

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

**Transforming Lives**

Joe Gabriel

(Member since March 13, 2016)



It's been 10 years since my wife and I first left the Mormon church. We loved being Mormon - it colored every aspect of our lives. Leaving felt like we set fire to our whole life. But we had to leave because we felt like we couldn't live our values - the values we had been raised with - inside the institution.

When we left the church we also thought we were leaving religion behind. We stopped keeping a sabbath, stopped paying tithing, and had our first drink of alcohol. (Which was pretty fun...not gonna lie). And I can't imagine a life without cold brew coffee now.) The idea of God as a patriarchal father in heaven didn't fit anymore so I stopped praying - and entered a limbo not knowing if I believed in God or anything beyond this life.

When we came to First U and heard Reverend Ana preach it was like the end of the Truman Show (dating myself here with this reference) - we had reached the end of the set and found a door to a more expansive unknown world. We were scared to step through but once we did we were in a continual state of awe - rediscovering principles and practices that we thought \*belonged\* to the institution we had left.

We began keeping a sabbath again - this time with a focus of stepping back from the pressure of capitalism, the wanting and striving. We put down our phones and devices and spent time together as a family with the mindset that everyone is Ok as we are in this moment. Time seems to stretch (which is wonderful and honestly ... sometimes with young kids in the house? it really seems to stretch) but we have new sources of energy to take on the week.

We also returned to the idea that our dietary practices reflect our spirituality. Now instead of abstaining from coffee and alcohol, we cut out red meat, and regularly incorporate vegan meals into our daily food choices. We're mindful of how our decisions impact the planet and our fellow living creatures.

We took Jesus back from the religious right. In possibly the greatest Christmas sermon I've ever heard our Jewish minister told the inspiring story of a messiah whose mission wasn't to take

away sins but to take on the ruling class in the name of the poor and underprivileged, who against impossible odds started a movement that changed the world.

We began to pray again in a new way. Individually and as a family. The idea of a white male God has been replaced with an expansive idea of the undefinable power that connects all life. The force for justice and goodness, that always sides with the oppressed not the oppressor.

Old words took on new life. Faith isn't blind belief — but the ability to transform. Covenants are a means to empower. Commandments are blessings. Prophets speak out against the entrenched powers and status quo.

Here at First Unitarian we found a way to reclaim religion and spiritual practice in a way that has transformed our life. Working together we can transform our world.

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