. I'm sure the same is true for you.
Being scared is an important feeling to keep you alive—if it makes you cautious.
If it paralyzes you, fear can keep you from being alive. So like many other emotions, fear must be balanced and you must be on the middle path. How do you go on when you're not sure if you can get to the other side? That's what the living do—we go on.

Q: How does a person live (somewhat introvertedly) according to their inner guidance and also stay engaged with others?
A: Depends. If you want more interaction with others, your inner voice is saying to move that way. If your inner voice is saying you need quiet time, move that way. It is not an "either/or" option. Many of us spend our lives bouncing back & forth in our social relationships—because people are wonderful and can also be annoying. To be with people is to live in the tension between love and frustration. Also: people provide us great training in forgiveness, humility, tolerance, and acceptance.

Q: Many of us are learning about the causes and consequences of systemic racial inequities. What can our UU Fellowship/Small Groups do to address Santa Cruz County issues?
A: I and your lay leaders are looking at bringing multicultural awareness training into the congregation. From self-awareness, actions and behavior can be taken. If you're interested in this initiative, please contact a Board member or someone on the Social Justice Team.

Summary:
Our religion does not provide answers to life's big questions. We must decide our best answer for ourselves whenever we asked. And I'll add that the answer you have today may not suit you tomorrow. Yet, we benefit from wrestling with these "big" questions in a brave, open community. A spiritual life means letting go of a quest for certainty and loving the questions and living out your values……..peace…….Rev Russ

February 8, 2020