

# REFLECTIONS

Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the Unitarian Church of Calgary  
Volume 1, Issue 5 • January 2015

## Theme: What does it mean to live a life of Character and Ethics?

### January Services:

January 4th

**A Community of  
Characters**

January 11th

**Compassion Exchange**

January 18th

**Test of Character**

January 25th

**Being Good Without God**

No better time to talk about living a life of character. January and New Year's urge to turn over a new leaf. The message is clear: You can be better, different and more! This also sums up a central message of our Unitarian Universalist faith. There is an optimism to this message, reflecting a deep faith in human potential. Careful though, this message can come off as finger wagging. "You can be better!" sometimes sounds like "You should be better!" This can easily lead to a focus on flaws. Character development becomes mostly a matter of squashing bad habits, eliminating weaknesses and confessing all the ways we fall short. Countering this flaw-focused view is what this month is all about.

Indeed, at our best, Unitarian Universalism has always come at character building from the perspective of joy. Yes, joy. Our forebears found themselves surrounded by voices claiming that salvation was a matter of correct belief.

Over and against this approach of "salvation by faith," they lifted up the idea of "salvation by character." "Deeds not creeds" became our distinguishing voice. And the type of salvation that concerned our forebears most was not the personal type of earning one's way into heaven but that of offering your best self to the world.

Forget about beating yourself up for all the ways you fall short; Get busy discovering the character traits that are uniquely yours and offer them to the world. That is the game of salvation. This was their message. This is our message. From a UU perspective, character-building is not just about becoming better; It's about finding yourself!

This perspective is supported today by a new school of positive psychologists who have shown that doing good and feeling good go hand in hand. That good feeling you get is not, they say, just from having helped another human being. It also comes from having acted from a place of authenticity and uniqueness. Some of us just naturally empathize with others. Some instinctually are loyal no matter what. Others are truth-tellers, with the courage to speak truth to power even when that power towers over us. Still others forgive with ease. When we act from these "signature strengths"—as the positive psychologists call them—we are not just making the world a better place; We are offering the world our unique gift. And we all know that gift-giving is a whole lot of fun!

So, yes, forget all the "shoulds." Forget that dreary and moralistic focus on confessing your flaws and eliminating your bad habits. Instead get moving on that joyful adventure of discovering and developing those particular signature strengths that you were born to offer the world.

Who knew that living a life of character could be so much fun!

Namaste Debra

## Upcoming Services

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Jan 4<sup>th</sup></b>                      <i>A Community of Characters</i></p> <p><b>Description:</b> This month's theme is Character with a subtext of Ethics. This morning we explore what makes up one's character, what informs our ethics, and how does a community such as this encourage, challenge, support and build character.</p> | <p><b>Jan 11<sup>th</sup></b>                      <i>Compassion Exchange</i></p> <p><b>Description:</b> Part of being a community of character means taking care of one another when we need help or support. Religiously, we do this in honor of our second principle, which declares we will engage with compassion in human relations. This month, UCC will launch a new initiative called the Compassion Exchange. Find out how this initiative will assist and enable us in our mission to be the compassionate community we know we are!</p> |
| <p>Presenter     Rev Debra Faulk</p>   | <p>Presenter     Chris Rothbauer, Intern Minister</p>   |
| <p>Service Associates     Danielle Webber, Student Minister</p>  | <p>Service Associates     Dorothy Lloyd</p>   |
| <p>Music             Jane Perry, Music Director</p>  | <p>Music             Jane Perry, Music Director and UUphonia</p>  |
| <p><b>Jan 18<sup>th</sup></b>                      <i>Test of Character</i></p> <p><b>Description:</b> There are many individuals who exemplify living ethical lives. Are there common qualities that can inspire us?</p>  | <p><b>Jan 25<sup>th</sup></b>                      <i>Being Good Without God</i></p> <p><b>Description:</b> One of the challenges raised to Unitarian Universalist by more traditional religionists is how can we be good without the idea of an external motivator. Our claim is that we are people of deeds not creeds, what then is the motivation to good deeds?</p>  |
| <p>Presenters     Rev Debra Faulk</p>  | <p>Presenters     Rev Debra Faulk</p>   |
| <p>Service Associates     Chris Rothbauer, Intern Minister</p>   | <p>Service Associates     Chris Rothbauer, Intern Minister</p>  |
| <p>Music             Jane Perry, Music Director</p>  | <p>Music             Jane Perry, Music Director, Multi-generational Choir and Tom Mirhady, cellist</p>  |

