

First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, New York

**“Earning Trust”**

Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore February 24, 2019

**Call to Celebration**

We gather today to hear the call of trust.

Trust is a fundamental building block of our community.

Mutual concern and support connects us together.

Respect, boundaries, and accountability create a feeling of safety.

Generosity and non-judgment help us feel we belong here.

Unfortunately, our trust building skills aren't perfect.

Intentionally or, more often, unintentionally, feelings get hurt

Even though promises get broken;

Even though we don't always follow through on our commitments;

Even though a sense of betrayal can pierce our heart;

May we remember that trust can be,

and indeed must be, renewed,  
again and again.

May the experience of renewed trust

that rekindles an illuminating inner warmth  
lead us back to believing in each other again  
and again and again

**Reflection #1**

These are challenging times for trust in religious institutions. Revelations of clergy sexual abuse that have been covered up by the Roman Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Churches are deeply offensive and shocking. The Methodists are gathering to consider removing prohibitions against LGBTQ folks. The debate will be seriously divisive and alienating, possibly splitting their churches apart. The Episcopal Bishop here in Albany refuses to allow his priests to honor the marriage equality decision by the Episcopal Church. While these are neither our congregation's problems nor Unitarian Universalism's, people's distrust easily spills over *to all* religious institutions. We get tarred with the same brush.

For these reasons and the anti-authoritarian nature of our religious tradition, I know I cannot assume your trust. I know I have to earn it. Not just once or twice but again and again and again.

Trust has been the theme for the month of February. The Meaning Matters groups use a packet of materials to go deeper with the monthly theme. In it, was [a link to an online video](#) by Brene Brown, a researcher many of us know from her work on vulnerability. This video explores what she titles “the anatomy of trust.”

She tells a compelling story about her 10 year-old daughter who came home from school in tears. She had shared something embarrassing on the playground with another couple of girls who had immediately shared it around to others. When recess ended, everyone was making fun of her back in her class. To stop the disruptive and hurtful behavior, the teacher threatened to take marbles out of their marble jar. The teacher used putting marbles in the class’s marble jar as a reward for good behavior in the classroom and removed them when behavior was bad. If the jar got full, they’d have a big reward, a way to teach communal deferred gratification.

Through the tears in her eyes, her daughter exclaimed, “I will never trust anyone ever again!”

Brown realized this was a teachable moment. She explained not everyone is worthy of her daughter’s trust. Trust is built over time just like filling up that marble jar. It takes lots of marbles to build a strong trusting relationship with someone. She asked her daughter if she had any marble jar friends. Her daughter brightened up saying “Yes, Hannah and Lorna.” Brown asked what they had done to earn her trust. She told her that Lorna would give her a half-a-hinny seat if the lunch table was full. And Hannah said hello to her grandparents at a soccer game.

These seemed to Brown like small, not very significant gestures to build much trust. Those answers stimulated her to investigate the topic of building trust by looking at research data. What she discovered was that, yes indeed, trust is built by lots of those small acts of kindness, enough over time to fill up that jar. While it takes a while to build strong trust, betrayals can empty the marble jar very quickly.

Brown likes this definition of trust: choosing to make something important to you vulnerable to the actions of someone else. Betrayal, she defines, as: discovering what I have shared with you, that is important to me, is not safe with you.

So to build trust, we need to understand what counts as a marble that will go into someone’s marble jar. She came up with an acronym, “BRAVING” to identify those marbles. To build trust, we must be “braving” connection.

BRAVING breaks down into these components:

- Boundaries – Being clear about our own and respecting others.
- Reliability – Do what you say you will do again, and again, and again.
- Accountability – Take responsibility, apologize, make amends
- Vault – Hold confidences and respect others’ privacy

- Integrity – Be courageous when it is tempting to be comfortable;  
Choose what is right over what is fun, fast and easy;  
Act in alignment with your values rather than just talk about them.
- Non-judgment – Be reciprocal, offer help and support and receive it too
- Generosity – Assume the good intent of another.

Whether or not this is a complete and exhaustive list of the marbles, there are a few individual actions that stand out and can earn a lot of marbles. One is going to the funeral or memorial service of a relative or close friend. Another is remembering the names of those who are near and dear to you. And what almost always earns a marble is just showing up when you are needed, and even when you are not.

Reflecting on this list was very sobering for me.

I can think of many times when I have been trustworthy and earned my marbles with this congregation. I'm pretty good at showing up for memorial services even when I'm not leading them. I'll drive across New York State to attend such a service for a colleague.

And ... I can think of some times when I missed an opportunity to earn a marble. I struggle with names and I've missed opportunities to show up. And when I do miss something, I strive to be accountable, take responsibility for my actions or lack of actions, apologize and make amends. Having this acronym is a helpful guide for the continuing work of earning your trust.

