

Show up, dressed to participate

By Pat Smith, August 29, 2010

Inspired by an article by Reverend Christine Robinson in the October 13, 2009, issue of the Albuquerque Messenger, the newsletter of the First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque. All quotes are indented and in Italics. If not from this article, they are referenced at the end.

Reverend Christine Robinson wrote an article for the Albuquerque Messenger. That's the name of the newsletter of the First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque, where Reverend Robinson is the senior minister. It begins this way. Quote:

*I once heard that all a teen has to do to pass their gym classes is to **show up, dressed to participate**. This surprised me—and it may not even be true—but I think there is considerable wisdom to it. After all, if you do **show up, dressed to participate**, you have put yourself in position to get lured in from the sideline, and you'll get a little exercise, develop some skills, and perhaps notice an activity to come back to later in your life. Gym class is not a team sport, where the point is to win. For lots of teen[agers], it's just something to endure.*

End of quote.

Part 1: Show up. Be there. Just **showing up** can make a difference. It can make a difference to others. It can make a difference to you.

Part 2: Dress to participate. Be ready. **Willing to participate**. Willing to help. It can make a difference to others. It can make a difference to you.

Sometimes, when we **show up, dressed to participate**, what happens is different than what we thought.

*...what we are called to do in these situations is not to be expertly wise or courageous or skilled, but just to **show up, willing to participate**, and see how the forces within us will help us manage and grow.*

By **showing up, dressed to participate**, we can make a difference, not only to others, but to ourselves.

Show up. Is that enough?

Sometimes, just **showing up** can wear us out. Here's a quote I found.

“When I get up in the morning I go, go, go; and when I come home at night, I've been, been, been.” (Marshall, p 41)

----- *mundane* -----

What do we **show up** for? Well, there is always the mundane. **Show up** at work, to your job. Well, maybe. Many people are able to telecommute. They can work from home. Write reports. Make phone calls. Keep up with emails. They don't have to **dress to participate**. They can declare a pajama day.

But many non-professionals as well as some professionals have to **show up** to work. Here are a couple of examples: people who work in restaurants and people who work in a hospital operating room. Not only do they have to **show up**, they must **dress to participate**. Many restaurants require their servers to wear a certain type of shirt. And those in an operating room are "gowned up". In both cases, these people are **dressed to participate**.

What do you **show up** for? What do you **participate in**? Ponder for a moment.

Flip chart.....

For some of these things, you don't think you have to save the world. You realize you don't have to do it all. You **show up. Dressed to participate.**

But you hope to make a difference, right? You hope that just by **showing up, dressed to participate**, you might change things. And, by **showing up, dressed to participate**, you might also be changed.

----- *voluntary* -----

Haven't you ever **shown up** for a friend because they asked you to? Hasn't a friend **shown up** for you because you asked? And just **showing up** is appreciated. You are helping just by **showing up**.

We can do that. We can **show up** for a friend. Sometimes we don't even have to be asked. We just **show up**.

----- *Murray Coulter and Richard Hopson* -----

Here's an example in this church. *Murray Coulter and Richard Hopson* set up Building and Grounds work days every few weeks. Many of you **show up** for these. You do it because you are asked. Not because you are experts at this. But because you know you can help. And not all of you show up all of the time. Sometimes you have conflicts. But whoever shows up is **dressed to participate**. And I'll tell you, most people don't wear the same clothes to work on our landscaping as they are wearing now.

Here's another example. We have a new committee. Yeah, I know what you're thinking. Another committee.

- Yes.
- *OK. What is it?*

- It's the Welcoming Committee.
- *OK. Who's on it?*
- You are! All of you are on it! All of you are members of the Welcoming Committee. And you didn't even have to ask! Congratulations. And thank you! What are your responsibilities? Welcome newcomers, first-timers, visitors. Welcome anyone you do not recognize.
- *OK. I'll do it.*
- No.
- *OK! Yes! I'll do it!!*
- Thank you! And congratulations!

