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In his letter from a Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote,

“I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

In a time of intense division, heightened by the walls and bars around him, Martin Luther King said that we are one.

We are one in a world desperately trying to convince us that we are disconnected and alone.

We are one in a world trying to separate and divide us from one another, trying to fit us into tidy boxes of clear identities.

We are one... and we come together to help us remember.

We Unitarian Universalists have long affirmed the sovereignty of the individual. Many of our ancestors stood up for their right to affirm the inherent worth of their dissenting beliefs.

People burned. So many upon whose shoulders we stand died for their right to be themselves, to

hold their truth and speak in the face of daunting obstacles.

We have inherited a rich tradition of individual freedom and creativity... Made all the more precious by today's climate of ironclad dogmas paraded in the public square.

We are being force-fed a fixed menu of ideologies and beliefs through the mainstream media and the entertainment industry. It is a struggle to dissect and investigate information, to decipher it and make choices as to what we will believe. It is a challenge to make up our own mind.

A Unitarian Universalist community is a bastion of intellectual freedom.

We are free in this faith to explore the depths of our convictions.

We are free in this faith to delve into our beliefs, to question and to decide for ourselves.

And because of this freedom and the variety of belief and practice which it helps create, it is sometimes hard to articulate who we are.

We are continually challenged to move beyond the bland negative self definitions relegating our intricate and powerful religion to pallid metaphors.

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Salad Bars of Belief

Where one can pick and choose from a multitude of shallow, context-less superficialities.

To the contrary, there is richness. There is power within our churches, within our districts and our denomination.

And we only realize the full extent of this potential when we come together. Strengthened in unity we can dig deep into this faith and become a beacon in the world surrounding us.

We do not move along this path alone. As much as we have innumerable individual freedoms, we have them in community, in relationship with others.

I am reminded every year at our General Assembly just how wide and vast the network of Unitarian Universalism is. I am inspired by all who come together and carry out the practice of our liberal religion. From the 38 people in a fellowship in Juneau Alaska, to the more than 900 members of the

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Dallas. We are all together in a common effort.

And together we are strong.

Together we are a movement, we are an organization. As a collective voice, our calling out has an expanded presence. Our calling out has widened purpose.

We are one, linked, woven this garment of destiny, viscerally connected through this network of mutuality, feeding us, sharing nutrients and life blood throughout a vast system.

We are linked in fluid dialogue with all those around us, nested in relationship to all those here in this room right now, to all Unitarian Universalists in our many districts, to all Unitarian Universalists in the world.

We are linked to the whole of religious liberalism, to all those calling out for a religion which respects the dignity of all people.

Truly... wholly linked to all life throughout the world.

And as in any ecology, the health and thriving of every one of those parts rests on the health of every other.

We *ARE* one.

Right now, sitting here, we are singular.

We are distinct...

And we are *ONE*.

You all, with days of process stretched out before you here, and I, along with the parade of hopeful seekers with whom I stand... we are all part of the vast stream of Unitarian Universalist ministry.

Reaching back through history, linked to every pioneer and heretic, to every rebel and every institutionalist whose life and work made this moment possible...

We are one with all that has come before.

And we matter.

Here in this stream, our voices, our hands, our presence and our witness is needed.

We are needed in these troubled times to bear witness to love, empowerment and hope in this world bent on intimidation, discrimination and rule by fear.

There is a great work ahead of us... and we must do it together.

For the world right now is full of voices.

Full of voices calling out to a vengeful God.

Voices calling out for the persecution of people whose love they abhor.

Voices calling out for a single expression of family.

Calling out for the subjugation of women and children.

Calling men back into toxic ideologies of dominance.

Voices now ringing in school boards across the country as creationism, newly titled “intelligent design,” seeps into curricula and the separation between church and state seems ever more imaginary.

Mighty... loud... voices.

I am afraid it is not going to be enough for us to sit in our comfortable secluded circles humming “Spirit of Life.”

For us to have a relevant place in the evolving dialogue of this world, we need to be organized and unified. We need to come together, all individuals, singing our separate songs and pour our hearts into some hybrid harmony.

And then to join our collective song with others, to reach out across whatever may divide us and acknowledge.

That our futures are shared.

That our destinies are woven.

That *We...Are...One*.

There is a holy work ahead, and it began years ago.

May we feel the stream, in which we are now standing, and take up the holy work to which it calls us.

May we be nourished by the deep roots which bind us through history to a dissenting tradition of prophetic witness.

May we be forever reminded, and moved to sacred action in affirmation of the truth...

That we are one.

Amen