

Sun., Aug 11, 2013: 10 a.m. CUUC: **A Home for Humanists**. Blurb: Humanism is among the largest spiritual identity groups within Unitarian Universalism. Is our congregation a home for humanists?

CAPITAL UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

ORDER OF SERVICE – Sunday August 11th, 2013

Welcome: Board Member John Pullyblank

Service Coordinator: Peter Scales

Prelude: "Adagio Cantabile" by Beethoven Janet Yonge, piano

Opening Words & Lighting the Chalice

Hymn: #300 "With Heart and Mind"

Joys and Concerns:

"Pebbles Fall, ripples grow, returning, returning, in community"

Offering: with a portion to Capital Connects. Music: "Romance in G" by Hummel

Acceptance: #402 "From you I receive, to you I give, together we share, and from this we live"

Hymn: #1058 "Be Ours a Religion"

Homily: "A Home for Humanists" Peter Scales

What is humanism?

Our first principle – that member congregations affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of all persons – does not exclude people who believe in gods or in the earth as our mother. Our first principle opens the door to humanism, though.

[http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_III]

HUMANISM AND ITS ASPIRATIONS: Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity. **The lifestance of Humanism - guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience - encourages us to live life well and fully.** It evolved through the ages and continues to develop through the efforts of thoughtful people who recognize that values and ideals, however carefully wrought, are subject to change as our knowledge and understandings advance.

This document is part of an ongoing effort to manifest in clear and positive terms the conceptual boundaries of Humanism, not what we must believe but a consensus of what we do believe. It is in this sense that we affirm the following:

Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. Humanists find that science is the best method for determining this knowledge as well as for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies. We also recognize the value of new departures in thought, the arts, and inner experience—each subject to analysis by critical intelligence.

Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing. We accept our life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be. We welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be known.

Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience. Humanists ground values in human welfare shaped by human circumstances, interests, and concerns and extended to the global ecosystem and beyond. We are committed to treating each person as

having inherent worth and dignity, and to making informed choices in a context of freedom consonant with responsibility.

Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals. We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. Humanists rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the lifestance of Humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.

Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.

Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness. Progressive cultures have worked to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community. We seek to minimize the inequities of circumstance and ability, and we support a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life.

Humanists are concerned for the well-being of all, are committed to diversity, and respect those of differing yet humane views. We work to uphold the equal enjoyment of human rights and civil liberties in an open, secular society and maintain it is a civic duty to participate in the democratic process and a planetary duty to protect nature's integrity, diversity, and beauty in a secure, sustainable manner.

Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. **The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.** [end of Humanist Manifesto paragraphs]

Materialism: that the only components of existence are matter and energy. Humanists are uneasy (to say the least) with spiritual magick and the idea that gods are directing and observing human or global events. Humanists tend to see the world with a sense of “what you see is what you get”, that this life is the only life you get and there is nothing afterward except your body’s return to matter and energy.

I want to draw this definition of humanism toward a Unitarian Universalist focus. In his [July 24, 2013 Huffington Post] article, “Welcoming Unitarian Universalists Home to Humanism,” Roy Speckhardt, Executive Director of the American Humanist Association writes that “Unitarian Universalism is famously tolerant of differing points of view when it comes to religion, including a historical acceptance of atheists and agnostics after moving away from a Christian-based theology over a century ago. It isn't uncommon for many congregations to be made up of a majority of nontheists of various stripes. But what has been happening over the past 10-20 years to the UUA is a failure to maintain reason as a guiding principle. Instead, the often laudable effort to be "all-inclusive" has become so dominant that in some congregations Unitarian Universalist identity has become so vague as to be insubstantial. This is due somewhat to late 20th century postmodernism that Unitarian Universalists (and many others) found so attractive. But the Everyone-Creates-Their-Own-Truth idea that is the core of postmodernism has failed, and by hanging on to it many UUA leaders and congregations are failing too.” “Former American Humanist Association President Michael Werner has a new book, *Regaining Balance: The Evolution of the UUA*, that exposes what he feels is behind the Unitarian Universalist

Association (UUA)'s growing anti-humanist sentiment in favor of what he calls radical tolerance. "The value of reason in religion has been discarded along with critical thinking, science, and progressive thought," Werner wrote, adding that a "narrow ideology has taken over the UUA."

