

Building Beloved Community

2019-2020 Annual Theme

Beloved Community is not accidental. It occurs through intention and must be thoughtfully nurtured. M. Scott Peck characterized pseudo-community as one that is superficial and in which people look at each other with the hard eyes of judgment. Beloved Community requires the soft eyes of respect. It is a place where we do not need to think alike to love alike.

September Covenant		Our congregations are not defined by creed. They are organized around a covenant. Ideally, this has two aspects: the internal covenant that are the promises that we make with each other within the congregation, and the external covenant that represents the promises that a congregation makes with the world. Because we are human, we break these promises, but we also recommit to them.
October Democracy		Our fifth principle commits us to the use of the democratic process in our congregations and society. This is one of the ideals of America, and yet it is under attack. Democracy is messy, but essential. The last 3 years have taught us that democracy is fragile. It requires the right to vote, free speech and assembly, a free press, and, among other things, bipartisanship.
November Mission & Vision		Mission asks, "Why do we exist?" "What is our purpose?" "Whom do we serve?" Vision asks, "What is the picture of the future that we want to create?" "What do we want to become?" Mission is a congregation's North Star. Vision describes the distant horizon envisioned. Both are essential. Some say that the mission of our congregations is to transform people who will transform the world.
December Compassion		Compassion is a significant part of our second principle. Compassion comes from two Latin roots: <i>com</i> meaning "together" and <i>pati</i> meaning "to suffer." It is part of a continuum that begins with sympathy—feeling pity for—and moves to empathy—feeling with. We are born with a disposition toward compassion, but it is a disposition that must be cultivated and deepened.
January Authority / Leadership		We do not have a creed that serves as the authority for belief and action. Rather, in our liberal tradition, authority draws on experience and is informed by reason. Our authority is further informed by our principles and sources. Authority informs leadership—not power over, but power with. Leadership is both to act and be acted upon, to be formed and moved by, and to suffer with those led.
February Generosity		The Indo-European root of the word generous, <i>gene</i> , means "to give birth." Generosity creates beloved community, connecting people through a mutuality of giving and receiving. It is a foundational spiritual practice. Each week, a congregation forms the bowl of community into which members place their gifts, and from which members partake of the love, support, and encouragement of others.
March Forgiveness		In our tradition, in which love is the doctrine of our church, forgiveness must be informed by this question: What does love require? To forgive is to side with love. While some things cannot be forgiven, much can. Despite the challenge and the pain, forgiveness, both self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others, frees us from the prison of our past.
April The Divine / God		"God is... / A three letter word, / Partner in profanity, / Companion of the sublime, / The deepest down / darkness in me, / The rainbow ..., / The mystery beyond all knowing / ... The question as inescapable / as it is unanswerable, / ... God is the theist's joy, / The atheist's foil, / The agnostic's doubt. / God is a simple / deep dark / Light bright / up-tight, three letter word." Rev. Richard Gilbert
May Sabbath		Sabbath-time is more important than ever as an antidote to our busyness, fragmentation, and distraction. The Sabbath is a symbol for creation and creativity. It acknowledges "being" over "doing." It values centering, meditation, prayer, and other spiritual practices. It may not be as long as a day, but we need Sabbath moments to refresh, restore, and renew.
June Good & Evil		Good and evil are a duality of existence. It is easy to see the evil in others, while denying our own capacity for evil. Our task is to create goodness so that evil is pushed to and beyond the margins. It is to speak truth to power, to attack the sin, but not necessarily the sinner. It is to realize and respect the limits of tolerance. In the end, it is to say "Yes" to life.
July Harmony		Native American author Tony Hillerman writes, "The Navajo word <i>hozro</i> ... means a sort of blend of being in harmony with one's environment, at peace with one's circumstances, content with the day, devoid of anger, and free from anxieties." Our task is to find our <i>hozro</i> , our way of living in harmony and in beauty. Harmony is a way of walking through life.
August Creation		Creation is an ongoing process. Our world and the universe continue to unfold. We acknowledge that we are co-creators with Earth. Our seventh principle calls us to respect the interdependent web. Our sixth source invites us to see the circle of life as sacred and to value and nurture nature, given the imminent threat of climate change. Creation invokes compassion and requires our creativity.

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