



# High Country Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

## Summit County, Colorado

Celebrating life in community  
in the beautiful mountains of Colorado!

August 19, 2018  
Monthly Touchstones Theme  
Liberty  
Service Leader: Maria Cheng

**Sunday Services, 4:00 pm weekly**  
Fellowship Hall  
Lord of the Mountains  
Lutheran Church  
56 Highway 6, Dillon, CO 80435  
(Services are not held in the  
months of October and May)

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## We Are Many We Are One

*Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland*

*We Are Many, We Are One* is the title of a Unitarian Universalist pre-school curriculum written by the Rev. Colleen McDonald. It explores community and nature, as well as different cultures, to illustrate the incredible diversity in the world and the magnificent interconnections that make us one.

## Ten Thousand Things



When I think of the overwhelming diversity embedded in nature, I recall delighting in Anne Dillard's enchantment that overflows in her book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

Every day while writing this book, she went exploring and found herself moved to awe by nature's diversity. Dillard knew that Nature is a master teacher because of Nature's capacity to evoke awe and wonder in her students. Nature gets our attention, which is necessary if we are to learn anything, by engaging us with her beauty, her power, her complexity,

her elegance, and her diversity. She has at hand ten thousand things by which to dazzle us and instruct us, by which to capture our imagination, by which to pull us out of ourselves so we are open to possibility, while simultaneously driving us back in on ourselves to ponder the meaning of it all: here a violet beside the wooded path; there Mount Bierstadt; here bird song as we try to guess who is singing; there the Black Canyon of the Gunnison; here the cottonwood trees along the Blue River; there the rabbits who make a home in the yard; here the ladybug; there the star-studded sky; world without end.

That diversity in nature is replicated in human beings. I think of the complexity of human diversity driven by the exponential combinations of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, language, country, culture, religion, theology, political ideology, personality, family of origin, birth order, body type, education, occupation, and so much more, including our favorite flavor of ice cream.

## Towers of Babel

Such diversity, it seems, prompts us to erect towers of Babel. Not one,



**Our Mission:** It is the purpose of the High Country Unitarian Universalist Fellowship [HCUUF] to be a community filled with love, beauty, and compassion. We are committed to freedom of opinion, expression, and spirituality. We seek to be of service to each other, our families, our larger community, and our natural environment.

but a multitude: each person, his or her own tower, making not meaning, but noise and static. We despair because there are so many words and so little communication. Although we seem to be speaking the same language, who really listens, who really hears, who really understands, who really cares?

The art of dialogue, if it ever really existed, has been all but lost. And skill in argument as a reasoned, thoughtful, civil, and enlightening exchange has been replaced by a culture of meanness in which, because winning trumps everything including understanding, we are all diminished.

### Pen to Paper

There is no doubt that the technology with which we communicate has grown exponentially even as our ability to communicate has lost intimacy, imagination, integrity, and impact.



In a time long ago, when quill pen dipped in ink, was poised to scratch meaning across the page of a letter, did we pause and consider *what* we would say and *how* because we could not easily remove an error or misstatement? Did we pause, knowing that our words had to have a certain depth and luminosity to make sure that they remained alive on the page until they were read by the subject of our attention many days or weeks hence? And in conversation, were we genteel because our words were not a means, but an end, because the purpose of the conversation was not to inform, instruct, or declare, but simply to connect, to relate, to share?

### Speaking as if You Matter

How shall we bring down the towers of Babel? How shall we bridge the chasm that separates us each from the other? How shall we overcome this soul-wrenching isolation? Let us undertake a new spiritual discipline. Let us speak as if we mattered. Let us speak as if the person to whom we were speaking mattered. Let our words become benedictions, which simply means “good words.” good words spoken by good hearts. Let our words become meditations in kindness as the purpose of our speaking becomes mutual transformation.

### Listening as if Others Matter

Let us listen not with our ego, but with our heart as we risk being transformed by the words of others. Let our listening become so deep and profound that we hear all that is said as it was intended, and all that remains unsaid. Let our listening become so deep that we abandon judgment in favor of understanding, and seek wisdom over information. Let our listening become so deep that we become multilingual, understanding the language of sorrow and joy, of fear and courage, of anger and bliss, of confusion and clarity, knowing that our mastery of the vocabulary of feeling will indeed allow us to listen with empathy and compassion.

### Assumed Similarity

But it is not only an issue of speaking and listening with heart. Our ancient impulse to tribalism causes us to assume that our similarities in the groups in which we choose to gather outnumber the differences. Social psychologists call this “assumed similarity,” in which we assume that members of our group are like ourselves, and that members of other groups are different from us. Linked to this is the tendency to like and trust people who we think are similar to us, and to dislike and mistrust those who we perceive as different. The fallacies in these attitudes persist because they are based on assumptions, not facts.

The fact is that the similarities that we share are like a social patina that disguises the reality of our inward being, a reality that has been formed by experiences and identities that better characterize who we really are. Some are at odds with the social patina, making us different from who we appear to be. That inward reality is often best revealed and illustrated by the stories that we share with each other. Such stories surface differences that others must try to make sense of, while illuminating similarities of which they were unaware.

In many respects we are more different, than otherwise. This is why consultants in cross-cultural skills counsel their clients to assume difference until similarity is discovered.

Wade Davis, a Canadian anthropologist, wrote “The world in which you were born is just one model of reality. Other cultures are not failed attempts at being you; they are unique manifestations of the human spirit.” In the spirit of humility, we may want to add that “other people are not failed attempts at being me.”

### Wo!

Each of us, to some greater or lesser degree, is an unexplored continent, to ourselves, and most certainly to others, even those to whom we are closest. Norman Maclean wrote, “It is those we live with and love and should know who elude us.”



