

Unitarian Universalist Church of Davis (UUCD) Theme Journal ♦ January, Authority

In Six Words Michele Norris, National Public Broadcast (NPR) host and special correspondent—most recently for *All Things Considered*—is known for her ability to cut to the quick of an issue in interviews. She is sensitive and fearless at once, asking questions that few explore. When I heard her speak in November, she talked about her “radio voice.” Her family wistfully asks her to bring home the measured and melodious voice they hear on NPR. She chuckled as she admitted the difference between her public presentation and her ‘at home’ conversations.

In our society there are also more public and private kinds of conversation, especially about controversial issues. Sometimes we have more doubts than we express in public. Perhaps we are more impatient, or angry, but don’t show it. Often our thoughts are less one dimensional. Without disclosing the feelings that are closer to the heart, we’re protected . . . and never offer ourselves the chance to truly be heard. Likewise, we don’t have the chance to hear the honest responses of others.

Michele has opened a public conversation on race and cultural differences that captures those opinions often kept private. She wants to have the American people share what is being said among friends in classrooms at grade schools, high schools, and universities. What are people saying at churches, around kitchen tables, or when friends walk together? She’s giving everyone the opportunity to eavesdrop. What are we, the American people, really saying about race, ethnicity and culture?

The result is “The Race Card Project.” Think about the word Race. If you had to distill your thoughts into a sentence created with **six words**, what would they be? Michele created cards that are distributed wherever she speaks. People are invited to write their concise thoughts about race using only six words.

The cards are thoughtful, ironic, witty, heartbreaking. Some are angry, doubt-filled, questioning. Some make you laugh out loud and others make you angry or uncomfortable.

*Arab, not Muslim. Know the Difference.
Dignity and respect favor no color.
Don’t assume. Alot you don’t know.
Total non-issue when the aliens arrive.*

In January, we are going to have our own display mounted on the wall in the Social Hall. Stacie Frerichs is designing a card that will gather our information for Michele Norris’ project. Everyone who visits our social hall, from Celebration of Life services, to music recitals, Free Range Singers, to a visiting Girl Scouts troop can participate. It’s for people of all ages, members, friends, and visitors. All are welcome.

You can visit TheRaceCardProject.com. I hope you’ll participate at UUCD, but you can double your participation and also write a card on-line. We’ll be sending our cards to The Race Card Project at the end of January. For the full month, you’ll be able to read each other’s six word sentences. Expect the comments to be all over the map.

1. We'll 2. be 3. listening 4. to 5. each 6. other.



One card per person, please.

Thanks to Stacie Frerichs & Amethyst McCay, Worship Associates; and Building Aesthetics Design representative, Liz King for helping with this project.

– Rev. Beth Banks



Sunday Worship

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/kofoed/8643478721>

January 3, 11:15am ONLY, *Living the Questions*; Alexandra Lee-Jobe; Adrean Dills; First Sunday Intergenerational. Ranier Maria Rilke wrote, “Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart...” Start the new year by identifying the questions that direct your life. Julie Shroeber, Carlena Wike, and Eli Norris speak about questions central to their lives.

January 10, 9:30 & 11:15am, *May the Source Be With You*, Laura Thompson; Ben Bazor, Worship Associate. We draw moral authority from many experiences and sources. Our UU tradition names six sources. Within those six sources are endless possibilities. What sources form and guide *your* moral authority? “Flutes!” performs from Holst’s “The Planets”

January 17, 9:30 & 11:15am, *The Grace of Silence*; Rev. Beth Banks; Stacie Frerichs & Amethyst McKay, Worship Associates. Michele Norris, known for her in-depth commentary on politics and issues in America, wanted to eavesdrop on everyday conversations about race. Much to her amazement, she started by discovering the secret stories in her own family. These stories told a history of lives paving the way for the Civil Rights Movement, and gave a vision of Martin Luther King Jr. Special Collection: Davis Media Access Checks to UUCD, memo DMA. Non-commercial community media fills a critical need, teaching both digital literacy and media production, and helping to highlight the voices of non-profits, community activists, marginalized voices, and perspectives outside the mainstream. Davis Media Access (DMA) fills this need in Yolo County, partnering with schools, local governments, community groups and people like you!

