

Let Your Life Speak

2018-2019 Annual Theme

Parker Palmer wrote, “Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.” These themes encourage listening to your life as a way of shaping your days and guiding your journey.

September Vocation		Vocation goes far beyond occupation. A good way to think about it, Frederick Buechner suggests, is as the intersection between your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger. According to Buechner, vocation involves both a look inward and a look outward. In his poem, <i>Ask Me</i> , William Stafford wrote, “Ask me whether what I have done is my life.” This is why vocation is so important.
October Formation		Formation involves the influence of others as well as our own self-invention. Mary Catherine Bateson calls it “composing a life.” It is as if we center ourselves on a potter's wheel with the intention of keeping our “impassioned clay” pliable through all the changes of our life. Bateson reminds us that the undiscovered self is an unexpected and powerful resource. And there is always more to discover.
November Gratitude		Unitarian Universalist minister Ralph Helverson wrote, “We have religion when we have an abiding gratitude for all that we have received.” Annie Dillard added, “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” Gratitude invites a spiritual practice in which daily we express our thanks to those around us and to life itself. It is through gratitude that our “thanksgiving is perpetual.”
December Peace		John F. Kennedy wrote, “Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures. And however undramatic the pursuit of peace, the pursuit must go on.” The process of peace is both an inward pursuit as well as an external commitment. Peace, as Thich Nhat Hanh said, is every step.
January Grace		Grace is a gift that comes to us unexpected and unbidden. It is the gift of life itself as well as the surprising gifts that bless our lives. Perhaps Mary Oliver's approach is best. She writes, “You can have the other words—chance, luck, coincidence, serendipity. I'll take grace. I don't know what it is exactly, but I'll take it.”
February Surrender/ Letting Go		Surrender is not valued in the West. We want control while denying that there are limits to our control. In Buddhism, detachment is cultivated. It is not a failure to care, but accepting what is beyond our control. Osho writes, “Linguistically, surrender means to surrender to somebody, but religiously, surrender simply means trust, relaxing. It is an attitude rather than an act: you live through trust.”
March Truth		Truth. It's part of our religious search according to our fourth principle: “A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” Truth is the philosopher's quest, the scientist's North Star, the poet's muse, and the social activist's passion. For us, science and religion are both valuable and venerated tools for truth-seeking. Yet we approach truth with humility, truth not TRUTH.
April Salvation/ Wholeness		In our tradition, salvation is understood as wholeness and health. In seeking wholeness, we are attempting to complete our life before death ends it. Parker Palmer suggests that a primary problem in our age is people living divided lives. Revealing, claiming, and nurturing our hidden wholeness is our life's work, the path to salvation in this life.
May Mystery		Our lives are not merely a series of questions to be answered or problems to be solved, but mysteries to be lived. As Annie Dillard reminds us (Buddha-like), “We wake, if ever at all, to mystery.” The capacity to value mystery is enhanced by awareness; by a sense of awe, wonder, and gratitude at the reality of being alive and being a witness to existence.
June Transcendence		In everyday language, <i>transcendence</i> has the sense of “going beyond.” The idea of transcendence is captured in our first Unitarian Universalist source: “Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life.” By going beyond ourselves, we connect more deeply with others and life.
July Freedom & Responsibility		Freedom without responsibility can become anarchy, while responsibility without freedom can become mindless duty. Freedom is our fate. We are faced with endless choices, decisions large & small. How we use our freedom determines everything. Warren Wiersbe reminds us that, “The privilege of freedom is precious, the responsibilities of freedom are serious, and we can't have one without the other.”
August Prayer		What is prayer for you? One way of describing its stereotypes is “gimmie,” “oops,” “ouch,” “wow,” and “thanks” (or prayers of petition, confession, intercession, praise, and gratitude.) Jack Mendelsohn wrote, “Suppose we think of it as an essential religious striving to touch truth and tap resources within and beyond ourselves.” Prayer can be a compelling spiritual practice to make us more fully human.

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