*\*All services are Sunday mornings at 10:30am unless otherwise noted.\**

## **Getting Started: January's Spiritual Exercise**

### ***Thinking About Character***

#### **OPTION #1 Track Down the Top Three Character Traits of Unitarian Universalism**

A Mennonite leader recently announced that “*Ours is not a religion that encourages people to be good. Ours is a religion that helps people to be good in a particular way. We don't try to take on too much. We bring each other back to humility, simplicity and nonviolence. Over and over again. And in doing so, we enable each other to go deep and grow strong.*”

We Unitarian Universalists are not Mennonites, but one wonders if maybe we might have a few character strengths that are distinctive to us – even if we've never named them explicitly.

How has Unitarian Universalism helped you go deep and grow strong in a particular way?

What three character traits have you experienced Unitarian Universalism bringing you back to over and over again?

Come to your group with your list of these three top character traits of Unitarian Universalism. Bring a few stories about how our faith and our congregation lives them?

#### **OPTION #2 Track Down YOUR Top Three Character Traits**

The goal of this exercise is to help you be more explicit about the character traits and “signature strengths” that you uniquely offer to the world. You are invited to do this through a two-step process”

FIRST: Watch “Rethinking the Bucket List” found at <http://www.karmatube.org/videos.php?id=4029>  
Take some time to let its message and inspiration sink in.

SECOND: READ “Measuring Your Character Strengths” found at <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2011/01/05/measuring-your-character-strengths/>

Take some time to reflect on the many “signature strengths” listed in the article:

- **Wisdom and Knowledge:** Creativity, Curiosity, Judgment and Open-Mindedness, Love of Learning, Perspective
- **Courage:** Bravery, Perseverance, Honesty, Zest
- **Humanity:** Capacity to Love and Be Loved, Kindness, Social Intelligence
- **Justice:** Teamwork, Fairness, Leadership
- **Temperance:** Forgiveness and Mercy, Modesty and Humility, Prudence, Self-Regulation
- **Transcendence:** Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor, Religiousness and Spirituality

Then pick three character strengths from the list or three character strengths you thought up on your own that represent the character traits that are uniquely yours. [You can be even more systematic about this by taking the signature strengths survey referenced in the article, found at:

<https://www.viame.org/survey/Surveys/TakeSurvey>

At the end of the survey it gives you the option of free results or more in-depth results at a small cost]

Come to your group with stories about how your signature strengths became uniquely yours and how by living into them, you've given a gift or two to the world.

## For Inspiration

*Remember that these readings serve as “jumping off points.” They are not here to tell us how to “do it right.” Rather they serve as windows into how others have thought about what it means to be a person of deep listening. Hearing about the journeys of others, we are better able to think through our own.*

*There’s a lot here. Don’t attempt to absorb or analyze it all. Rather, think of it as a treasure chest that you are sifting through to find the jewel that speaks most strongly to your heart. Come to the meeting prepared to share the selection that resonates with or speaks most powerfully to the story of your own life right now.*

“Long Haul People” by Rudy Nemser  
You find them in churches  
when you’re lucky;  
other places too, though I mostly  
only know ecclesiastical varieties.  
Long haul people  
upon whose shoulders  
(and pocketbooks and casseroles  
and daylight/nighttime hours)  
a church is built and maintained  
after the brass is tarnished and  
cushions need re-stitching.  
They pay their pledges full and on time  
even when the music’s modern;  
support each canvass though the sermons aren’t  
always short;  
mow lawns and come to suppers;  
teach Sunday School when  
there’s no one else and they’ll miss the service.  
Asked what they think of the minister,  
or plans for the kitchen renovation,  
or the choral anthem, or Christmas pageant,  
or color of the bathroom paint,  
they’ll reply: individuals and fashions  
arrive and pass.  
The church—their church—will be here, steady  
and hale.  
For a long, long time.  
It will.  
For long haul people bless a church  
with a very special blessing.