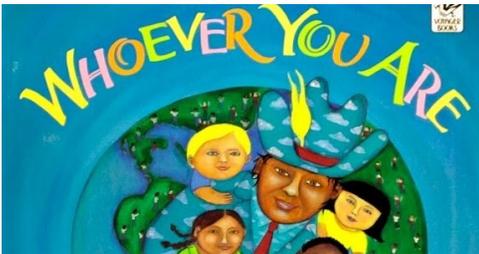
When we adopted our daughter LinsiAn at the age of two, she spoke Mandarin and we did not, so the opportunities for miscommunication and misunderstanding were huge.

In our attempts to communicate, her response was often “Wo.” She would say this standing on the bed or on a chair emphatically pointing at her chest. It is a word that means, “I” or “me.” She was, I think, asserting her individuality as well as her difference. “See ME! Hear ME! Understand ME! Because I am different.”

But of course she now shares many similarities with her parents. Six months after we returned from China, my wife, Carol, was taking a course to learn Mandarin. The “final” was a wonderful dinner at a Chinese restaurant where the professor ordered for everyone. Observing LinsiAn during the dinner, the professor said, “Well she isn’t Chinese anymore.” That may have been true, but “Wo,” she was indefatigably LinsiAn.

## Whoever You Are

And how have we raised her? One of our goals was for her to learn to value diversity. The charter school that she attended while in middle school in Aurora was one of the most racially diverse schools in Colorado. But we also wanted her to value unity, which is why I often read her the book, *Whoever You Are*, by Australian writer Mem Fox.



It begins, “Little one, whoever you are, wherever you are, there are little ones just like you, all over the world. Their skin may be different from yours, and their homes may be different from yours; their schools may be different from yours and their lands may be different from yours. Their lives may be different from yours, and their words may be very different from yours. But inside, their hearts are just like yours, whoever they are, wherever they are, all over the world.” And so it goes, exploring diversity and unity.

## Separated by, United by

In human relations, diversity is

the strong force, while unity is the weak force. We are separated by fear, but united by hope. We are separated by the need to be right, but united by acts of kindness. We are separated by allegiance to our tribe, but united by working for the common good. We are separated by belief, but united by faith in the possibility of a better world. We are separated by lies, but united by abiding truths. We are separated by ideology, but united by universals. For everything that would divide us, there is an equal and compelling force that can unite us. If we are to move forward together, we need to turn away from the false gods of tribalism and division, and turn toward truth, beauty, and goodness.

To cultivate such turning, we would do well to begin each day with a beginner’s mind, as the Buddhists call it, and with new eyes. In this respect, Betty Smith had the right idea. Author of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, she wrote, “Look at everything as though you were seeing it either for the first or last time.”

## A Unity That Makes Us One

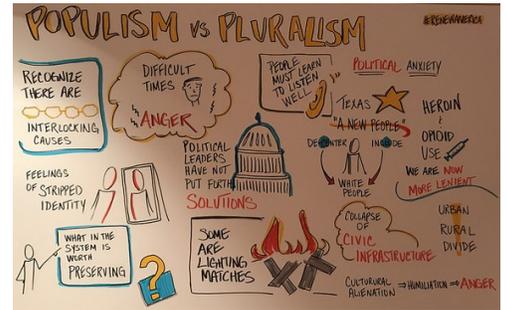
We Are Many. This is true of life on earth and of the human species, both of which consist of a delicious diversity. We Are Many. We can ignore this fact, or we can learn to engage the diversity that exists beneath any assumed similarity. But we are also One. Unitarian Universalist Rev. David Bumbaugh wrote, “We are here dedicated, to the proposition that beneath all our differences, behind all our diversity, there is a unity that makes us one and binds us forever together, in spite of time and death and the space between the stars.”

The idea of *E Pluribus Unum*, “Out of Many, One” is novel. The idea of the United States is both noble and fragile. It has been under assault, and at times appears to be more the dis-United States. We cannot take this unity for granted given how badly it is frayed. The responsibility for forging unity is both individual and collective.

## Pluralism

There are three primary strategies for dealing with diversity: exclusion rejects those who are different,

while assimilation attempts to eliminate the differences. The third, pluralism, involves the energetic engagement with diversity. Unfortunately we human beings tend to reject, ignore, minimize, or assimilate diversity rather than engage diversity. Through pluralism, we can, as Wade Davis insists, meet one of the most important challenges of our time: reinventing what he calls the “poetry of diversity.”



Professor Diana Eck, head of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, writes, “Pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference.” Pluralism does not seek to minimize difference; rather it is the encounter of commitments: our deepest commitments encountering the deepest commitments of others. The purpose is not agreement, but the creation of authentic relationships that lead to ongoing and transformative dialogue. When done well, dialogue will surface one difference after another. Yet, it is only in the deep places of difference that we will also begin to find robust and enduring similarities.

## More Human Than Otherwise

We are separated by race and politics, as well as other things. We can surrender to the forces that want to divide us even further, or we can say, “Wo.” Me! I! I am different and I will not give up. Instead, each day I will find a way to lay another plank in the bridge to others who are different from me. It may be as simple as reading a columnist with whom you disagree, and seriously considering that point of view. Or working in common cause with people who hold different religious or political beliefs than you. Or an act of compassion directed to someone with whom you have nothing in

common. Or entering into a discussion with another person with whom you disagree on some things to see if you can find areas of concern on which you can both agree. As Unitarian Universalist Minister Richard Gilbert reminds, "We are all more human than otherwise." And that reality is cause for hope.

In our diversity, may we find abiding connections, a unity that makes us one.

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