



INTEGRITY

The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community.

Many years ago, my daily bus commute crossed the Mississippi River on the old Lake Street bridge. Then almost 100 years old, the quarter-mile bridge connecting St. Paul and Minneapolis was a wrought iron structure built well before the invention of the automobile. And one day, engineers inspecting the bridge's integrity, determined it could no longer safely bear the full load of our daily modern-day traffic.

Overnight, my commute changed. On one river bank, the route 21 bus pulled over and we debarked and boarded a large van that shuttled us across the bridge in smaller numbers. On the other side, we left the van and climbed aboard another 21 bus to continue our way down Lake Street.

Decades later, the Twin Cities would experience the tragedy of a different bridge's failure over the mighty Mississippi. We have learned to take the integrity of bridges seriously. But what do we know about the integrity of people, and systems, institutions and practices meant to carry us across the chasms stretched between our old familiar world to the far banks of a future we hope and pray will be better?

Here in our congregation, we say we are helping one another lead loving lives of integrity, service, and joy. Just what does a loving life of integrity look like now?

The dictionary offers two basic meanings of integrity – *the quality of being honest; having strong moral principles; and the state of being whole and undivided.* Other sources, thoughtfully unpacking its meanings in different times and places, have noted that in the dominant culture of the United States, integrity is often regarded as an individual virtue and one measured by consistency. In different cultures, here and elsewhere, it is shaped by community and practiced with adaptability.

Today, in this time of contagion, what does it mean to live with integrity? How do we measure the integrity of the metaphorical bridges needed to cross between you and me, and us and them, and here and there, and then and now and yet to come? Some bridges, made of the most basic habits, are no longer sound. Handshakes and hugs. Community sings and face to face worship and breaking bread together. Even strategic planning, because things are changing so rapidly. Just a week ago, when I typed the letters "c-o-v," my phone's autofill offered the option of covenant. Now, its first suggestion is COVID-19. Is my brain's autofill capable of keeping up in a more discerning way than that?

Integrity, as a matter of moral principle and one of wholeness, requires that we let go of rigid attachments to old ways and individualistic understandings, but not of our deepest values. We are asked to adapt. To go slowly. To step back and step up. To choose and take one step at a time in ways that leave no one behind.

I recently confessed to a wise teacher my difficulty focusing in this new reality. She empathized and shared her practice, more important now than ever. She ends her daily meditation each morning by asking: *what is the one thing I need to do well to be of service today?* She sits patiently until the answer is clear. Then, she does that one thing. Sometimes, she might repeat this 10 times in a day. Others, I imagine, it might take several days to complete a single demanding task. The key is pausing to ask the question and listening carefully for the answer.

The Canadian Buddhist teacher Pascal Auclair was once asked how he finds hope in a world with so much suffering. He paused. Then answered, *I don't*

think much about hope. What I do think about, nearly every day, is what is my next right action?

Integrity is about asking that question, and placing it in conversation with our own deepest values, with one another, and with the changing world we share.

The losses we have already experienced and the ones yet to come are and will be many. Our grief is real; we need to feel it and share it. But we will receive gifts in this, too. If we listen carefully, we may discover and perhaps recover what really holds us together — across the six-foot social distancing, across the chasms of our separate locations, identities and ideologies, across the wide gap between what is no longer and what is not yet.

Everything is connected. We know — scientifically, ecologically, emotionally and spiritually — this is how the world is made. Can we let the integrity of that truth hold and guide us now? Let's all practice. Align your next step with this truth. And the step after that. Leave no one behind. No one. Like this we will step into the unknown future. Like this we will help one another to live compassionately with integrity, service, and joy. Like this we will make a bridge as we go into a future made whole by this knowledge that we are all connected, always have been, always will be.

By Associate Minister Karen Hering on behalf of this month's theme team: Ahmed Anzaldúa, Drew Danielson, Janne Eller-Isaacs, Rob Eller-Isaacs, Lisa Friedman and KP Hong

Integrity Theme Resources
Resources for further reflection
are in this month's Chalice Circle
packet at [www.unityunitarian.org/
chalice-circles.html](http://www.unityunitarian.org/chalice-circles.html).