

Part 1: Questions Submitted in Advance

1) QUESTION:

Hi Roger. Here is my question:

What is the “Spirit of Life” that is referenced in some songs/prayers?

ANSWER:

Like most metaphors or words that have symbolic meanings, I think that Spirit of Life can evoke different things in us. For those who are more theistic, it can be addressed to the divine spirit that sustains us and shines in us. The Latin root of the word Spirit means breath. In the New Testament and the Jewish Bible, the Greek and Hebrew words for spirit are used to mean the human spirit and the spirit of God. For those Unitarians for whom the use of the word God has no meaning, Spirit of Life is an invitation to the depths of who we are. It is an opening to the voice that calls us to freedom, justice, love and peace.

As we sang at the opening of the service, Spirit of Life is a UU hymn, perhaps the most familiar or beloved. In some congregations they sing it every Sunday.

2) QUESTION:

Ministers are called on to do SO much: pastoral counseling and care; writing and delivering sermons; managing and administering the daily church functions; keeping tabs on the life of the congregation; attending so many meetings; involvement in the broader UU community; self-care....and more. What aspects of ministerial life do you most enjoy, Roger?

ANSWER:

Uh, wait... Was I supposed to be doing those things? Well, to me the appealing part of parish ministry is that I have the opportunity to do a variety of things, not just one routine thing. It has been said that parish ministry is one of the last generalist professions. I enjoy working with volunteers and other professionals on shared work and programs in church life and the denomination. I am a dedicated institutionalist, so I care about how we pursue our mission and sustain our programs. As a pastor it's a privilege to be trusted and brought into your lives. I like to read a lot, and I have an incentive to do that and ways to make use of what I read. I like to write but I put off doing it. If I didn't have the responsibility to write sermons and newsletter columns, I might not accomplish very much. I enjoy being in a community of all ages, I enjoy learning songs and singing them together. In other words, in ministry you have to be able to do a lot of things just well enough.

### 3) QUESTION:

Who is an unsung Unitarian Universalist (or Unitarian or Universalist) whom most of us don't know but should? Why?

ANSWER:

This question caused me to browse the online *Dictionary of Unitarian Universalist Biography*. There are hundreds of important ministers, lay leaders, musicians and writers in our heritage, many of whom deserve a whole sermon. Yet I am also aware of countless Unitarian Universalists who have attended their UU churches faithfully and lived their values in and through their congregations and local communities. I have a show and tell item for the example I'm going to tell you about. (This scarf was a gift to me from a UUSS family several years ago.)

For the school year of 1995 to 96, I was a student ministerial intern for the Unitarian Church of New Bedford, an old city on the southeast coast of Massachusetts. One very kind member of the congregation was Philip Margolin, who was in his mid-80s then. His wife Nancy had passed away. They had three grown children and with a Vietnamese immigrant family they had become extended family. Phil used to share his garden bounty with his neighbors, and he did grocery shopping for a blind couple. At the church I remember his announcements recruiting volunteers to help in serving meals at a local ministry for hungry and homeless people, where he devoted much of his time.

Phil's parents were Jews who had immigrated from Russia, entering the U.S. at New York's Ellis Island. He grew up outside of Boston. His father died when he was a boy, and Phil helped his older brother take over the family tailoring business. After serving in the Second World War, Phil attended fashion design school. He worked for major clothing manufacturers in several big cities, eventually working for Burberry's. He became the president of their U.S. division and in that role had the responsibility for selecting the black, tan and red plaid pattern for which Burberry coats and accessories are well known, [like this scarf]. I had no idea about this until I read Phil's obituary a few years after I left New Bedford. I just knew him as the kind widower who volunteered at the soup kitchen and came to church every Sunday. As I think about him today, I realize that there are unsung Unitarian Universalists among us and around us all the time. And for that I feel very blessed.

### 4) QUESTION:

There is much demonization of transgender people in this country currently. What is the UUSS response and how can I, as a trans woman, be spiritual while facing this demonization/ that seems to call into question my right to exist?

ANSWER:

This is an important question and I'm grateful that you've asked.

As I mentioned in a sermon in August, it is a strategy of fascist movements to demonize people from the least understood and most vulnerable groups in a society in order to generate irrational fear. They do this to gain power. In some southern states, including Florida, our congregations have provided comfort and refuge for trans neighbors and members. Our denomination, the UUA, has been a leader among religions in confronting this fear and hatred. The UUA's *Uplift* program provides resources to individuals and congregations and has also assisted people in moving out of states where they are at risk from new laws targeting transgender youth as well as adults.

