

*The power of people is unique from all others in that we are creative. We have the ability to create . . . If after discovering and developing our own creativity we join powers with other such creative beings, nothing is unattainable. Freedom, justice, aesthetic beauty, peace, and true appreciation are the fruit of our imaginations joined and channeled.*

—Shell, member of LRY, in journal *People Soup*

## “People Soup” and Our Creative Faith

### Welcome

Today we begin our exploration of the spiritual question “What does it mean to be a people of creativity?” Creativity, according to Peggy Taylor, “is our ability to dream things up and make them happen.” Often making things happen is the hard and scary part. You have to be brave to try new things and to risk failure. It takes courage to be creative. Here, we come together, in part, to en-courage one another—to risk creativity and thereby continue to create the people we are meant to be.

### The Covenant

(Read in unison)

L. Griswold Williams

**LOVE IS THE DOCTRINE OF THIS CHURCH,  
THE QUEST OF TRUTH IS ITS SACRAMENT,  
AND SERVICE IS ITS PRAYER.**

**TO DWELL TOGETHER IN PEACE,  
TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE IN FREEDOM,  
TO SERVE HUMAN NEED,  
TO THE END THAT ALL SOULS SHALL  
GROW INTO HARMONY WITH THE DIVINE—  
THUS DO WE COVENANT WITH EACH OTHER.**

### Opening Words

The world is in constant motion, and, if we are fortunate and intentional, we respond creatively. Danna Faulds reminds us of this in her poem, “Allow.”

She writes:

There is no controlling life.  
Try corralling a lightning bolt,  
containing a tornado. Dam a  
stream and it will create a new  
channel. Resist, and the tide  
will sweep you off your feet.  
Allow, and grace will carry  
you to higher ground. The only  
safety lies in letting it all in—

the wild and the weak; fear,  
fantasies, failures and success.  
When loss rips off the doors of  
the heart, or sadness veils your  
vision with despair, practice  
becomes simply bearing the truth.  
In the choice to let go of your  
known way of being, the whole  
world is revealed to your new eyes.

## **Chalice Lighting**

(Read responsively.)

We light our flame in remembrance of years past  
that have brought us to this present hour,

**AND THE COUNTLESS LIVES,  
KNOWN AND UNKNOWN  
THAT HAVE MADE OUR LIVES POSSIBLE.**

We light this flame of life in affirmation  
of the strength that is ours to live this day,

**AND THE POTENTIAL WE POSSESS  
TO CREATE A BETTER TOMORROW.**

We light this flame of faith

**THAT OUR MINDS BE ENLIGHTENED,  
OUR LOVE DEEPENED,  
OUR PATH TOGETHER ILLUMINED  
BY JUSTICE AND PEACE. (OH, YEAH!)**

## **Time for All Ages**

*The Dot*, by Peter Reynolds

Delivered by Joyce Duncan

Today we are thinking about creativity.

Some of us got the message, when we were younger that we were not talented artists.

This is the story about what changed one girl's perception of her own artistic abilities.

It is the story of *The Dot*.

Art class was over, but Vashti sat glued to her chair. Her paper was empty.

Vashti's teacher leaned over the blank paper. "Ah! A polar bear in a snow storm," she said.

"Very funny!" said Vashti. "I just CAN'T draw!"

Her teacher smiled. "Just make a mark and see where it takes you."

Vashti grabbed a marker and gave the paper a good, strong jab. "There!"

Her teacher picked up the paper and studied it carefully. "Hm. Hm. Hm."

She pushed the paper toward Vashti and quietly said, "Now sign it."

Vashti thought for a moment. "Well, maybe I can't draw, but I CAN sign my name."

The next week, when Vashti walked into art class, she was surprised to see what was hanging above her teacher's desk. It was the little dot she had drawn—HER DOT! All framed in swirly gold!

"Hmph! I can make a better dot than THAT!" She opened her never-before-used set of watercolors and set to work. Vashti painted and painted. A yellow dot. A green dot. A red dot. A blue dot. The blue mixed with the red. She discovered that she could make a PURPLE dot.

Vashti kept experimenting. Lots of little dots in many colors.

"If I can make little dots, I can make BIG dots, too."

Vashti splashed her colors with a bigger brush on bigger paper to make bigger dots. Vashti even made a dot by NOT painting a dot. At the school art show a few weeks later, Vashti's many dots made quite a splash.

Vashti noticed a little boy gazing up at her. "You're a really great artist. I wish I could draw," he said.

"I bet you can," said Vashti.

"ME? No, no huh-uh, not me. I can't draw a straight line with a ruler."