"Unitarians speak warmly of salvation also, but in terms of character. We prefer to think of it as an achievement dependent on deeds rather than creeds" -Jack Mendelsohn, UU minister  
It is no easy task to be good. Anyone can act: get angry, give money, speak to friends, and so on. But to do something to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not easy. – Aristotle

“Persistence. Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan ‘Press on!’ has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.” — Calvin Coolidge

“On some positions, Cowardice asks the question, ‘Is it safe?’ Expediency asks the question, ‘Is it politic?’ And Vanity comes along and asks the question, ‘Is it popular?’ But Conscience asks the question ‘Is it right?’ And there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but we must do it because Conscience tells us it is right.” — Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Never, never be afraid to do what's right, especially if the well-being of a person or animal is at stake. Society's punishments are small compared to the wounds we inflict on our soul when we look the other way.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

You can judge a man's true character by the way he treats his fellow animals. - Paul McCartney

It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare.

- Mark Twain

“Character isn't inherited. One builds it daily by the way one thinks and acts, thought by thought, action by action. If one lets fear or hate or anger take possession of the mind, they become self-forged chains.” — Helen Gahagan Douglas

Water does not resist. Water flows. When you plunge your hand into it, all you feel is a caress. Water is not a solid wall, it will not stop you. But water always goes where it wants to go, and nothing in the end can stand against it. Water is patient. Dripping water wears away a stone. Remember that, my child. Remember you are half water. If you can't go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does. -Margaret Atwood

Character is how you treat those who can do nothing for you. – Anonymous

We [UUs] are concerned with the ethical relations and understanding of life, not about the salvation of souls. For us, salvation is by character; religion is a matter of deeds, not creeds; and this natural world is the center of our lives." - George Marshall, UU historian

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

- Helen Keller

We believe in the fatherhood of God,  
The brotherhood of Man,  
The leadership of Jesus,  
Salvation by character,  
And the progress of mankind.  
Onward and upward –  
Forever and ever!

-James Freeman Clark, UU

“Each of us is meant to have a character all our own, to be what no other can exactly be, and to do what no other can exactly do.” – William Ellery Channing, Unitarian minister

For Unitarians, salvation is by character and religion is a matter of deeds, not creeds - adapted from George Marshall

Character is doing the right thing when nobody's looking. J.C. Watts

Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are. - John Wooden

What we call our destiny is truly our character and that character can be altered. The knowledge that we are responsible for our actions and attitudes does not need to be discouraging, because it also means that we are free to change this destiny. One is not in bondage to the past, which has shaped our feelings, to race, inheritance, background. All this can be altered if we have the courage to examine how it formed us. We can alter the chemistry provided we have the courage to dissect the elements.” - Anais Nin, The Diary of Anais Nin, Vol. 1: 1931-1934

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. - Martin Luther King Jr.

Character consists of what you do on the third and fourth tries. - James A. Michener

You express the truth of your character with the choice of your actions - Steve Maraboli

Character may be manifested in the great moments, but it is made in the small ones. - Phillips Brooks

Nearly all can stand adversity, but if you want to test a person's character, give them power. - Abe Lincoln

## Questions for Discussion

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and find the one that "hooks" you most. Then let it take you on a ride. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into—and break open—your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your TLC (Theme-based Listening Circle) meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.