Being spiritual doesn't mean not letting these kinds of things upset you. After all, they endanger your wellbeing and threaten the values we share of dignity, understanding, belonging and peace. In this unsettling climate, I think spiritual care of yourself is of primary importance. One part of that is being part of a community which accepts you and others in our full humanity and where you can find affirming allies. A small way we do this is by putting our pronouns on our church name tags in order to be more open about the varieties of gender expression among us. Yet we can always learn more and learn what more we can do in order to practice hospitality and advocate for justice within and beyond these walls. Yet we remember that Love is at the center of our UU faith tradition.

#### 5) QUESTION:

Here's my question for the question box: If the Universe told you, "Roger, you can no longer be a minister. You must choose a different career," how would you respond?

#### ANSWER:

Thank you. I assume I can answer about things that I would be ABLE to do, versus fantasy jobs that I don't have the skills to do. This question took me back to my original career ideas. But I feel it's a bit late for me to go to law school, which I did consider back then. In college I worked for a year on the campus newspaper and liked journalism, but I gave that up because I was too stressed out by the regular burden of deadlines. One thing I'd enjoy doing now would be to write theater/ reviews, but I think there are even fewer paid positions for that than for other kinds of journalism.

To pay the bills, maybe I'd work in retail sales or customer service or even wait tables at a restaurant. I like interacting with people. However, if I worked at a store's cash register, I'd be inclined to tell people that the product in their shopping cart was manufactured in the People's Republic of China or some other country with human rights abuses. As a server at a restaurant, I might lecture people about the dangers of saturated fats or the unsustainability of the fish they want to order. Perhaps I could get a job selling organic vegetables for a vendor at the Farmer's Market.

Whatever else I did to earn money, however, I'd still miss church. So, to feed that side of myself, I think I might like to volunteer as a Sunday school teacher.

6) QUESTION: This person sent a series of questions for brief answers.

Roger, is your “natural ease...” singing it or dancing to it? (Singing to it.)

Reading it or watching it?

(Reading, though I listen to Public Radio while doing chores or driving.)

Cooking it or eating it? (Eating... whatever it is that you're cooking.)

Planning it or doing it? (Doing it. On trips I learn the most from getting lost.)

Observing it or participating in it? (Depends on whether it's athletics or church.)

Going away or coming home? (Coming home, though jet lag can be rough.)

Handwriting it or typing it? (Either one, just not typing it on my phone.)

#### INVITATION

If you haven't already submitted a question in the Chat or on the pieces of paper, you may do that now during the Gift of Music. Roger asks you to write your name on it. If he isn't able to get to your question, he wants to know who asked the question so he can follow up later.

From the Weekly Message email of September 27, 2024

#### **Some Questions I Didn't Get to Answer on Sunday**

Greetings!

It was great to see many familiar faces at the Question Box service as well as to connect with our many recent newcomers! Questions came from new folks as well as longtime UUs.

**What is your favorite color and what thing is that color that you like?** While red and rust colors often strike me, I think blue in many shades is my favorite, as in... my 1983 Honda, current office walls, bathroom ceramic tiles, clergy robe, many dress shirts, a local blue jay, and the YMCA swimming pool's water.

**What is a UU Christian Communion?** It's a simple ritual in memory of Jesus of Nazareth. One does not need to be a Christian to participate at this open table. We do this in the spirit of peace, fellowship, love, and justice. I'm hosting it Sunday, Sept. 29, at 2:00 pm in our Library/Bookstore.

**When is Ms. Harris going to move into the White house?** Jan. 20, 2025. Inshallah.

**What do you have to say about pastoral care to those of us who have a hard time reaching out for support?** Reach out! That's why we are here! Pastoral care happens in many ways—an email to ask us to hold you in prayer or to tell us good news, a brief conversation after a committee meeting or during coffee, or just a hug (pastors need them too). Please reach out even if it's just to get more acquainted; this can make it easier to call us if you ever have a crisis or a burden. (Note that we have Pastoral Volunteers and a Caring Committee too!)

**Do you like dogs? Will you get another dog?** They bring out a goofy, playful side in me, causing me to speak in baby talk. However, they are a big responsibility and more expensive than I had anticipated, so I will enjoy the vicarious cuddly pleasures of others' dogs. Please tell them that I feel hurt if an unfamiliar dog does not warm up to me.

**What do you think is one of the biggest challenges facing UUSS?** I answered on Sunday that I think we are in a place of health and vitality right now. Of course, we are always trying to do better at living our mission. What I failed to add, however, is that our [Strategic Plan](#) embodies the challenges we have taken on. It provides guidance for where we put our attention and resources. [Click here](#) or call the office for a paper copy.

**Is there something I (or we) can do to help improve this group?** Your participation improves this congregation! Read the [Blue Sheet](#). Take care of your spiritual and physical health. Every Sunday, introduce yourself to one person you don't know every Sunday. Consider making (or increasing) a significant [monthly pledge](#) to support our staff, programs, and mission. If it's significant for you, it will make a difference for UUSS. Thank you!

Keep the faith and keep in touch!

Love,

[Rev. Roger](#)