And I am not the only person who represents Albany UU. So do all of you. It is how *you* interact and relate to each other *that also* matters a great deal. In a sense, we collectively create an Albany UU marble jar. When we earn each other's trust we also put marbles in the Albany UU jar. And when visitors come to our congregation, they immediately can sense how many marbles are in our jar by the feeling of community we create together. Building trust with each other isn't just good for your personal relationships, it is good for our congregation as well.

I'm pleased to say our congregational jar has a lot of marbles in it. We do a good job of sustaining a vital and nurturing religious community. And of course it could be better. Each of us can probably think of times when the congregation has both been and not been there for us. Building trust is about progress not perfection. This isn't a competition or a rating process. Brown's valuable work on trust can help us be more conscious in our efforts to build community here for all our benefit.

And love will guide us on our way.

(We sang "Love Will Guide Us")

## Reflection #2 – Patti Jo Newell

Preparation for our stewardship campaign has caused me to reflect how everything about our congregation is an exercise in trust. From the mundane trust that the lights will turn on and the sidewalks will be shoveled to the more profound acts of trust when we give our children to care of the RE program, when we allow the Caring Network to help us when we're most vulnerable, when we share before the whole congregation the intimacies of our lives, joyful and otherwise. And, of course, we trust that we will each pledge, according to our ability, to support our beloved congregation, and that we will fulfill that commitment.

Trust is the currency of relationships, between individuals, groups, institutions and communities. Consider the myriad relationships spun from our congregation, within it and out from it.

Dear to our hearts is the relationship we've established with Sheridan Preparatory Academy. We committed to help build a playground. And we did just that. We committed to volunteer to help in the classrooms on a weekly basis, and our presence there grows still. A current proposal is to provide stipends for each child to attend a field trip. And I'm confident that should we adopt that proposal, and announce the gift to our friends at Sheridan Prep, that we would make good on that promise. This school, the teachers, the students, the parents, have come to rely on us...to trust us. And we have been worthy of that trust. We are in a relationship together.

Imagine for a moment if we broke that trust. We said we would provide that cash assistance, but then failed to do so. Beyond the immediate hardship to the school, teachers and parents trying to make that field trip a reality, the negative impact to the relationship would be huge, the repercussions severe. Would they be likely to take us at our word again? Allow the students' hopes to rise again based on any future promise we might make?

And like it or not, as a majority white congregation in a relationship with a majority of color student body, our faithfulness to our commitments will be experienced in the context of the considerable broken trust that came before us, just as OUR faithfulness to our commitments will impact others' future relationships with the Sheridan Prep community. For this, we must be responsible.

Up until a few years ago, we had the most lovely neighbor a few doors down. At some point Joan volunteered to watch our cats when we were away, and did so for more than a decade. She refused to take any money for this service. It was such a gift, to know that our cats would be so well cared for in our absence, by someone who truly loved them. Joan and her husband looked for a new house for quite some time, so when we saw the sign go up in their yard it finally became real that they would be moving. Before they left, Joan informed me that she had found someone to look after our cats, also someone who would do so for free. I was stunned. Grateful, but stunned. I expressed my appreciation but also my surprise that she had taken it upon herself to find her replacement. She was so matter-of-act in her explanation. She had undertaken the commitment and felt that she couldn't relinquish it until she secured a new commitment to us, to ensure the need would be met. How extraordinary. For this, she felt responsible.

As we consider our Open Question, What would it look like for Albany UU to be a good neighbor?, the ideas we've discussed would create still more relationships, more commitments. Our congregation is a living thing, ever changing, yet anchored with roots deep in our shared values, with the passion of individuals, with the promises we have made. We ARE the promises we've made, the commitments we've kept, the trust we've engendered.

We are growing our sense of community, and it is essential that we attend to that most basic of commitments, our pledge to ourselves, to each other, and to the broader community that Albany Unitarian Universalist will continue to thrive as an expression of liberal religion, as a congregation committed to making a difference in the lives of those in need, to taking a stand against injustice. For all this we are responsible.

(You may pick up your pledge materials, immediately following the service, at the back of Community Hall. We encourage you to do so, and to return your pledge form promptly. For this, we are also responsible.)

### **Benediction - Kimberly Quinn Johnson**

We are the ones we have been waiting for.\*  
 We are not perfect, but we are perfectly fitted for this day.  
 We are not without fault,  
 but we can be honest to face our past as we chart a new future.  
 We are the ones we have been waiting for.  
 May we be bold and courageous to chart that new future  
 May we have faith in a future that is not known  
 We are the ones we have been waiting for.\*

\*the words of June Jordan in "Poem for South African Women," which she presented at the U.N. on August 9, 1978