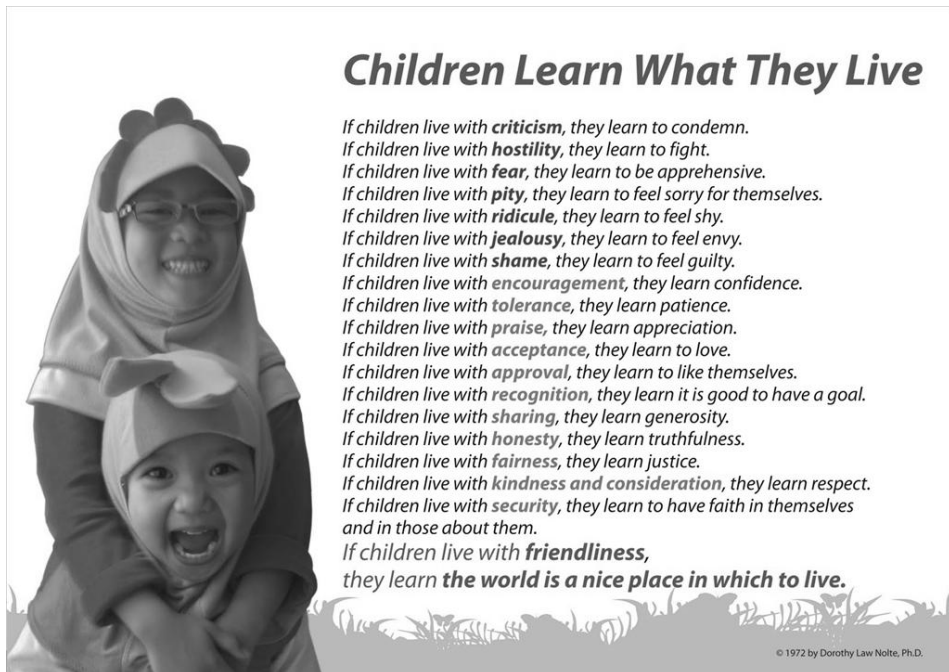
1. How do you stay in relationship with those whose character has shaped you most? Some of us ask those who we respect to mentor us. Some of us hang pictures of our character heroes up on our walls? Do you have a spiritual practice of keeping people of high character close so that their character continually encourages yours?
2. What is shaping your character most strongly at this stage of your life? Are you aware of it? Is it something you've chosen?
3. Do you consider it a character flaw to give up? A poet writes, "Remember that, my child. Remember you are half water. If you can't go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does." Is this the way you live your life?
4. Do you need to get into the "character gym" more often? Do you believe that character comes from nature or nurture? Were you just born with your character strengths? Or is there something you do daily to exercise your character and increase your "Character muscle mass"?
5. Do you need to be more gentle with yourself when you fall short? How do you treat yourself when your character falls short? Are you proud of your response? Or do you need to find a better way?
6. Who are you being with your life? How is this different for you than asking "What am I doing with my life?" Has doing eclipsed being for you? How is your life asking you to bring being in better balance with doing?
7. What keeps you from character? Cowardice? Woundedness? The feeling of being cheated? Anger? We've all got something in our life that leads us to fall short in a predictable and patterned way. Do you know your pattern? If not, is it time for you to figure it out?

8. Has your character ever helped you face down the devil and say no? In our Recommended Readings, there is a clip from the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* in which George Bailey turns down his nemesis' invitation to turn his back on his values in exchange for wealth (clip that starts at 1:08:50). Has your character ever saved you from a situation like this? Are you currently in a situation where you need your character to save you?
9. Have you felt like character has been used to wound or hurt? For example, do your own efforts to model good character make others feel bad? Have others made you feel bad by the way they set a "good example."
10. Does acting well add joy to your life? For some, acting from a place of high character is seen as a duty, responsibility. For others, a matter of acting authentically and bringing not just your best self to the world, but gift to the world. Offering a gift to the world is a joyful act. When was the last time you felt such joy?
11. Does God or grace come into this? Is character just a matter of exerting your own will? Or do you experience some kind of "otherness" when you live up to your best self? Do feel like "I acted well" or "I was enabled to act well through the support of an otherness that is difficult to name"?

## Nurturing Children of Character

*Submitted by Shannon Mang, Director of Religious Education*

Dorothy Law Nolte was a child development educator who understood the character development of children before it was field of study. She influenced more than one generation of parents with her “Children Learn What They Live” first published in 1954:



### **Children Learn What They Live**

*If children live with **criticism**, they learn to condemn.  
 If children live with **hostility**, they learn to fight.  
 If children live with **fear**, they learn to be apprehensive.  
 If children live with **pity**, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.  
 If children live with **ridicule**, they learn to feel shy.  
 If children live with **jealousy**, they learn to feel envy.  
 If children live with **shame**, they learn to feel guilty.  
 If children live with **encouragement**, they learn confidence.  
 If children live with **tolerance**, they learn patience.  
 If children live with **praise**, they learn appreciation.  
 If children live with **acceptance**, they learn to love.  
 If children live with **approval**, they learn to like themselves.  
 If children live with **recognition**, they learn it is good to have a goal.  
 If children live with **sharing**, they learn generosity.  
 If children live with **honesty**, they learn truthfulness.  
 If children live with **fairness**, they learn justice.  
 If children live with **kindness and consideration**, they learn respect.  
 If children live with **security**, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.  
 If children live with **friendliness**,  
 they learn **the world is a nice place in which to live.***

© 1972 by Dorothy Law Nolte, Ph.D.

