

**Remarks on Volunteerism offered at the UUFSMA
December 2, 2018 by William Dalsimer**

Welcome and good morning.

I was asked to speak today on volunteerism. I'm unsure of why I was asked to do so as I am no expert on Volunteerism. Perhaps, it was my service as a Peace Corps volunteer way back (more than 50 years now) in 1962-64.

Let's explore together the strong **call to voluntary service** among Unitarian-Universalists ,the **health benefits** from volunteering and one of the challenges along the way to volunteering.

The **Mission Statement** of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Miguel calls upon each of us to

- 1.serve the spirit** as we each understand it,
- 2. serve the needs of our own community and**
- 3.serve our multicultural community through** actions that further **social justice.**

The Sunday service committee is charged with presenting 51 services annually. I have been present when Committee members have **discussed how to balance the emphasis in the Sunday services between serving the spirit and serving our call to social justice.** Some folks want more spirituality, some want less, and believe it or not, others want none of the spirituality while others want little social justice stuff.

But serving social justice issues and spiritual matters are interlocked. Our social justice concerns and activities as well as our spiritual identity are both grounded in the same 7 principles adopted by the membership congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association. These are the guideposts in our non-creedal faith. These 7 principles define us.

We believe in:

- 1.the inherent worth and dignity of all
- 2.Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
- 3.the acceptance of one another and encouragement in spiritual growth in our congregations
- 4.a free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- 5.the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all
6. the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process
7. respect for the interdependent web of all existence.

As a Fellowship we have formed a spiritual community committed to issues of social justice guided by these 7 principles.

You will find on the welcome table- The Community Connections Brochure which describes these activities and the 13 non-governmental Mexican organizations which we currently support.

The directory insert in today's Order of Service identifies our working groups, their current leaders and contact information for volunteering within the community.

As a life long UU I first learned about volunteerism while tugging on my father's pant leg at the end of those too long UU meetings in smoke filled rooms after Sunday service. All I wanted to do was to get home and play. But even as a child I could see that my father's extensive volunteerism *enhanced his life.*

Studies have shown that volunteerism can lower blood pressure, extend life expectancy, increase physical agility, and reduce isolation . Volunteering generally contributes to healthier, more optimistic and engaged lives.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, functions as the principle social justice committee of the Unitarian Universalist

Association and works to advance human rights through grassroots collaboration in the United States and in more than a dozen countries throughout the world.

Our local Fellowship is in full accord with the mission and work of the UUSC.

If the UUSC is the lion that roared with \$ 10,000,000 of annual income and \$ 8,000,000 of disbursements in 2017. Our Fellowship is the mouse that roars with \$ 64,000 of income and \$ 32,000 of disbursements to our grassroots partners here in San Miguel. We support human rights- the right to clean water, the right to education, the right to economic growth and community development, the right to health care and housing, and the right to freedom from fear and oppression.

A recent example of this was our critical role in the creation and support of Caminamos Juntos. The newly formed Caminamos Juntos , is a registered civil association, whose mission is to respond to the humanitarian needs of Mexicans deported from the United States. Recently this focus expanded to respond to the needs of the men, women and children in the Caravans from Central America.

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Effective Volunteerism may start as a simple act of love or a temporary response to an emergency. It can manifest itself as distributing food, water, lip balm and clothing along the railroad tracks here in San Miguel. It could be a longer commitment like joining the Peace Corp to live and work in a foreign land for two years.

By responding to the needs of our fellow humans we blur the lines between "us" and "them".

Boundaries are strong. They can work against the UU principles of the interconnected web of all life. They may cloud our vision and prevent us from seeing the inherent worth and dignity of all humans.

I grew up as a protected white male of the upper middle class in a New York suburb. So except for the fact that I was shorter than the average adolescent male, I was one of the "privileged". The economic, social and educational lines were drawn. And those divisions along with race, religion and class, remained largely unspoken and unacknowledged in my neighborhood. These ingrained class distinctions infect our adulthood in many ways.

