

**Taking Inventory  
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**Cleaning my closets is no picnic. Its one of the hardest things I have to do. I usually start at one end of the closet, from hanger to hanger, left to right, to the end. The clothing that I really like, that fits and the clothes I wear a lot goes in one pile. It's a very small pile I'm sorry to say. The stuff I wear occasionally, like the star studded cocktail party dress, goes in another. I'm not, sure if one dress really constitutes a pile! Then there are those curious pieces of clothing that I don't remember, like the expensive size 12 dungarees.**

**At least half of the closet is filled with cute little dress pants, skirts and blouses that must belong to someone else... either that or someone the size of Twiggy broke into my closet to stash their stuff. I don't know who that could be!**

**In the end there are three piles, actually six. It is amazing how the piles evolved in size. The smallest is of course my celebrity appearance. wardrobe, then the clothes I actually wear, to the little ones I don't remember called the "in your wildest dreams, sweetie" collection, to the clothes I've been given that I don't really like or that don't fit that I haven't the heart to exchange.**

**Then the one size fits all ensemble to cover my expanding and contracting anatomy, as happens to most of us; and then the largest pile, which reappears in its entirety year after year. I call it the nostalgia collection. No matter what, that pile never gets given away or thrown out. Those clothes are rarely ever worn, but they consume most of my time when I clean the closet, just remembering each piece, where it was worn and what happened, how I felt and who was there at the time. It is a strange lot of stuff, like this: A cut off necktie from my brothers wedding party at The Bear Creek Restaurant, in East Sparta, Ohio, in 1986.**

**My sister in law told us that ties were mandatory at Bear Creek, so I bought one and wore it over my dress as a joke, to find that anyone wearing a tie had it ceremoniously cut off at the door by the maitre de.**

**Inside, the barn board walls of the restaurant were covered with the ends of cut off neckties! Back in the closet my mangled tie went with all the other odd bits of clothing that represented many years of memories, good times, and places, good 'friends and family.**

**So much of the chronology and history of our lives seems to hang in our closets. It is probably the only place in our homes which contains any real evidence of how we have changed from one decade to the next. Not only in size and shape but in how our thinking, our commitments and, devotions, opinions and circumstances have evolved through time, just like our wardrobes!**

**As Unitarian Universalists, our individual ideas about religion and spirituality also change through the years. The only difference between our internal faith and our external wardrobes is that we seldom clean out our spiritual closets on a regular basis, with the same deliberate attention that we pay to the more tangible clutter that we keep on hangers.**

**Because we are a faith made up of the beliefs of all individuals who comprise this congregation, I have also realized that I would no more tell you what to think and how to think it, than I would attempt to sneak into your, house at night and hang my clothes, my memories and my feelings in your closets, expecting you to wear them. I just cannot put you in the difficult position of having to choose to throw them all out because they were not your choice, the style was wrong, or that they simply just didn't fit.**

**That brings me to the question of how can I as your minister clothe each of you adequately if I refuse to tell you what kind of spiritual garb I prefer and in turn should expect you to wear.**

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**We have no such uniform to identify us as a faith and this morning I would like to tell you why that is and why I will never write a creed for this church that is anything more specific than the seven principles listed on the inside cover of your hymnal.**

**Spiritual leadership is always an issue in all of our churches, and that question surfaces every few' years as to how much latitude should the minister have in defining what we believe, in taking all of your comments, past traditions, present beliefs and secret feelings about God and Life and death and piling it all up into one statement of faith that we can all abide by.**

**I can't do that for you nor do I hope you will ever waste your time trying to find the perfect statement either, for we are too beautifully diverse and rightly so to call ourselves by one narrow theological name that just doesn't fill out the one size fits all pile for everyone!**

**First we are a faith that expects all of us to grow and to change, in different ways at different times in our lives according to our experience and knowledge. Some of us are a size 3 others a 14 or a 34 or a 48 long. Like our clothing few of us stay the exact same size all our lives, neither do we**

stay the same spiritually as the years pass. At times, as we change we will shop around for a creed that confirms where we are at in our thinking, particularly when we are between sizes and don't know where we are headed, because the old one just didn't quite fit anymore.

What we do have are the seven principles. They were created at the General Assembly in 1964 as a pattern for our faith whereby we could fashion our own spiritual clothing person to person, yet they were intended to define us all as having the tools to be spiritually well clothed no matter what our budget, theology or preference.

We can select the accessories for ourselves, and we can appreciate the nostalgia of those past religious experiences which we have chosen to keep but also allowed for us to also feel very comfortable with the wide range of choices. Some of you are mystical in your approach to living, some of you believe in an afterlife and have a very concrete picture as to what happens to you when you die. Others believe that death is only the dust of our finality and nothing more. Some love rituals, others like spontaneity and informality.

We sing folk songs and ancient hymns.. Some are very Christian anthems written by monks or early composers. We still sing them, not because we all believe in the words beneath the music, but because it conjures an immediate recollection of the emotional nostalgia we might have retained from childhood that jogs us to remember and to weep for what once was and still may be, a source of comfort. Or maybe it was the candlelight or the mood of solitude and wonder in those magical moments throughout our religious histories, when life stood still.

It is true that our faith is confusing. It is an open ended adventure in, personal spirituality, one in which we are charged to embrace from the time we join this church community. Like the clothing hanging in our closets some ideas of faith stay with us forever.

Some we keep and some we throw out. Some we save for another time. Others we accept as gifts... those memorable garments of spirituality which we hold on to for nostalgic reasons. They meant something to us once and that experience may never happen again in quite the same way. It seldom does. But we like to keep the evidence close by.

I will never tell you what to wear each day, on your bodies or on your souls, I will only make suggestions and toss out ideas. I might even make you laugh or cry or make you mad, but they are only my ideas which you are free to take or to discard.

**I am the last person to try and convince you that being a Unitarian Universalist is easy. And in those times when the biggest pile on your spiritual floor demands attention I will simply ask you to remember that this is your internal closet and you can do anything you wish with it's contents and it is O.K.**

**I can help you sort out some of the extraneous stuff that you don't know what to do with and I can make suggestions, but the decision is always yours. Our faith never 'came off the rack., Every piece was custom made! My job here is like that of a tailor to encourage each of you to chose a pattern that fits you. That is the curse and the blessing of who we are. A curse because there are so many styles to chose from and a blessing because we can shop endlessly for what we want. We have the luxury of wearing or exchanging what we have for a theology we like.**

**As new members of this faith we have cut you loose from any dogma or creed which professes only one answer for any of your most serious questions about creation, life or death. That prospect is awesome and difficult, because those answers rest with you not with me.**

**I hope that in the years to come that you realize how sacred those choices are and how important it is that our only creed, our seven principles, remain among you as a primary guideline for defining your faith.**

**I welcome you who are new to us who have signed the book. I would never wish the mess in my closet upon you!**

**So welcome to our extensive wardrobe. The closet is never completely full and there is much we need to sort out. Your energy , thoughts and ideas will bring new life and meaning to who we are and have yet to become, no matter how well we wear our faith.**

**So be it.**

**Amen**

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