Every generation of parents has a source of wisdom- my parents had Dorothy Law Nolte’s “Children Learn What They Live” on a poster that lived on a kitchen cupboard; their parents had proverbs and aphorisms that they had been told by their parents and grandparents. The poster that lived on my kitchen cupboard door was by Marianne Wilkinson, but attributed to Nelson Mandela because he used it in his inauguration speech:

Today, when I visit the homes of mindful parents I often see family values beautifully written on their walls.

What are the sources of deep wisdom from your family of origin; your grandparents; your culture?

What are the sources that have shaped your *Character*, and now influence how you live with the children in your life?

How have the children in your life surprised you with their expressions of caring deeply for the Earth and for one another?

During this month of January, celebrate the gift of our children and how they bring out the very best in us. Celebrate also the *Character* that is lived out through our daily actions and words.

-Shannon Mang DRE

**OUR DEEPEST FEAR IS NOT THAT WE ARE INADEQUATE. OUR DEEPEST FEAR IS THAT WE ARE POWERFUL BEYOND MEASURE. IT IS OUR LIGHT, NOT OUR DARKNESS THAT MOST FRIGHTENS US. WE ASK OURSELVES, WHO AM I TO BE BRILLIANT, GORGEOUS, TALENTED, FABULOUS? ACTUALLY, WHO ARE YOU NOT TO BE? YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD. YOUR PLAYING SMALL DOES NOT SERVE THE WORLD. THERE IS NOTHING ENLIGHTENED ABOUT SHRINKING SO THAT OTHER PEOPLE WON'T FEEL INSECURE AROUND YOU. WE ARE ALL MEANT TO SHINE, AS CHILDREN DO. WE WERE BORN TO MAKE MANIFEST THE GLORY OF GOD THAT IS WITHIN US. IT'S NOT JUST IN SOME OF US; IT'S IN EVERYONE. AND AS WE LET OUR OWN LIGHT SHINE, WE UNCONSCIOUSLY GIVE OTHER PEOPLE PERMISSION TO DO THE SAME. AS WE ARE LIBERATED FROM OUR OWN FEAR, OUR PRESENCE AUTOMATICALLY LIBERATES OTHERS.**

— MARIANNE WILLIAMSON —



## **Extra Resources for Reflection on Character**

### **Books**

**Voices in the Park** By Anthony Browne

Four people enter a park, and through their eyes and characters we see four different visions. There's the bossy woman, the sad man, the lonely boy and the young girl whose warmth touches those she meets. Their perspectives reveal how our characters shape not only how we see the world, but how we alter the world."

**What Makes a Hero? The Surprising Science of Selflessness** By Elizabeth Svoboda

"Researchers are now applying the lens of science to study heroism for the first time. How do biology, upbringing, and outside influences intersect to produce altruistic and heroic behavior?"

**The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling** By James Hillman

"What The Soul's Code offers is an inspirational, positive approach to life—a way of seeing, and a way of recovering what has been lost of our intrinsic selves."

**The Power of One** by Bryce Courtenay

An intriguing story of a young English boy named Peekay and his passion for changing the world.

**Shake Hands with the Devil** by Romeo Dallaire

The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda is a book by Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire of the Canadian Forces, with help from Major Brent Beardsley.

**Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking** by Susan Cain

Culturally defined preferred character traits explored.

### **Movies**

It's a Wonderful Life

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frXkIECPkDO>

(watch clip that starts at 1:08:50)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4ne13Zft9Q>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Er69b4HMI8>

Erin Brockovich

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TjEklyF7-E>

Twelve Angry Men

(1957) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7CBKTOPWFA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7CBKTOPWFA)

(1997) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4Ym5vBfk50>

Lions for Lambs

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n\\_V6ulwA0KE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_V6ulwA0KE)

The Blindside

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJ3kwMq18-8>

## Video and Online

“Rethinking the Bucket List”

<http://www.karmatube.org/videos.php?id=4029>

“Kathleen Taylor has spent over 20 years as a counselor and community engagement facilitator for the dying and has found that in the last chapter of their lives, most people become their authentic selves.”