Vashti smiled. She handed the boy a blank sheet of paper. "Show me."

The boy's pencil shook as he drew his line. Vashti stared at the boy's squiggle.

And then she said...

"Please...sign it."

Vashti thought she couldn't draw. So she didn't imagine what she might draw in order to make it happen. She just sat at her desk with a blank piece of paper. She was too scared to risk putting anything on the paper. Then her teacher invited her to "Just make a mark and see where it takes you." When Vashti did make a

mark, her teacher asked her to sign it.

What did the teacher do with Vashti's signed drawing of a dot? She framed it.

What did this inspire Vashti to do? Create even better dots and more colorful dots and EXPERIMENT with dots of different sizes.

And then the little boy saw her exhibit and expressed his desire to be a great artist. But he only knew how to draw lines. What did Vashti invite him to do? Like her own teacher, she invited him to create in his own way—and then sign his squiggle. With this in mind, you are invited to take your paper and marker and make your own unique mark and see where it takes you. You're also invited to sign it!

Today we are thinking about how there are no creators without companions—that new art emerges from the inspiration of those who have gone before; new forms of community come from those who came before.

Our Unitarian Universalist merger began with Unitarian and Universalist youth coming together to see what they could create in the way of programming and a publication with lots of art work called “People Soup.” There is no creative spirit without companions—those who came before and those who will come after.

## **Prayer/Meditation**

*Go Boldly*

Jean M. Olson

### **Let us join in the spirit of prayer with a spoken meditation on creativity by Jean Olson**

May you be brave enough to expose  
your aching woundedness  
and reveal your vulnerability.

May you speak your deepest truths,  
knowing that they will change as you do.

May you sing the music within you,  
composing your own melody,  
playing your song with all your heart.

May you draw, paint, sculpt, and sew,  
showing the world your vision.

May you write letters, poetry, biography,  
slogans, graffiti, the great novel,  
laying bare your words to love and hate.

May you love even though your heart  
breaks again and again.

And until the end of your days,  
may your life be filled

with possibilities and courage.

## Reading

From *Liberal Religious Youth Merged Fifty Years Ago*

The Rev. Deborah Pope-Lance

Fifteen years ago, The Reverend Deborah Pope-Lance wrote in the Unitarian Universalist World magazine about dreamers seeking connection. Specifically, she wrote about her memories of LRY Unitarian Universalist Liberal Religious Youth.

Deborah said:

At my first youth group meeting back in 1966, we listened to Frank Zappa on vinyl and played “sardines” in the darkened church, a game of hide and seek where once a seeker finds the hider he or she must hide there too until everyone has found the tightly-packed bunch. Many who joined local Liberal Religious Youth (LRY) groups like mine were found there in ways that changed lives and, one could say, saved their adolescent souls.

Every Sunday night the group, drawn from three churches in Massachusetts, met with our advisor, Charlie McGlynn, a middle-aged state employee, father, and possibly the only person over twenty-five we trusted. Charlie let us run the group and—only when necessary—saved us from youthful errors in judgment. We sat around a candle in the church basement and talked about spirituality, sex, war, equality, freedom, responsibility, and the pressures and pleasures of coming of age in the late 1960s. Like other local LRY groups, we hosted coffeehouses and conferences, repaired low-income housing and protested the draft, and annually offered a Sunday service. One year, we conducted a funeral for the “death of God,” complete with casket and pallbearers. For many, LRY was our first experience in self-governance and self-expression.

LRY was formed fifty years ago with the merger of Unitarian and Universalist youth organizations in 1953—eight years before the consolidation of the denominations. Its history began with the Universalist Young People’s Christian Union in 1889 and the Unitarian Young People’s Religious Union in 1896, youth and young adult–led organizations largely independent from their denominations. LRY inherited this philosophy of youth autonomy and grew throughout the 1950s and 1960s into a spirited, politically involved, continental organization led by a teenaged executive committee and an adult executive director.

In 1969, LRY leaders decided that an executive director wasn’t needed. Meanwhile, poorly managed instances of typical teen behavior problems, adults who actively joined in, and LRY’s hippie image exacerbated distrust between adults and LRYers.

To reverse that trend, in 1983 LRY gave way to Young Religious Unitarian Universalists (YRUU), the UUA’s current youth organization.

A recent twist of fate reminded me of LRY’s legacy. I became an interim minister in the church where I was once an LRYer. Now I stood every Sunday in the pulpit where my LRY group had eulogized God. I met with parents in classrooms where we had played sardines. I sipped tea after services in a hall where a candle and a community had held back the darkness.