----- *WTOS* -----

Our church is a member of WTOS, the West Texas Organizing Strategy. When there is a local issue that the group takes a position on, they identify several people to speak publicly, often before the City Council. And they want a lot of people who are involved in WTOS to **show up** to the meeting. Just **show up**. To show we are strong in numbers.

I call this "**show up**" strategy "butts in a seat." Just **show up**. Be there. The more butts in a seat, the stronger the evidence of support.

--- *Put on WTOS hat* ---

And, there's more. Those who **show up** are asked to wear an identifying pin or hat. That is, **dress the part**.

As we see from the flip chart, most of you are members of organizations outside of this church community. You may pay a membership fee. By charging a fee, the organization can boast of having so many members. And belonging is maybe all you do for some of these organizations. That's all. You have priorities; you don't have time to do more. But for other organizations, not only might you give money, but you **show up** to meetings, **dressed to participate**. And for still other organizations, not only do you **show up, dressed to participate**, you take an active role, maybe even a leadership role.

But, have you ever gotten involved in something, and it turned out to be more than what you thought initially. And you regretted it later? I have. I thought I had more time. Or my priorities changed. Or I lost interest. My heart was not in it.

So we back off, and change our **participate** role to a **show up** role.

And other times, we get hooked. We change our **just show up** role to a **participate** role.

----- *Dressed to Participate* -----

Let's look a little more at the "dressed to participate" part.

A common phrase in our UU religion is "deeds not creeds". It's our actions that matter, not only what we say on Sunday morning. It's our participation that matters. A present day UU said it this way.

"We have not accepted someone else's faith, remote in time or place or circumstance, memorized and repeated ... at church, but we have found the faith in our own experience. We do not grope for external words, [nor] look for external power, [nor] rely on external miracles, but [we] know that it is up to ourselves to survive and to overcome as we hold fast to integrity..." (Marshall, p 38, emphasis added)

Deeds not creeds.

But this idea goes back a long way, though maybe stated differently. Here's a quote from the Bible. Micah: Chapter 6, verses 6-8. It might sound familiar.

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?"

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Micah "...calls upon us to turn from the superficiality of religion to the practice of a religion that is from the soul outward, from the mind outward, from the heart outward." (Marshall, p 36)

Deeds not creeds.

We believe in social justice. Social action. Action. **Participation.**

Here's another Bible verse.

First John, chapter 3, verse 18.

...let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

(After giving a sermon last December on Eastern vs Western thinking, meaning Asian thinking vs that of Europe and the Americas, I would say it's both our words and our actions that matter.)

Thomas Jefferson says (*A Chosen Faith*, by Buerhens and Church, p49)

...it is in our lives, and not our words that our religion must be read.

Deeds not creeds.

UU minister Rebecca Ann Parker recalls a conversation with someone she was sitting next to on a bus. (p 15 in *A House for Hope*)

He said that he had been raised Catholic and that his wife was the daughter of a Methodist minister. [We might call that a “mixed” marriage. We have several mixed marriages in our congregation.] Church was important to [this man].

“I can’t believe all the doctrines,” he said. “I never was comfortable with the bloody crucifix hanging over the altar—I couldn’t understand why we would be worshipping it. But I learned a way of life from the church that I have not rejected.” [Reverend Parker asked what is that way of life?]

“Oh, it’s simple,” he said. “Love your neighbor as yourself. Try to help, not harm. Do what you can to make a difference.”

[And then he said] *“We care for foster kids.”*

Deeds not creeds.

Unitarian Universalism has a long history of social justice. That’s why I love this religion. We have been and are in the forefront of civil rights, women’s rights, gay rights, worker’s rights, all of which are human rights. Fighting injustice. Standing up for those who are less fortunate and taken advantage of in our society.