January 24, 9:30 & 11:15am, *By Whose Authority Do You Claim to Know?* Rev. Beth Banks. What are some of the enduring theological messages that ground our religious faith? What gives each of us the authority to claim our theology as valid? New and longtime members of UUCD join Beth in the pulpit to share their understanding of enduring UU theological messages. For six intense weeks, participants from the *Fire of Commitment* class explored *The Universalists and Unitarians in America* by Rev. John Buehrens. Before the service, consider, “What is one Unitarian Universalist belief central to your life?” If you’re thinking of the Principles and Purposes, I’d encourage you to consider what religious beliefs might be supporting them. Classical chamber music: flute, cello, and piano play selections from Carl Maria von Weber’s “Trio”.

January 31, 9:30 & 11:15am, *Faith Not Fear*, John Ashby. *Acting out of Faith* leads to a better world than *Reacting out of Fear*. Courage is not the absence of fear, but is facing fear and acting courageous anyway. For UUs, the Faith that guides us can range from a faith that humans can do better, to a faith in a supernatural sacred, to everything in between. Or morning services will be giving a UU perspective to prepare for the Celebration of Abraham event the same day.

Attend **Diving Deep** (a new UUCD series where we explore deep theological waters) *Celebration of Abraham: “Faith Not Fear”* Jan. 31, place & time TBA. Jewish, Christian and Muslim clergy speak, followed by small group discussions. We close with a ritual of hand washing and a bread communion. John Ashby is our representative and Rev. Beth joins the gathering (having just attended a weekend UU anti-racism, anti-oppression training, *Beloved Conversations*).

Listen Download or stream edited Sunday services at www.uudavispodcast.org

Reflect **The Committee on Ministry** (Lucas Frerichs, Stefan Harvey, Hiram Jackson, Lisa Oakes, Susan Steinbach, Karen Urbano) invites you to make the theme part of your spiritual practice: “Authority without wisdom is like a heavy axe without an edge--fitter to bruise than polish.” – Anne Bradstreet, *Meditations Divine And Moral* What does authority without wisdom look like in your life? What about with wisdom?

Learn

This is a great month to explore that *de facto* parental answer: "Because I said so." I remember being given this 'reason' as a child and forging a determination never to repeat these words to others. My stubborn determination remains, but it is strongly tempered by the wisdom of experience and also reluctant acknowledgement that this may actually be a good answer.

Unitarian Universalism runs strong with self reliance, conscience, and speaking truth to power. In this tradition, 'because I said so,' can be a powerful statement, and one we encourage. "Because I said so" is really about privilege. Being able to assert one's internal authority as the guiding light of a discussion is an assertion of power.

Are we using this power responsibly? Do we encourage others to claim their inner authority? How does the expression of internal authority relate to dynamics of power in our relationships?

Start at home to consider how your family values internal authority. How is it encouraged or limited? What about at work or school? At church? This month we have several opportunities to explore our relationship with Authority. On January 3rd, the Way Cool Sunday School will talk about their consciences. The UNIQUE high school group will practice claiming their voices as they plan a February worship service.

Our first SUUper Sunday is MLK weekend; all ages are welcome to stay for lunch and UU activities. If your conscience has been pondering your relationship to Christianity, consider attending our first Liberal Christianity Group Jan 20, 6:30-8:30pm. May your conscience have clarity and direction, and may you bless this congregation with your voice.

– Adrean Dills, Interim Director of Lifespan Learning



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/rupertuk/501436464>

Act

Black Lives Matter – When you think of 'the authorities,' you may picture a white judge/police officer. Overwhelmingly, our nation's tradition (which includes slavery and Jim Crow) places authority in the hands of white people. Systems rooted in this tradition are often dangerous for people of color, especially black people. Police authority comes out of a history of protecting property, which originally included slaves. Our criminal justice system disproportionately targets people of color and the all-too-frequent shooting of black men and women by police has greatly troubled justice-seeking people, bringing us the *Black Lives Matter* Movement.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "Since we know that the system will not change the rules, we are going to have to change the system." This vision is critical to our work as it highlights that this struggle is beyond just, "Stop killing us, we deserve to live. We deserve to thrive, and this requires the full acknowledgement of the breadth of our human rights." - Opal Tometi, co-founder Black Lives Matter.

Justice-seekers must use moral authority to stand on the side of love and fight for a system which honors the inherent worth and dignity of everyone. We can start by proclaiming that Black Lives Matter. – Uniting for Racial Justice, UUCD

Our UU Authority and Black Lives Matter – In Unitarian Universalism a great deal of authority rests in individual congregations. It is the congregations that "covenant to affirm and promote" our seven principles. Among those principles is a commitment to act on behalf of "justice, equity, and compassion in human relations." We see here a version of the old adage, "with power comes responsibility."