But there was no youth group. With help from parents, church leaders, the YRUU Web site, and a promise from me, their minister, to show them my favorite hiding places, a group formed. Now on Sunday nights, youth and their adult advisors gather for pizza and talk about things that trouble and mystify them. They play sardines and are found.”

## Sermon

*“People Soup” and Our Creative Faith*

Rev. Clare L. Petersberger

Many years ago, a Unitarian Universalist youth wrote about what she discovered when she became part of a Unitarian Universalist religious exploration program. She said it was like falling into a universe. And in this universe, others encouraged her to be creative. She discovered companions in creativity. Looking back, she realized she had been informed, formed, transformed—essentially created—by her Unitarian Universalist upbringing.

Her memories reflected her own personal creation myth. Her words resonated with me because I was born in May of 1961—and on May 12, 1961, the Unitarians and Universalists merged into the Unitarian Universalist Association. With parents from different religious backgrounds, I will forever be grateful to have fallen into a world, if not a universe, in which the Unitarians and Universalists had consolidated. This merger creating the Unitarian Universalist Association informed, formed, and transformed my life.

In Sunday school classes in the 1960’s we were encouraged to paint, sing, dance, re-enact sacred stories, take risks, and be creative. We learned that to be human is to be creative. We read creation myths from the world’s religions; looked at photographs of cave paintings dating back 40,000 years; sang songs from holidays in the world’s religions; made masks and mandalas; discussed ways to help make the world a better place and joined with one another to do just that. When I attended a few LRY meetings, while rock and roll played in the background, I remember eating pizza discussing spirituality and women’s rights.

A couple of years before this, the first edition of *People Soup*, a magazine for Liberal Religious Youth, was published. Nancy and Kai found and included one of the creative logos from it on the cover of your order of service. This image reflects the purpose of *People Soup*. In the words of the first edition: “*People Soup*, that’s a funny name. It brings to mind things like communion, as in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, (from which we got the term to *grok*— to comprehend”, “to love”, and “to be one.”)”

The editors of *People Soup* continued, “*People Soup* brings to mind a common element; the sea is often referred to as a rich soup in which all the teeming life of earth was born.” It concludes, “Or a common problem, ‘a fine soup we’re all in.’”

The origins of LRY go back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When the evangelicals organized young adults to engage in missionary work, the Reverend Jenkin Lloyd Jones organized, in 1874, the first Unity Club in Wisconsin for Unitarian young adults to discuss current events and work on social reforms. These Unity Clubs were not for teenagers but rather for those 35 or younger. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Universalists had established the Young People’s Christian Union for domestic and international missionary work. The Universalist minister, Quillen Shinn initiated the Two-Cents-a-Week Plan, which asked every Universalist young person to donate one dollar annually—or two cents a week—to missionary work.

The program was extremely successful and raised \$16,000 to build a Universalist church in Atlanta, and then \$6,000 for a new chapel in Little Rock Arkansas, and then \$16,230 to construct a new Universalist church in St. Paul. Shinn also founded, and the Young People's Christian Union supported, a black Universalist church in Barton, Georgia. Its minister, The Rev. John W. Murphy, had converted to Universalism because of the missionary literature published by the young people. And the missionary literature reached Japan where the Young People's Christian Union raised funds for a Japanese Universalist minister.

By way of contrast, when the Young People's Religious Union for Unitarian youth was founded at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it did not have a full-time director, did not have as strong an organizational chart, and did not have as clear a missionary vision. So the two organizations held their first joint Uni-Uni rally in 1897. A motion was made that the two organizations meet in joint conventions and a huge cheer went up from the youth. Oh, yeah! But older leaders from both denominations quote "sought to keep clear of entangling alliances."

It is the role of institutions to conserve—to not change. And it is the role of the next generation to challenge this! Because change is inevitable. The goal is not to resist change, but to be intentional about it.

As someone who ate pizza and drank soda at meetings of LRY, I found it interesting that Unitarian and Universalist youth at the turn of the century seemed to be more intentional about healthy eating. The menu for one of their conferences included oysters, three kinds of meat, rolls, olives, and three kinds of salad before ice cream, cake, and coffee! It sounds like our TUUC Youth Group is moving us back in that direction, today, with a variety of healthy wraps and delicious strawberry cups and homemade lemonade!