Humanistic Judaism offers Jewish humanists and cultural Jews a positive Jewish experience through communities that blend the celebration of Jewish culture with the values of humanism. www.shj.org

"Gentlewoman," a retired interfaith hospital and hospice chaplain, posts to Huffington: "Religious and skeptical humanism are optimistic movements, full of hope and enthusiasm, despite major encroachment by the Religious Right. They attract large numbers of young people who learn all the classic virtues and practice them in the world, only they don't have a theological or "spiritual" (whatever that means) overlay."

Many of us in this room – and indeed in British Columbia – live with essentially humanistic ideals about how to live and how to be in community with others.

Those were a few words about what humanism is. Let me tell you what I think humanism is not.

What is not humanism?

2 answers:

Modern humanism is not Renaissance humanism. Renaissance humanism means "standing for devotion to the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, and the humane values that may be derived from them" [Nicholas Mann "The Origins of Humanism"]. Historian John Rigby Hale cautions against too direct a linkage between Renaissance humanism and modern uses of the term: "Renaissance humanism must be kept free from any hint of either "humanitarianism" or "humanism" in its modern sense of rational, non-religious approach to life ... the word "humanism" will mislead ... if it is seen in opposition to a Christianity its students in the main wished to supplement, not contradict, through their patient excavation of the sources of ancient God-inspired wisdom." [Wikipedia]

If you imagine that the material world is the opposite of the transcendent, spirit world, then modern humanism is not transcendentalism. Transcendentalism is a broad category to include beliefs that something besides matter & energy - call it consciousness or god - undergirds material existence. This has been the claim of so-called mystics from all religions and spiritual paths, from all time, places and cultures [adapted from Huff Post user "OtayPanky"].

I want to claim also that humanism is not atheism or agnosticism. I like the story of a city council meeting recently... council and the citizens were going to be discussing an issue of social concern... the mayor acknowledged Rabbi Cohen in the audience... the man next to the rabbi leaned over and whispered, "I don't believe in god." The rabbi replied, "I don't believe in the god that you don't believe in, either."

"Frozen01" posts to Huffington: "What most people complain about in the New Atheist movement is its strong anti-theist rhetoric. That rhetoric is a DIRECT response to and rejection of the pervasiveness of "literal truth" in our society."

I've talked about what humanism is and what it is not. I've been reflecting on those definitions and I want to say a few words about...

What humanism is to me. Pluralism is one word to describe "holding two belief systems." In my view there is room for pluralism. People can be humanist and Jewish, humanist and Hindu, humanist and atheist, and humanist and Christian.

It's not all-or-nothing. But it is "people before gods".

In my mind, people who act today in such a way as to improve their chances in heaven are essentially not humanists. They might be 80 percent humanist. ☺

I think that the Confucian maxim, which most Canadians know as the Golden Rule, One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself, is essentially humanistic because it does not also say, "because god says so."

In the Torah, Leviticus 19:18, a version of the Golden Rule says "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk. Love your neighbor as yourself." But the next line is "I am the LORD," and this ensures that this statement is not humanistic.

You may have heard of "The Platinum Rule"... Viennese philosopher Karl Popper (1902-1994) wrote that "The golden rule is a good standard which is further improved by doing unto others, wherever reasonable, as they want to be done by" (*The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 2).

I believe that our Unitarian seven principles can guide us toward humanism, while also leave plenty of space for spiritual searching. In the end, each of us needs to live the life that works for us in our hearts and minds. Let me repeat a phrase I spoke earlier from the Humanist Manifesto: The lifestance of Humanism - guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience - encourages us to live life well and fully.

If your strivings and meditations lead you to a god or many gods, and you are still able to live in society in peace, then I embrace you in all of your pluralistic and hyphenated humanism. ☺

In the service blurb I asked if Capital – our little group – could be a religious home for humanists...

What does a religious home look like?

There are two kinds of religious homes. Maybe three.

In one kind of religious home, the people at the front of the room tell the people in the chairs what to believe. If the people in the chairs accept what the people at the front are dictating, then it's a religious home.

The other kind of religious home is where the people in the chairs hold and modify their own beliefs, and where they are free to do so. The people in the chairs listen to the people at the front... accepting some of the info and rejecting others.

I have described what humanism is and is not, and talked about what a religious home might look like. So...

Is Capital a home for humanists?

Yes, without a doubt. Not just as it is home for Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, pagans, Wiccans, atheists and agnostics but, in some ways, more so. In my mind, and some will likely disagree, Unitarian Universalism is primarily a home for humanists. Hyphenated humanists also find themselves at home here.

Hymn: #295 "Sing Out Praises for the Journey"

Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice

Please stand as you are able, form a circle around the room, and let's sing one of our humanist hymns, #123 "Spirit of Life."