

FINDING COMMON GROUND: THE UNITY BEYOND DIFFERENCES

Final Week of a 4-Week Series, "Unity Basics"

Rev. Stacy Macris Ros

Sunday, July 29, 2026

The last three weeks we've been looking at Unity's history, our basics, the beginning, our foundational teachings. We looked at our five Unity principles. Last week we looked at our positive, affirmative prayer and how Unity prays a little bit differently than perhaps some other Christian churches or New Thought churches.

So, tonight we're going to look at how we can bring all these teachings together. How we can be Unity out in the world. How we -- when we're confronted with differences and disagreements with another person or another group of people -- we can say, *"Hey, how can I find common ground? How can I find common ground even when there's friction between one another?"*

It's an important question right now, whether it's a one-on-one or a group of people. Because for a lot of people right now, the political divide has really caused a lot of anger and fallout amongst friends and family. And even politics aside, of course, there's times with friends and family that we might get frustrated, feel disconnected from them, feel angry, frustrated with them.

Anyone been frustrated by a family member before? Oh, just my family. Okay. [Congregants laugh] Well, it's just me talking to me tonight then.

So how can we be peacemakers? That's our question tonight. How can we be peacemakers?

Again, whether it's political or something else that's causing us to feel that disconnection from another individual or group of people, it's really about: How can we bridge the divide and find common ground with one another? Because that just leads to more peace: more peace within us, more peace around us. We become the peacemakers, and we then end up being the peace -- creating the peace -- that we are seeking.

There's a great Eastern philosophical saying. And I thought I have to put it on the screen here for you, because then you'll get it really ingrained in your heads here. Here you go on the screen. It says, *"You may not be able to keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair."*

I heard some, *"Ohs."* Yeah, you may not be able to keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair. There's always going to be people we disagree with. There's always going to be someone we have a hard time with or we don't understand fully. But it's up to us whether or not we let them take up residence in our head or our hair.

So, the first step to creating unity -- to building these bridges of peace and oneness -- really it starts with **FINDING COMMON GROUND**. Building that unity and connection. And it starts with that intention to do that. Right? To be the bridge of understanding.

So, last week I shared that our sole work for the week was to -- instead of reaching for our phones first thing in the morning or start worrying as soon as we wake up or start going through our to-do list as we're laying in bed still -- instead we were going to pause, take a breath, and set a one-word intention for how we were going to show up for that day. And that really is what's going to help us if we want to move from separateness to oneness.

It begins with each and every one of us choosing to embody this spiritual truth: to set the intention to be the bridge -- that bridge of understanding.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the monk, said, *"When you understand, you love. And when you love, you naturally act in a way that can relieve the suffering of people."*

So, in a tense situation, before/during the situation, we can return to our center -- our inner spiritual foundation. That first conscious breath in the morning that anchors us to something deeper. It allows us to recognize the peace that's inherent within us and, from that place of peace, that's where that understanding starts to grow. It's like the soil. You set the intention in the soil, and then peace and understanding can grow from there.

Staying peace-filled means having a regular prayer practice, meditation practice. That's the way we stay filled up with a tranquility, with a calmness. Prayer and meditation aren't just when we need them. Sometimes we think, *"Oh, I need a prayer now,"* or, *"I need to meditate now."* But really, it's regular maintenance. And it's that regular maintenance that allows you to flow calmly through your day or be able to work calmly through tough situations.

We can also be more intentional when we remember our divine nature. And that's where our affirmative prayer comes in. That's where our affirmative prayer supports us in remembering our divine nature. And with our intention for the day. Taking your intention for the day, you can create a simple prayer or affirmation.

So last week, again, we talked about:

God is _____

So I am _____

Therefore, I can _____

And I forgot to mention last week, too: that comes from Rev. Linda Martella-Whitsett and Rev. DeeAnn Weir Morency in their book, *"Discover Your Divinity."* I can't take credit for it. But it's a great, simple little way to do, again, an affirmation or a prayer.

So, if we're looking for, *"I want to be understanding,"* you say: *"God is understanding. So I, too, am understanding. Which means I can be open to listening, to hearing, to being supportive and understanding this other person or these individuals."*

But it's the prayer meditation that fills us up with peace before those difficult conversations or situations arise. So, we stay filled up with prayer/meditation. We get that peaceful center so that we don't get easily knocked over when life's storms hit. Because life's storms hit.

Another way we find connection is to listen -- to truly listen. To really hear the person. Not start preparing your rebuttal as they're talking, but to really listen and hear them. To listen to understand and not to win. To be mindful and to respond, not to react. To choose curiosity over certainty.

And so, I have a few questions that can help that I often will ask myself in these situations. Is there information I'm missing? Why is this important to them? Here's a good one: What if I'm wrong?

I mean, I'm never wrong. [Congregants laugh] My husband's not here tonight, so he can't, you know, disclaim that.

And also the question: How would Spirit see the situation? How would living, loving Presence see the situation?

So, choosing curiosity over certainty. Having an intention of connection and bridging the divide. It comes down to having a heart of peace. It goes back to being willing to set an intention for ourselves to be the peaceful presence. It starts with us. It starts with our morning. It starts with every minute that we're feeling friction or anger, the bubbling up of that which is not Oneness.