The Uniting for Racial Justice leadership group is asking the congregation to place a Black Lives Matter banner on our property as a first step away from a very long history of state violence against black people and toward justice and equity. Numerous other UU churches have already taken or authorized this step.

Before URJ asks for your pro-banner vote at a congregational meeting March 13, two facilitated meetings (12:30pm, Jan. 3 & 24, Library) provide opportunities for you to listen and be heard. Worship on March 6 also addresses this topic.

Relevant background includes: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/> (particularly pages on general principles & major misconceptions) <http://www.joincampaignzero.org/#vision> (a BLM-inspired effort to specify the needed reforms to the criminal justice system) <http://www.uua.org/worship/collections/black-lives-matter> (BLM-related content from the UUA)

To exercise our authority as a UU congregation, attend the January discussions. Exercising our authority is an important part of our religious tradition and current practice. – Social Justice Co-chairs Robin Datel and Stefan Harvey

Sing

Concert: *Where The Grassroots Grow: MLK 2016*, Sun. Jan. 17, 2pm & Mon. Jan. 18, 7pm; UUCD Sanctuary. Authority and voice are interconnected. A voice can carry authority; voices can speak out against authority. Leonardo da Vinci said, “Nothing strengthens authority so much as silence.” Martin Luther King, Jr. said “One has a moral authority to disobey unjust laws,” and his voice became the voice of moral authority for our nation. It is fitting that we honor Martin Luther King with a gathering of voices, singing out with ringing authority what we know is true: that ordinary people can make a difference, that using our resources on weapons prevents us from taking care of basic human needs, that we all need a place to go when it gets cold.

Come celebrate with us this January— be a part of the choir, or a part of the audience.

Singers from Free Range Singers, UU Sparks Choir, and the local community team up with Special Guest Rita Hosking to celebrate MLK Day at a community singing event. This inspiring program will raise funds for grassroots organization Davis Community Meals. Rehearsals: evenings Jan 4-7 & 11-14; dress rehearsal Jan. 16, 10am-1pm. To join the choir for this event, email Laura Sandage, lsandage@comcast.net Event supported by UUCD & singer donations.

Participate

Meatless Mondays – Remember as a kid when you couldn’t wait for the authority to control of what you ate? Only, by now you have discovered that what you put on your plate has ethical dimensions. Meatless Monday makes you conscious of all the stages of producing, processing and shipping livestock for a growing global demand, and every stage pumps more greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere which in turn exacerbates climate change. Once again, we find everything is linked. At the December Paris Climate Talks, Meatless Monday reminded visitors that “less meat = less heat,” a message for us all to take to heart.

Authority

can be a challenging topic. I think this is because it is so closely associated with power. While the two have a relationship, they are not necessarily cut from the same fabric. Within authority there is always an element of power. Power, however, does not always contain authority. Power can be seized, but authority must be granted.

In seminary we explored the concept of religious authority. Since I went to a Christian seminary, the models most lifted up were Christian. Sources of authority for Christians are scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. In the Protestant tradition, scripture is the highest authority. In the Catholic Church, authority is based in scripture and tradition (that is, the church itself). As my instructors pointed out these models, I found myself feeling left out. I raised my hand.

“Excuse me,” I said meekly. (It was early in my seminary education and I was uncertain what I was getting myself into.) “I’m not sure these models work for me or for other Unitarian Universalists.”

“Of course,, the professor replied, “UUs use many other sources outside of Biblical scripture, so your scriptural authority is found more broadly.”

“No,” I said, “We don’t generally place authority in scripture at all, at least not in the way that you are defining it. And as for the other authoritative sources of tradition, reason and experience, they may inform us but they are never absolute. Even the principles that guide us are subject to review and revision every 15 years.”

She let out an unsettled sigh and asked, “Well, certainly there is some authority that calls you together? Perhaps, your UU colleagues can help you out.”

Over the course of the next few minutes my UU colleagues and I talked about the authority of covenant and community within our tradition. We shared these ideas with our Christian colleagues, who offered their opinions and questions. In the end, we all agreed that some of the things we mentioned were indeed authoritative.

Looking back, I still believe that covenant and community hold authority within our faith. But, I would also add that the highest authority is the continued process of meaning making that we engage in generation after generation.

Historically, it was the Cambridge Platform which granted this process authority by stating, “There is no greater church than a congregation which may ordinarily meet in one place.” This gave congregations themselves the highest level of authority. Though our faith and beliefs have changed drastically from those of the ministerial synod which formed the Cambridge Platform, our understanding of the “process” as the highest level of authority has not changed. And to that I say, Amen.

– Laura Thompson, Intern & Campus Minister