How many of us carry into our interactions with others the subtle and not so subtle distinctions which shaped our young lives. How long into a social gathering is it before you ask or are asked, "What College did you attend? What type of work do you do? We may feel that our safety and comfort depend upon being among "us" and not among "them".

Recently, I saw notes from a training session offered to Volunteers preparing to assist the staff at ABBA House Shelter, our partner in Celaya , with offering services to migrants passing through Mexico. This got me thinking about the "us" and "them".

The Protocols suggested a series of 8 "DON'T DO's" for the Volunteers safety.

Those protocols were like the Don't Do's on the signs in the NYC playground where I took my kids. Don't Play Kick Ball, Don't Push, Don't Run, Don't Throw Trash on the Ground, Don't Roller Skate.

My revolutionary self tended to rebel against these lists of Don't Dos. I wanted to roller skate. What was wrong with giving a ride to an exhausted migrant in the Caravan? (A Don't Do in those training Protocols)

Like the Don't Do's in the playground which interfere with a child's enjoyment, I felt that these protocols for the volunteers seemed unduly restrictive. They might contribute to the barriers, anxieties and fears existing between the "us" and "them". On the other hand, I understood that the Don't Do's were established to protect the children on the playground or enthusiastic, naive volunteers from the possibility of harm.

Later, I read a comment posted in the GOFUNDME designed to raise funds for the passing Caravan.

Rebecca, our volunteer attorney, who has been working with Caminamos Juntos and members of the Caravan wrote:

"We offered to drive a family with small children (a mother, her nursing baby and toddler, and her two nieces) to Irapuato. Other people stopped to ask if I could also carry their things: large foam mattresses and bedrolls, backpacks stuffed with baby items, a heavy pink shopping bag. The longer I stayed up there, the more things people wanted to load up. It was hard to say no, figuring I could always find a spot for one more item..."

I was heartened to hear that a Volunteer had departed from the rigid safety protocols offered as advice and moved, not

only by feelings of compassion, but by her prior experience with the Caravan and common sense, made her own choices and offered that mother and her small children a lift.

Many of us feel handicapped by our lack of Spanish, the physical limitations that sometimes comes with aging, illness, shyness, and the unspoken anxieties and biases that may be part of ourselves that we carry from childhood. Would we find it difficult to stand in the sun distributing water, food and supplies to multitudes or to put ourselves before 20 4th graders trying to learn English?

But there are many volunteer opportunities, which may be possible for you right here within the UU community. You might visit the home bound, teach children in the Sunday school program You might pass the collection plate on Sunday. You could host a potluck diner for a small group. You could participate on the Social action or Sunday services committee or make coffee, greet guests on Sunday.

You could look in *Atencion* , the local English newspaper and count dozens of other volunteer opportunities.

In the United States, some of the ugliest political rhetoric in our memory has demonized entire communities — Muslims, immigrants, Mexicans, refugees — It has transitioned into dangerous policies targeting, among others, the most oppressed among us.... ... It's a long and

tragic list. And it's a list that offers vivid evidence, once again, that the long arc of the moral universe may indeed bend toward justice, but its movement can be halting and uneven. So much depends on people of good will fighting for values they hold and that are under siege.

So, if you are inclined to embrace the world of volunteerism and work to blur those imaginary lines between "them" and "us" then reach out and explore volunteer experiences. Your experiences may enrich your life and the lives of others and offer you the opportunity to connect with the "other" .

As Deepak Chopra says:

"The moment you identify yourself as separate from other beings, or other people, or separate from life in general then you will suffer... because, when you're disconnected from people and life, you feel fear, and that creates the beginnings of suffering."

CLOSING HYMN

Please join together in our closing hymn #134, "Our World Is One World"

OUR CLOSING WORDS ARE FROM UU MINISTER A. POWELL DAVIES:

Here we are-all of us-upon this planet, bound together
in a common destiny.

Living our lives between the briefness of the daylight
and the dark.

Kindred in this, each lighted by the same precarious,
flickering flame of life, how does it happen that we are not
kindred in all things else?

How strange and foolish are these walls of separation
that divide us!

Go in Peace.
