

Share Your Story

An important strategy for deepening the experience of community, whether in faith groups, work groups, social action projects or even your neighbourhood is sharing your story. In his latest book, "Deepening Community," (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2014) Paul Born identifies four acts which individually and especially together deepen community. Along with sharing our stories, on which I will focus in today's article, he includes: enjoying one another by spending time together; caring for one another; and working together to build a better world.

Depending on the nature of the group, sharing our stories can range from briefly explaining how we find ourselves in this particular group at this time to elaborating a personal history and review of our wishes, needs and beliefs. Of course, the more elaborate the history etc., the more we are placing trust in the others in the group and by implication, the more we are offering them a safe place for their story. Deepening community through telling our stories can lead to feeling safer, provide for more solutions to problems, drive better social justice actions and create a base for sharing resources.

Within Unitarianism, one aspect of sharing our stories takes place during our service component called "Joys and Concerns." During this time, people at the service are invited to take a turn to share with the group a happy event or a sad situation that they are currently experiencing. We note that concerns are lessened (i.e., divided) by sharing with the congregation and joys are multiplied through the sharing. The ritual includes lighting a candle or dropping a pebble in water for each joy or concern. For many members, this is the most important element of our services. At the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara (UCN) more extended sharing can take place at coffee hour after services, at monthly lunches, at non-threatening bridge nights, at monthly film nights and at occasional retreats. And since many service addresses are given by our members, these times provide opportunities for members to elaborate on their personal search for truth and meaning. As well, in the fall, we will be (re)introducing circle suppers; opportunities for members to share potluck suppers.

For many members, including myself, having a community and all that that entails is a primary reason for attending and being a member. In addition, the social justice/social action component of our congregation provides for reaching out to the broader community through cooperation with other faith and social action groups and this provides an important vehicle for members to express their values regarding poverty, equality issues, gender diversity and environmental concerns. Involvement in these projects becomes a part of telling our stories and contributes to deepening our sense of community; a classic example of the more you give, the more you receive.

While focusing on telling our story as an act of deepening community, it becomes clear

that this act moves us toward the other acts of deepening community noted above. Telling our story leads quite naturally to spending time together, caring for one another and working to build a better world.