

OPINION

Better as a bouquet, the gift of pluralism

BY THE REV. DR.
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Spirit of Life

The flowers are showing out, at long last. I appreciate the ways they demonstrate the sage advice given to writers in every age, to “show, not tell” the heart of their wisdom. One lesson the flowers seem keen to share at the moment is about the inherent value of pluralism (i.e. a condition in which two or more states, groups, principles, sources of authority, etc. coexist).

Nature clearly prefers to showcase, rather than downplay, diversity. I mean, have you observed the yellow forsythia alongside the pink rhododendron? Each is gorgeous on its own, of course, but their beauty is enhanced by their proximity to one another. This is one reason bouquets of various flowers are brought to celebrate life’s significant moments — beginnings, merg-

ings, endings.

This summer, the Unitarian Universalist Association (our national denominational body) will be voting on a new articulation of our core values, and pluralism is among them. Here’s what we officially say about it: “We celebrate that we are all sacred beings diverse in culture, experience and theology. We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with love, curiosity, and respect.”

Admittedly, this statement is aspirational, descriptive more of our future hopes than our current realities. Nevertheless, it’s still a pretty radical thing for a religious tradition to claim pluralism as a value. There have been way too many bloody battles waged over theological disputes that

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The spring testimony of Mother Nature — the original champion of diversity — may not be as audibly loud as some of the voices fomenting division right now, but we desper-

ately need to listen to it (with our eyes and hearts if nothing else). For example, there is a coordinated attack on diversity, equity and inclusion programs in schools and capitols in over one-third of U.S. states. In many of these, resources meant to support people with marginalized identities are being rerouted to maintain the very systems that disadvantage them.

Appallingly, “diversity,” which is intrinsic to humanity and the natural world, has become a dirty word for those who wish to establish and enforce only one right way of being. That way, strangely enough, usually seems to align with their preferences and malign those with whom they disagree or differ. That’s spiritually toxic, not to mention boring.

Perhaps we need spring’s consistent reminder of the value of diversity and how

much better we are together. The flowers — from the tiniest of clovers to the proud amaryllis to giant clumps of hydrangea — are showing us some wisdom: Put your energy into being you instead of trying to restrict the ones around you from being them. Their color, smell, size or shape might just complement your own — and it’s not really your business anyway.

Your business is to be the best, most authentic you that you can be, so that you contribute what you are meant to in the bouquet of us. It is possible to both celebrate and transcend our uniqueness as we come together, becoming stronger and more resourceful together. Just like the flowers, we are better as a bouquet.

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