UU Minister Forrest Church said (*A Chosen Faith*, by Buerhens and Church, p49)

Without the proof of deeds, good intentions and right opinions are nothing more than empty shells.

Deeds not creeds.

What about this church?

This past spring, on March 7, the Sunday service kicked off our Stewardship Campaign. *Tom Johnson* talked about what it meant to him to be a good UU team member. He named three things.

- *First, attend church regularly.* Not necessarily every Sunday. But routinely and regularly.
 - Tom did this. He was here most every Sunday. He was out of town occasionally. And when he came back, he almost always expressed a joy about his trip, during Joys and Concerns.
- *Second, be active in the life of the church.* Not just a “butt in a seat”. Be part of the team. Participate in committee activities. Help continue the good things we have. Don’t be

afraid to make suggestions for improvements or new things. Of course, realize that implementation of new ideas requires people. People to **show up, dressed to participate.**

- Tom did this. He was active in the life of the church. Very active. For example, he took to heart his role as chair of the Membership and Publicity Committee. He sought out visitors. He had deeper discussions with those who expressed interest in joining. He also served two years on the Board of Trustees. He was an active and valued member.
- *Third, make a financial commitment.* Try to make it a fair share contribution. Tom and his wife JoAnna contributed financially to the church during their time here. And they continue to be members and contribute even though they have moved to Austin.

This church exists because you, the congregants, do all three.

- You attend. You **show up**. You showed up today!
- And you not only attend, you help. You volunteer. You **participate**. Fully 1/3 of our members were part of the Stewardship Team last spring. One-third!
- And, you provide financial support. You helped increase our pledge income by several thousand dollars, allowing us to expand our programs.

Gee, you must really want this church to continue!

What you participate in, and how you participate, determines what you get out of it.

What do you get out of participating? What does this church get out of your participation?

What difference do you want to make in our church community? And in the wider community?

What difference do you want to make in the lives of those you touch?

Continue to be involved in the life of this church. Continue to be involved in the life of the wider community.

See how you can make a difference in this church. See how you can make a difference in the wider community.

And in so doing, see what a difference you can make in yourself.

“...the turtle gets where it is going by stretching out its neck. People, too, have to stick out their necks, stand up and be counted...” (p 43 ref 1, James B. Conant)

Show up. Dressed to participate.

Last summer I gave a sermon titled *Our Children, Our World*. The theme was, “If we get the child right, we get the world right.” It was about how important a UU education is to our children. And, as a result, many of you signed up to teach children’s RE for one Sunday during the year. Our RE chair, Charree Mahoney, used that list throughout the year.

But you don't have to wait to be asked.

You don't have to wait for your ship to come in. Swim out to meet it!

You don't have to wait for something to happen. Make it happen!

My 4 ½ year old granddaughter, who lives in Houston, visits me once or twice a year. When she sees me doing something around the house, emptying the trash, sorting laundry, cooking, she doesn't wait to be asked. She takes the initiative. She is constantly asking, "What can I do? Can I help?" Now, how wonderful is that?

----- *ending* -----

A Psalm of Life

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Tell me not in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou are, to dust thou returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each tomorrow
Find us farther than today.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act, - act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
 We can make our lives sublime,
 And, departing, leave behind us
 Footprints on the sand of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
 Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
 A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
 Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us then be up and doing,
 With a heart for any fate;
 Still achieving, still pursuing,
 Learn to labor and to wait.

What is your interest?
 Where is your energy?
 How do you want to spend your time?

Ever heard this? *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* It's from the bible, Matthew, Chapter 7, verse 7. Ask, and it shall be given you. Oh yeah, it will. Just ask! There's a place for you in this church community in the here and now.

Our hereafter is now.
 We have to **show up** now.
 We have to **participate** now.

So, let's **show up! Dressed to participate!**

References

1. Marshall, George N. (1980). *Challenge of a Liberal Faith*, Third Edition, Unitarian Universalist Association, Skinner House. 246 pages.