

Reflection 1: “Notes on Finding Your Compass” (Laurel)

When I explain to non-UUs what Coming of Age is, the simplest explanation is “it’s like a UU bar mitzvah!” Granted, there’s not necessarily any singing or Hebrew in Coming of Age, but they are similar in a lot of ways. It’s a celebration to mark the transition from childhood to adolescence, a process through which an individual becomes responsible for their own place in their religious community, and a moment when all of that is recognized in a service with the congregation.

Historically, youth in a Coming of Age program are expected to write a credo - a statement about their beliefs - and are then required to share that with the community. Now, I grew up UU and went through Coming of Age and I remember always feeling slightly irked that the congregation made us young people do this thing that they never did. I’ve also heard enough credos to know that they generally elicit some resistance. And while I totally appreciate the boundary setting implicit in that, I also think we’ve done a disservice to our young people if all they can articulate is what they don’t believe.

When we started Coming of Age back up a few years ago, I created a new curriculum with David King in the hopes of making the experience more helpful to the youth in the program. Instead of trying to write down some explanation of beliefs, we go through a process of learning how to attune to our own core values and how we can live authentically.

We talk about things like moral injury - a kind of trauma often seen in soldiers that comes from violating one’s own moral code - and moral exclusion, that process by which we dehumanize others so our moral code doesn’t have to apply to them. And from there we work inwards, talking about how our families and peers and religious communities help us live more in line with our core values, but still can’t tell us exactly what is of deepest import to us as individual people.

So we talked about how feelings are messengers that help alert us to the moments when we’re really following our moral compass and zing us with the icky feeling when we’re veering off course.

There was one particularly entertaining session when we explored what the word God even means, because so often when someone says they don't believe in God, they mean one particular version. So we went through different definitions for God, while Lily tried to figure out how to draw them, to broaden our understanding of the complexity of religious words.

And our youth did lots of thinking and digesting and, yes, even writing during this process, but it was always for themselves, never for the purpose of having to write a creedal statement. Because life is more complicated than that and faith is a practice, moral living is a practice, showing up authentically is a practice.

Even this service was a process of Claire and Lily expressing what felt good to them and how they wanted Catherine and I to support them in this moment.

So we've been practicing, exploring, wondering, learning, negotiating which Taylor Swift songs made sense in this service, and doing a whole lot of laughing. Because we're all on our own spiritual journeys, but it's a whole lot better when we can practice attuning our compasses in loving community.

And before I pass it over to Catherine to share some notes on her experience. I first want to thank her for being my co-facilitator for this Coming of Age class. It really does take a village and I so appreciate that Catherine gamely said yes when I asked her to be my partner on this journey. I was in charge of content for this class and it was immensely helpful to have Catherine's thoughtful engagement, going through this experience with our young people and inviting us all into greater curiosity and joy. So thank you, Catherine.

(give Catherine flowers)

Reflection 2: "Notes on Finding Your Compass" (Catherine)

Thanks Laurel—for the chance to share today, to participate as a co-facilitator in this Coming of Age class, and most importantly to have had the opportunity to get to know Lily and Claire, supporting them during this time of exploration and

discovery. As someone who grew up in the Catholic faith having participated in their sacraments (reconciliation, communion, confirmation) as a youth, I was familiar with CoA as more of an observer (first as a congregant here, and then supporting Noah in 2021), so I appreciated the more active participation that these Coming of Age classes offered me and wanted to highlight some of my experiences.

One, these sessions allowed me time to consider my own core values—how I might live them more fully—Claire and Lily were very accepting of my “aha” moments and wonderings. Two, these sessions allowed me the chance to play a supportive role—I think that I have shared my views on community and how vital a kind and loving base matters, so it was wonderful to be able to “be there”, “show up”—support Lily and Claire during these last several weeks—really trying to embrace the 3rd UU principle of acceptance of one another and encouragement of spiritual growth in our congregations. And finally, these sessions offered me some serious insight into the music and lyrics of Taylor Swift. I might even be a newly converted Swiftie.

You heard Laurel mention a few details about one of the discussions (the “particularly entertaining one about God”) and there is one takeaway that feels like an appropriate one to share today. We had discussed and illustrated various definitions of God and as you can imagine they run the gamut. We also had the chance to share our own—and how we could use this broader perspective of religious words and concepts to connect to our moral compasses. And it’s that detail that I wanted to share with you...I chose a hand...(one, I am not the artist that Lily, but two, this body part seemed the most appropriate visual representation of a guide—a physical representation of my moral compass)...you see, a hand can nudge, support, high five, hold, fist bump, work in conjunction with an arm to full on embrace, or even indicate a hard stop, and it can express these actions across many cultures and languages. And so it is with my hands that I fist bump, embrace, and high five Claire and Lily’s accomplishments today and promise to hold, support and nudge you along the continuum of finding community, uniting in the light.