Neither the Unitarian nor the Universalist youth groups grew as quickly after World War I. Given the tremendous cost to life, the age of the Unitarian and Universalist youth leaders dropped to below thirty. Each group held annual Youth Sundays, and initiated conferences for Unitarian youth at Star Island and Rowe Camp and for Universalist youth at Ferry Beach. Both groups supported attempts to establish a "Student Week" for college students in the summer. Then, with the Great Depression came financial woes for both organizations and more intentional conversations about merger. To test the waters, to experiment with merger, the two organizations worked together, along with the Friends Service Committee, on peace caravans. Students would travel in pairs, using second-hand cars, to speak about peace with anyone who would listen to them. This was at a time when the United States was unwilling to enter the World Court; the League of Nations was ineffective; and Hitler was gaining power.

An effort was also made to establish relationships with international youth. An International Religious Fellowship in Switzerland in 1939 ended only three weeks prior to the outbreak of World War II. Its theme was "The Demand of God to a Confused Generation." Because of the Second World War, because many youth members were drafted, there was a growing recognition that the antiquated structure of the Unitarian Young People's Religious Union was no longer efficient nor successful. Similarly, the Universalist youth movement undertook a major reorganization in response to internal and external pressures. Both organizations sought to support the refugees after the war.

Conversations continued on merging the two youth groups. Philosophically, they were aligned. Organizationally, there were great differences. The Unitarian Youth Group had a council of 20 with four elected officers, 14 regional representatives and one past president. The Universalist Youth Fellowship had a Board of nine with four elected officers, and four trustees representing task-oriented departments. In

conversations about merging, members of the youth organizations learned about power and creativity and democracy. One LRY member, Shell, writing not at the time of merger but at the time of Watergate, wrote the words at the top of your order of service. “The power of the people is unique from all others in that we are creative. We have the ability to create. If we choose to join powers with other such creative beings, nothing is unattainable.”

In 1952, The American Unitarian Youth appointed Sam Wright as Executive Director. He used his creative power to, in part, write a hymn. It became known as “The LRY Hymn.” You may know it with slightly different words. Sam Wright wrote, “We would be one, as now we join in singing our hymn of youth to pledge ourselves anew to that high cause of greater understanding of who we are and what in us is true.”

Committed to the cause of greater understanding, over a two-year period a new organizational structure for Liberal Religious Youth was mutually created by Unitarian and Universalist youth. It entailed four elected officers and seventeen representatives from regions. Sam Wright, who held the vision of “We Would Be One,” was appointed the first Executive Director of the Liberal Religious Youth.

Our congregation is discussing experimenting with a proposed structural change. I’ve heard some express fears that the experiment will fail. I am reminded of Vashti staring at her blank piece of paper fearing failure. Undoubtedly parts of the new governance proposal will not work exactly as envisioned. That’s precisely why what is being proposed is experimenting with a new model. That way, we can learn from what does not work and improve the model.

That’s what the Unitarian Universalist youth did to intentionally create a new organization—LRY. Historically, Unitarian youth and Universalist youth answered the question, “What does it mean to be a people of creativity?” by imagining new possibilities for programs and structures and making them happen. They believed in the fruit of our imaginations joined and channeled. The question is: Do we?

The creation of LRY showed the Unitarians and the Universalists the distinct possibility that the two denominations could merge into a much larger and richer people soup. When the Unitarians and Universalists did finally vote to consolidate on May 12, 1961, The Reverend Donald S. Harrington gave the youth credit when he said, “It is our tremendous potential, born of the world’s response to our new relevance, caused by this new world’s need for a religion which is dynamic instead of static, unitive instead of divisive, universalistic instead of particularistic, history-making rather than history-bound, that has made this Unitarian Universalist merger necessary.” Looking ahead to the future, he concluded, “May we, Unitarians and Universalists and men and women of good will everywhere, strive with all our might to make our lives, our churches and fellowships, and our new Unitarian Universalist Association be a vehicle of this vision!”

Much has changed since LRY was founded, *People Soup* was published, and that young woman described falling into the universe of UU religious education. LRY was disbanded after three decades and Young Religious Unitarian Universalists was formed. But some things have not changed from generation to generation such as the human need to create, to have companions who support our creativity, and to work within structures which encourage us to grow and function well as a community. The Liberal Religious Youth showed to all a new community. And now it is our turn as members and friends of the Unitarian Universalist Association to build for tomorrow a nobler world than we have known today. May we remember and be inspired by the creativity and courage of Unitarian Universalist youth

## Closing Words

The Reverend Tom Schade reminds us:

My friends,  
There is a power at work in the universe.  
It works through human hands,  
but it was not made by human hands.  
It is a creative, sustaining, and transforming power  
and we can trust that power with our lives  
[and with our ministries].  
It will sustain us whenever we take a stand on the side of love;  
whenever we take a stand for peace and justice;  
whenever we take a risk.

Trust in that power.  
We are, together, held by that power.

GO NOW IN PEACE.