

For Your Service

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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My friends, in June, it is customary for us to set aside some special time to recognize our volunteers, because it bears regular reminding that ours is a shared ministry. In principle, we already know this, but it takes on special significance when we take a pause to see the specific faces attached to this truth, knowing that there are personal stories behind this truth, and perhaps considering more deeply how you are part of this truth or how you might want to be more involved in it.

One of the fundamental traits of volunteering is that it is not typically remunerated. And yet people do it, because it brings on other rewards – a sense of connection, a sense of achievement, a sense of contributing to something larger than ourselves.

Another, aspect that is sometimes overlooked, is that unpaid work *is* indeed *work*. It brings value to a community, and it brings value to the individual. It also takes time, it takes dedication, and to some extent represents sacrifice. It means putting energy and passion into something other than whatever else we might also be doing.

That doesn't mean it can't be enjoyable – it often is, just as paid work can also be enjoyable, if you're fortunate to have that kind of position. That doesn't make it less work, and it warrants recognition.

We thank you for your service.

Which brings us to one other dimension that is not always articulated. Folks *volunteer* to do this work – which is to say, we do it willingly... out of our own volition. Each of you who has taken a volunteer task, will have your own reasons. Some may call them selfless, or sometimes selfish... I suspect they're often a combination of both, which are part of what I like to call *self-full*.

In our wider society, there is another kind of unpaid work that often also goes unrecognized. And that is the work of social justice by folks who are experiencing social injustice, in real time.

This work is *also* work, and it is often unpaid. Sometimes it is unpaid because it is unappreciated. Often it is even received with hostility. And because of this, this kind of work, this kind of ministry, is also not always taken on voluntarily... given the choice, some folks would rather not *have* to do it. But the reality is that it sometimes becomes a necessity to advocate for oneself.

Now, I want to recall, for a moment, that there are many forms of oppression and many ways to be marginalized. For those of you who haven't experienced racial oppression, you might have otherwise lived marginalization due to your gender, or your age, or ability, your sexual orientation or gender identity, or where you fit in the construct of socio-economic class.

If you fit into any of these, or similar categories, you might recognize that sometimes you have to advocate for yourself. This is work, it is

unpaid, it is usually not voluntary. It is not fair, and yet, it has become necessary.

Sometimes the categories of privilege and marginalization overlap... for those of us who may find ourselves in the privileged position, there is also work to be done – it *will* be work, it will likely be unpaid, and is necessary... a duty, for the sake of fairness.

That is the work of solidarity, to be side by side with those who do the work of advocating for justice, especially when they're advocating for themselves.

Now this work can take many shapes. These past couple of weeks, you've seen that it has often been expressed in the form of public protest, often at danger to oneself. Now, I'm not going to spend time debating the specifics of how that is carried out, because today, that will distract from the larger truth, that people are advocating for themselves, and other folks are being in solidarity with them.

That particular expression of solidarity may not be possible or appropriate for you. There are other ways, that may make more sense in your specific situation.

And perhaps you're struggling with how to show your support. These conversations can be tricky, and it's easy to be daunted by the rules of engagement, which can often shift unexpectedly.

There is one way that I want to highlight. When in doubt – listen... take a breath, and listen. If marginalized folks are speaking to an experience that is different from yours, listening is one of the most basic ways to show support.

And yes, it is also work to do that. It takes self-restraint to put aside our opinions for a while, and really seek to engage with information that may be new to us. It may be unremunerated work. And it will be *just* work.

We've had this conversation – several times before – in this community of faith. By now, many of you are used to hearing about the need to listen to the stories of marginalized folks, and you are well aware of the need to advocate for justice that truly applies to everyone equally. This is not news.

What I want to stress today, is that the work doesn't end.

It certainly doesn't end for the folks with marginalized identities – who constantly live the experience of oppression and who also often find themselves having to explain that experience to other folks who have trouble identifying with *their* experience.

It is for this reason that we have guest speakers in February, who give witness to why Black lives matter. And it is why we also talk about different types of justice, outside of the designated day, or week, or month when that matter is featured. The work is ongoing. It necessitates repetition, and practice, because that is one way in which lasting change comes about.

You may have already engaged in some of this work over the past few days. And there is always room for more. If you're wondering today, how you might show support. There are a couple options I'd like to offer.

I have invited folks with web access to read some reflections and articles with different perspectives on the current conversations of racial justice. If you have access to other materials that give voice to the marginalized experience, that is also a good place to continue the journey of solidarity.

And, my friends, there is one other concrete action we've been invited to do. The Canadian Unitarian Council has set up a study group for dismantling racism. Part of the work includes a survey of Unitarian Universalists across Canada, because knowledge about where we are

informs what action we need to take. Many of you have completed that survey. And as the *Dismantling Racism Study Group* progresses in its work, I invite you to explore how you might be involved.

And when in doubt, my friends, listen. Whenever the opportunity shows up, listening can be one of the most effective kinds of work you can do for the sake of justice.

So may it be,
In Solidarity,
Amen

Opening Hymn #128 For All That is Our Life

~)-| Words: Bruce Findlow, 1922-

Music: Patrick L. Rickey, 1964- , © 1992 UUA

SHERMAN ISLAND

Meditation Hymn #169 We Shall Overcome

Words & Music: African American Spiritual, c. 1750-1875, Musical and lyrical adaptation by Zilphia Horton, Frank Hamilton, Guy Carawan and Pete Seeger. Inspired by African American Gospel Singing, members of the Food & Tobacco Workers Union, Charleston, SC, and the southern Civil Rights Movement. TRO—© Copyright 1960 (Renewed) and 1963 (Renewed) Ludlow Music, Inc., New York, International Copyright Secured. Made in U.S.A.

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MARTIN

#404 What Gift Can We Bring

Words & Music: Jane Marshall, 1924- , © 1982 Hope Publishing Co.