

From the ICUU President

The news of the recent shootings in a UU church in Knoxville, Tennessee, USA was at once troubling, saddening and in an odd way, encouraging.

It was deeply troubling in that one human soul so could become so sick and twisted that he felt he had to try and kill complete strangers solely because they support liberal religious and social positions. This gunman apparently felt that all the things wrong in his life could be blamed on people with progressive points of view. Unitarian Universalists were convenient symbolic targets.

I know what it is to be dispirited and angry, even filled with rage, but I feel blessed that I have never been so overcome with illness, rage or hate that violence has seemed like a good option. For U*Us in many parts of the world this attack on our faith so deeply shocking as to be almost beyond comprehension. Yet I am mindful that a for good many of our brothers and sisters in too many parts of the world this act of violence, while still terrible, is not so rare or shocking. Our hopeful, loving faith exists in the midst of violence, lawlessness and political unrest, in the midst of warfare, in the midst of deeply dangerous circumstances. Perhaps those U*Us have a better understanding today of what our Tennessee sisters and brothers have experienced this week. Still, for me, fortunate to live in a fairly peaceful place, the news was terribly shocking.

One member of our local Edmonton church suggested that as with 9-11, there are a lot of people from our communities feeling a little less safe in their churches today. That is troubling.

And of course, these events leave deep feelings of sadness for the victims, their families and friends. Only people who have been through that kind of experience can begin to grasp what the families must be enduring. I feel blessed that I have never had to face such events. All I can write is that I feel tremendous sympathy for the members and friends of the Tennessee Valley UU Congregation as they grieve their losses and try to find ways to feel safe again in their church.

But in the end, there have been some encouraging things, too. The first victim died while saving others from the gunman. Several people present rushed the man and subdued him risking their own lives. Throughout Knoxville, churches of other faiths have been providing real support and public witness for their Unitarian Universalist neighbours. The UUA has sent a trauma team of experts to provide counselling and assistance. And as I write, six days after the shooting, the members of the church are working hard to make their next Sunday service a reclamation of their home and a rededication to their values.

Even more hopefully the congregation's minister, Rev. Christopher Buice and UUA President Rev. William Sinkford have issued strong and faithful statements. Both have declared that our liberal approach will not be altered or changed by this tragedy. They speak of love and compassion, not hate and revenge. In the midst of this tragedy, the people are finding new strength and resolve. They are finding positive meanings in this terrible event.

We who choose a liberal and principled approach to faith can expect to be tested in that faith from time to time, though seldom is the test as shocking as last Sunday in Knoxville. It is at moments like these that we look to those Principles and to our understanding of the divine working within us to pull us through. May our Knoxville sisters and brothers find the strength they need in their time of grieving. May we all join them and find new reasons to renew our own commitment to our UU faith.

Rev. Brian J. Kiely
President
International Council of Unitarians and Universalists

<http://www.uua.org/spirituallife/117162.shtml>

The UUA has sent in a trained trauma team who have been meeting with church members. I have also noted that there has been an overwhelming and loving response from churches of all faiths in the Knoxville area.