

*This Ain't No Disco***A Message for All Faiths Unitarian Congregation****By The Rev. CJ McGregor****Delivered on January 23, 2022**

Before I say anything this morning, I want to address the title of my message: *This Ain't No Disco*. I joined a Stewardship Committee meeting and we were talking about why people come to All Faiths, why you belong. It was Ernie Reid that suggested this theme, it was shot down, and I promised Ernie I would use it as the title for my message this morning. And so, I've kept my promise. Speaking of Stewardship, Marsha kicked off our Stewardship Campaign to raise funds for our next fiscal year. I've been thinking, there must be an easier way to raise money to fund our budget. I've been writing a proposal to our Board of Directors for their next Board meeting. I think we should do away with this church thing and change this space from a sanctuary to a disco. You know disco loud music, a light show, dancing and that iconic silver ball.

Imagine it. We open our doors at 8pm on Saturdays and people from all around will come and dance the night away. Our sound and video space will become a DJ booth with DJ Eddie E. We move the chairs to the outside of the room. We remove these churchy lights and install a multicolor laser light system. Up comes the carpet and we lay down a slick new dancefloor. Not any dance floor. A dance floor that when you step on it it lights up. Regina would have a booth collecting admission, Joe would be our bouncer, and Carlos would be our promoter with Kathy as security. I've got this figured out. And finally, the cherry on the cake—a disco ball from the ceiling. We'll be mobbed making money hand over fist. We won't have to have a stewardship campaign. We'll be rolling in it. Everyone, everywhere. will know who we are and where we are. Who's coming on opening night?

There are just a couple of problems. One, I would need new hair and two, this ain't no disco. You can still wear your polyester suits and thick heeled shoes, you're just not going to get a DJ booth (I'm cutting DJ Eddie E's career short), a lightshow, a dancefloor, or that shiny ball. Maybe the shiny ball isn't totally out of the question. I've seen some unimaginable things happen in UU congregations. Let us focus on not what the congregation needs from you to sustain itself, but why you need this congregation. Simply put, it is the idea of belonging. Belonging is not something that just comes to us as a result of breathing air and drinking water or dancing the night away. Belonging is the sense that one is accepted, even appreciated and loved. Sounds simple, but, as with so many things, it is not. Psychologists tell us that belonging is a basic human need. Folks prosper more when they have well-developed sources of belonging. We suffer when we lack the connections that come with belonging.

Remember Abraham Maslow from Psychology 101? He's the guy with the still widely accepted theory that human beings have a hierarchy of needs, each of which needs to be satisfied in order to live a fully developed and self-actualized life. Well, belonging is the second level of human needs – right after food, clothing, shelter and safety. Psychologists, Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary, argue that the need to belong is a fundamental human need to form and maintain at least a minimum amount of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. Satisfying this

need requires frequent, positive interactions with the same individuals, and engaging in these interactions within a framework of long-term, stable care and concern.

And so, what does it feel like to belong? What does it feel like to be here? What does it feel like to be part of something? What does it feel like to be given a chance to live out your values, to live out justice? What does it feel like to know people know who you are, celebrate you, and hold you? What does it feel like to give to this most incredible place knowing you are building it, sustaining it? What does it feel like?

If you believe all people deserve to be heard, represented and given an equitable opportunity to survive and thrive and those who are able should actively stand up for equity and justice then you belong here. If you believe you deserve to have a richer life, of connection and purpose then you belong here. If you believe that everyone deserves a free and responsible search for truth and meaning then you belong here. How does it feel to belong here? How does it feel knowing you are among people that think and love like you? How does it feel to step inside a place where you are understood, can speak freely, and not live in the fear of hate and bigotry all around us in our county and state? What does it feel like?

Because you belong here you can go from feeling isolated, lonely and feeling adrift, without real purpose to having a real community and living a richer, more connected and meaningful life. You can go from being on the sidelines, wanting to do more to create justice and equity in your community to being a partner in working for justice and your voice making a difference in creating justice and equity in my community. You can go from having a lack of spiritual moorings to a spiritual life that has meaning as you explore many paths. This congregation ain't no disco because you come here to belong to be together rather than showing up, doing your thing, and leaving.

Coming together as we do each week as a faith community is an expression of our desire to be together; to belong to something bigger than any of us. It may be a time to pause and hit the set button. Our Unitarian Universalist faith does not ask us to leave our skepticism or our doubts at the door. It does not ask us to place our trust in supernatural beings doing supernatural things and it does not ask us to believe 21 impossible things before breakfast. It allows each of us to hold our own views about religion and religious ideas. It allows us to change or refine our views as our lives take us toward different truths and deeper ways of interacting with life itself. Here, we do not need to think alike to belong. We are free to follow our search for truth and meaning in the company of others who provide encouragement and support.

We belong together and we belong to each other. We are kindred spirits interacting together with love and compassion. We don't always get it right and there are times when the notion of belonging to each other seems beyond reach or possibly even our sanity. But we come back. We come back to each other because this is where we have found a true belonging; a belonging that connects or reconnects us with the whole of Life, with the Interdependent Web of Existence of which we are a part. We come back because we continue to carry with us the notion that here we have the best chance for being and becoming the people we have always aspired to be.

I chose the prelude this morning because it is so fitting. I have had the opening theme song in my head for a number of weeks. I won't sing it for you, but the words are, "Making your way in the world today takes every thing you've got. Taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot. Wouldn't you like to get away? Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your

name. And they're always glad you came. You want to go where people know troubles are all the same. You want to go where everybody knows your name." Of course, the song is referring to a neighborhood bar as the place where "everybody knows your name" but I think the idea translates just as well to a congregation like ours. There is something very appealing about being in a place where you are known and appreciated, where people are glad to see you and you are reminded of the commonality of the human condition. In this world of separation and alienation, we seek comfort and meaning. We want to know and be known. We want to experience something greater than the sum of our individual lives. We may call that something God or Love or Cosmic Energy or the Ground of Being or Creation, or the Big Bang or Star Dust. By whatever name or character, it comes to this: We Belong. Come, whoever you are. Come just as you are.

You belong here.

May it be so.