

FIRST UNITARIAN
CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY
BR  **KLYN**
A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

Transforming Lives

Patrick Gunn

(Member since January 25, 2009)



When I was growing up, my religion was a large part of my family's identity. I attended Catholic grade school, high school and college. I feel there was some real value to being raised in an environment that encouraged service to others and taught me to love my neighbor. But as I learned from the Jesuits to question my beliefs and values, I realized that there was too much that I didn't agree with and the Catholic church could no longer be a home for me. Consequently, as a young adult, I stopped attending Mass or participating in any religious activity.

But when my wife Laura and I were married and had our first child, I felt it was important to raise that child (and any future children) in a community that would reinforce the values we planned to teach at home. Out of laziness, I first revisited the Catholic church, but was quickly reminded of how little my world view was reflected there. Surely there must be a denomination out there that aligned with my values and beliefs without compromise. Thus began my year or so of religion shopping, sampling various religious traditions throughout Brooklyn. Each had value; none felt just right.

Then I found First Unitarian online and decided to make the long trip from Windsor Terrace in to Brooklyn Heights on a Sunday morning. I knew very little about the religious tradition of Unitarian Universalism, but upon my arrival here I felt almost immediately that I had found my home. You see, I was lucky enough that one of the first services I attended was a Coming of Age ceremony. I sat and listened to these amazing adolescents express themselves so thoughtfully and with such poise. I heard them talk about how First U had not told them what to think and believe, but had revealed to them the meaning in the search itself. I turned to Laura and said, "THAT's who I want my children to be when they're teenagers!".

We soon became members and began attending services regularly.

There are many things that Unitarian Universalists do well, but Religious Education of our children and youths may top the list. I am so thankful to the dedicated RE teachers and ministers and youth mentors and OWL instructors and all who have helped to raise my children with an understanding of the Seven Principles.

And while I was coming for the kids, somewhere along the way I started to recognize how much I was benefitting from being part of this community myself. As a family, the lessons learned in RE and at First U have sometimes given us the vocabulary to communicate and navigate difficult situations with love and compassion and understanding. Just recently, we sat down for a conversation as a family about a topic that required each of us to be brave and vulnerable, and we started with the familiar UU tradition of lighting a candle, which helped set the tone for a reflective and loving talk.

This past April, I got to sit in the congregation and listen to my oldest son give his credo. Hearing him express his values and beliefs, so much of which was shaped by his time here – he was just as earnest and thoughtful as his congregational predecessors 12 years ago. I could not help but think back to that first Coming of Age group that inspired us to start attending First U with the wish that one day our little toddler would be one of those compassionate, inquisitive, socially aware teenagers who attend this congregation. That hope has been realized. For that I am so very grateful.

First Unitarian has changed my life. Working together, we can change the world.

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