

ILLUUMINATION

Celebrating a Unitarian Universalist Holiday

IllUUmation celebrates the Flaming Chalice and 7 Principles of Unitarian Universalism. Practiced since 1994 in the UU Church of Little Rock, Arkansas, where it began, IllUUmation attempts to provide an opportunity for Unitarian Universalists to come together to celebrate the things which are most important to us as a Religious Community. Though the strands of our history are important and well worth exploring, we are not bound by or to our history other than to better understand our Living Tradition and Principles. Today we also honor our Living Tradition as we remember the historical influences which have helped to shape our movement, but we specifically celebrate our Flaming Chalice which was first shaped as a symbol of our movement for our Unitarian Service Committee during the 2nd World War and our current set of Principles ratified by General Assembly in 1985. IllUUmation thus provides an opportunity for us to express what we believe and the world we seek to shape.

When we light our Chalice each Sunday we connect ourselves with Unitarian Universalists around the world as well as throughout history. We remember that we are not alone in our separate congregations, but part of an association of over a thousand congregations, mostly in the United States but also around the world. Almost every UU Congregation practices the Lighting of the Chalice in some form, so that it has become our most recognizable tradition and symbol throughout the UU Association.

And though Unitarian Universalism holds no creed, doctrine, nor dogma, our 7 Principles are the most widely known statement of things we generally believe in common. They were drafted and passed democratically, but they will someday be replaced by a better statement for a future time, most likely with an even fuller statement of our Living Tradition than the statement also known as our 6 Sources. The Principles and Sources are actually part of the by-laws of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA).

On this Illumination Sunday, we face a nation more divided and with more internal concerns than I have ever experienced throughout my lifetime. The values behind our Principles and my own personal beliefs are being violated seemingly with every stroke of President Trump's pen. Values such as hospitality to the stranger, care for the poor and sick, sharing with others, stewardship of the earth, justice and compassion have been struck down with daily edicts and proclamations from the new President. Even more than the fear I once had about being drafted to go to fight an unjust war in Vietnam, I now fear the work of my own government, of the land that I love! While the outcome of the election was devastating to many of us, the harsh reality now appearing is even worse than I had feared.

Even the devastation of the Civil War, Jim Crow, the struggle for Civil Rights, and the three hundred year modern struggle for equal rights for persons of color and women may pale in comparison to the impact of the now more quickly widening chasm between the rich and powerful 1% and the rest of us. Again it will be the poor who will pay the price. Even this ridiculous wall with Mexico will surely be paid for by taxes and increased costs of food and products coming from Mexico, and not by Mexico. The cost of false promises, outright lies, and fraud perpetrated by Trump and his followers will fall not on the wealthy who benefit from each stroke of the pen, but on the poor and middle classes. The lack of healthcare for all, maintained only in the United States among developed nations, will surely be exacerbated by the dismantling of the Affordable Care Act. Millions will be losing their health insurance and no viable option has even been suggested in replacement. The fear that immigrants, LGBTQIA persons, persons of color, and women now must endure will continue to reverberate throughout our society for years, perhaps decades or more to come. So much progress is being dismantled with one pen!

Where is justice? Where is compassion? Where is sanity? Where is hope? These are not just difficult times, these times are horrible, awful, scary, almost hopeless at least in the short term. And still millions support these actions of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and this terrifying display of wealth and power against ordinary people.

These are hardly the best of times, unless one happens to be among the super wealthy who will profit from this isolationist America-first display of power and control by Trump and his cronies. For those who will lose healthcare insurance, see taxes increase while pay continues to stagnate, and suffer from renewed racism, sexism, heterosexism and ableism, these are among the worst of times and look to be getting much harsher.

Our 7 Unitarian Universalist Principles phrased as a covenant remind us that:

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

Based upon our covenantal understanding of the 7 Principles:

I challenge us to reach out to support Muslim congregations and individuals.

I challenge us to provide sanctuary to undocumented workers and families.

I challenge us to provide meals or food stocks for the poor.

I challenge us to develop ongoing tutoring programs.

I challenge us to put out flags and banners for Black Lives Matter and LGBTQIA Lives Matter, and Justice and Truth Matter and Love Matters!

I challenge us to work for the reinstatement of the provisions of the Voters Rights Act and for the prevention of voter suppression and gerrymandering. I challenge us to march and demonstrate and make it clear that we do not support the work of this President or the Congress enabling his actions. I challenge us to work for the impeachment of Trump, Pence, Ryan, McConnell and all of Trump's Cabinet, and failing that to work for the election of progressives to replace them all as soon as possible.

The Founding Principles of our Nation were crafted by men influenced by the same enlightenment values that undergird our current principles as much as they have previous sets of principles and statements of belief from Unitarian and Universalist history. The evils now being perpetrated by President Trump, which will in many cases be supported by Congress arise from the same greed that prevents Trump from releasing his Tax documents and the fear, xenophobia, racism, sexism, heterosexism and ableism that he has fostered throughout his campaign.

In the face of this evil, we dare not flinch. We must raise the cause for justice. We must demonstrate for freedom and equality. We must march for peace. Now is the time when we are called to live out the values of our UU Principles. We dare not allow our nation to again enter the times when such evil split our nation. The future of humanity itself is at stake, and we are the ones called to respond by our very Principles. The time for response is now, before the media is so mesmerized that such actions are normalized. The time for response is now, before women, LGBTQIA persons, Muslims, Native Americans and other Persons of Color are so isolated and beaten down that they cannot respond. The time for response is now before such evil actions take us further away from the ideals of both our Nation and our Religion.

As we look at our Flaming Chalice, we must remember that it was created as a symbol of our resistance against the tyranny that gripped Europe under Hitler and the Nazis, and as a sign of hope and support for all those needing relief services. Our Flaming Chalice burns as a light against the darkness and shadows cast by the evil of this and every time.

Friends, the freedom of millions of honest and hardworking people is already at stake. At this point it is Mexicans and Muslims and women who want to control their own bodies, but it won't be long before they come for intellectuals, educators, and anyone objecting or demonstrating or speaking against them. If we do not speak out, march, and demonstrate now, we may not have the chance. If we have learned anything from history it is that such displays of power when unchecked tend to become more and more tyrannical. With both houses of Congress, and soon the judicial branch under his thumb, Trump can perpetrate all manner of evil against the people of this nation and the world.

Our Principles call us to action now, for tomorrow may be too late! As Michael Servetus, Francis David, Norbert Capek and others gave their lives for daring to believe in Tolerance and Progress, so too may we be called to put our lives on the line for those things that we believe. This battle for the soul of our nation is too important for us to ignore, these times too dangerous for us to hide, this moment our best opportunity to restore justice and truth.

Friends, I challenge and encourage us to do all that we can to live out our UU Principles today and every day. I invite you to share all the ideas you have for ways to speak against the injustices now being perpetrated under the guise of protection. Be careful but do not shy away from speaking and acting upon your truth as inspired by our UU Principles. Do all the good you can for as long as you are able. Join hands with all those working for justice. Go out and work for justice, equality and compassion. Share hope and truth wherever you go!

So may it ever be! Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!