Boyd Varty: What I learned from Nelson Mandela

[http://www.ted.com/talks/boyd\\_varty\\_what\\_i\\_learned\\_from\\_nelson\\_mandela.html?utm\\_source=newsletter\\_weekly\\_2013-12-](http://www.ted.com/talks/boyd_varty_what_i_learned_from_nelson_mandela.html?utm_source=newsletter_weekly_2013-12-13&utm_campaign=newsletter_weekly&utm_medium=email&utm_content=talk_of_the_week_button)

[13&utm\\_campaign=newsletter\\_weekly&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=talk\\_of\\_the\\_week\\_button](http://www.ted.com/talks/boyd_varty_what_i_learned_from_nelson_mandela.html?utm_source=newsletter_weekly_2013-12-13&utm_campaign=newsletter_weekly&utm_medium=email&utm_content=talk_of_the_week_button)

Stories about heroes of the heart.

“TEDx: Self Control”

<http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/TEDx-Duke-Dan-Ariely-on-Self-Co>

Dan Ariely explores the power of self control, and how we can harness it in our everyday lives to live better lives.

“The Colbert Report: Jonathan Haidt”

<http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-reportvideos/413586/may-02-2012/jonathan-haidt>

“Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt discusses his book *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. Asks the challenging question: Do liberals really have better characters than conservatives?”

[http://www.ted.com/talks/susan\\_cain\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_introverts](http://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts)

In a culture where being social and outgoing are prized above all else, it can be difficult, even shameful, to be an introvert. But, as Susan Cain argues in this passionate talk, introverts bring extraordinary talents and abilities to the world, and should be encouraged and celebrated.

## Looking Ahead

The content for these packets is a group effort. We welcome submissions of your ideas of readings, stories, videos, visual images, questions, and spiritual exercises for each month's topic. While not everything will make it into this collection, it is useful for our worship team and our group facilitators. You can send submissions for February's topic of "Passion" by the third Sunday, January 18<sup>th</sup>, to [debra@unitarianscalgary.org](mailto:debra@unitarianscalgary.org)

## Themes for Winter and Spring 2015

January – Character (ethics)  
February – Passion

March – Freedom  
April – Sustainability

May – Honesty  
June – Imagination

## Theme-based Listening Circles (TLCs) for 2014-15

**Introductory TLC** – those interested in joining a TLC are invited to try it out with the first one on Deep Listening being offered in January by Rev Debra. After these sessions new TLCs will be formed. Please sign up in Wickenden Hall, at [TLC@unitarianscalgary.org](mailto:TLC@unitarianscalgary.org) or call Debra.

Sunday January 4<sup>th</sup> 12:30 – 2:30

Monday January 5<sup>th</sup> 7:00 – 9:00 pm

Theme-based Listening Circles are now meeting all over the city! This is your opportunity to connect with others within the church while, at the same time, delving deeper into the theme of the month. If you still need to sign-up, spots are available in many of the groups and new groups will be forming soon to meet demand. These are the current groups.

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday, 12:00-2:00 pm, Unitarian Church of Calgary, Chris Rothbauer and Ev Dewar, Facilitators

4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday, 7:00-9:00 pm, Renfrew, Liz Webster and Susan Bradt, Facilitators

4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday, 2:00-4:00 pm, Kensington, Bev Webber and Martin Watson, Facilitators

4<sup>th</sup> Friday, 10:00 am-12:00 pm, Unitarian Church of Calgary, Bonnie Evans and Sylvia Fenn, Facilitators

A TLC is forming especially for families that will meet at various locations and times throughout the year. A virtual TLC is also available.

To sign-up for any of these TLCs, e-mail Chris Rothbauer at [chris@unitarianscalgary.org](mailto:chris@unitarianscalgary.org) or phone (587) 585-5141.

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*Thanks to all who contributed and appreciation for the Canadian Unitarian Congregations participating in the thematic ministry sharing circle, and Rev. Scott Tayler's Soul Matters Sharing Circle.*