And I want to go back to that great question ... which I made a joke of, but, really, it's so, so helpful. It's originally ... I got this question from the book, *"The Anatomy of Peace."* And it is that question that I may disagree with people, but the question really is: And what if I'm wrong? What if I'm wrong? What if we just maybe sat and entertained the idea: And maybe I'm wrong? What if I'm wrong?

And I might be right, but I'm wrong if the energy that I bring is a heart that's at war; a heart that's closed; a heart that's unwilling to understand. I might be right, but then I'm wrong.

Because even when we're right – correct -- a heart at war is not one that's creating healing; that's creating connection; that's creating community.

So, a story on this. Our first summer here, and my sons were here. It was after work. We were going to go meet in Old Town Scottsdale. It was very hot. It was very hot, like 113 degrees hot. And I was coming with my, you know, whatever I was wearing at work that day. And so, I texted them saying, *"Hey, I've parked; where are you?"*

And they said, *"We're at First and Brown."*

And so, I said, *"Well, I'm at First and Brown."* And I was looking around and I was looking around. And I said, *"I don't see you."*

And they said, *"Well, we're at First and Brown."*

And I said, *"But I'm at First and Brown."*

So, then my younger son called and he said, *"Mom, we're at First and Brown."*

And I said, *"Graham, I'm at First and Brown."*

And he said, *"No, you're not."*

And I said, *"Yes, I am!"*

Do you see how it's getting more angry? We went back and forth.

And I said, *"Well, I'm going to take a picture of the sign that says I'm at First and Brown."*

He said, *"Well, I'm going to take a picture that says I'm at First and Brown."*

I said, *"Just tell me where you are."*

He said, *"We're at a parking lot, and there's a Mexican restaurant that says The Mission."*

I said, *"Great! I'm going to come with my photo, and I'll meet you there."*

Well, a little man in a golf cart -- because it was 113 degrees outside -- he showed up and he said, *"Hey, you need a ride?"*

And I said, *"Great! I'll take the ride."*

So golf cart picks me up, takes me to the restaurant. He mentioned it was a great restaurant. And then we get there and we're looking at our photos and we realize: Oh, guess what, everyone? If you know Old Town Scottsdale, we're both correct. So here was the sign. This is what taught us about Phoenix's grid system, by the way.

Here's the sign that I had sent here on the photo. You'll see it says First and Brown. Here's the photo he sent; here's the second photo. You'll notice it says First and Brown. One was First Avenue and one was First Street. Again, this is where we learned about the grid system. We've been telling all of our friends who've been visiting us now.

So, we were both correct! However, our hearts were in conflict. We were not, as our affirmation states tonight, choosing to be a bridge of understanding. We were not choosing peace to fill our hearts, guide our words, and bless our relationship. We were trying to be right.

Again, both of us had the correct information, but our way of being in that moment did not invite understanding, connection. It was not a heart at peace.

Now, of course, we corrected that. We had a good laugh. We came back together. But it's those simple times where, again, there's a choice there. Do we stay connected or we have to be right?

And oftentimes we say we want peace, but what we really want is the other person to change. But, of course, change starts with us. Change happens within us first. If we want peace to occur, it has to start right here with our own heart. We can't extend peace if we do not extend peace and understanding to ourselves first, and then from that place to another person.

And that's very similar to the story I shared last week. Last week I shared the story about a father and daughter who had become disconnected; who grew apart. And it was only when she began to pray for her own heart to soften that the relationship found its way back to each other. Praying for our own heart to soften.

So in the book, "Anatomy of Peace," the author explains that having a heart of peace means keeping your heart open and remembering your connection as fellow humans. **And this is the third step to building a bridge to oneness of unity: it's about seeing others as people.** Seeing them as their fears, their worries, their needs ... and that those are just as real as your own.

A heart at war sees others as objects -- people to move around, to control, to conquer - whereas a heart of peace means understand that the other person's concerns and worries are as much as your own.

It goes back, again, to opening our heart to the present moment and seeing with our spiritual eyes -- that spiritual foundation. What do my spiritual eyes see? Acknowledging that we're both expressions of this God life. Remembering that we're both a part of this Life Force, connected by this invisible universal thread -- all One.

There's a great story in this book, "The Anatomy of Peace." It's about a man named Lou. It's a real story. This man, Lou, he grew up in the 50s and 60s near the Catskills Mountains. And his family owned one car: a 1942 red truck that rattled and coughed and made a whole bunch of noise.

And so, eventually, when Lou had turned 16, the family bought a brand new car, which was no small feat. And they were all very excited. And Lou really, really, really wanted to take the car into town and show it off to his friends. And so, sensing his son's excitement, Lou's dad told him he could take the car into town and run some errands.

So, Lou got in the car. But, of course, in his excitement, he realized he'd left his wallet in the house. So, he runs back in the house and grabs his wallet. And then he races back out. And to his horror, the car had vanished. And he feels panicked. He was afraid in that moment: *"Oh, my goodness, did I put the brake on?"* as the car rolled down the sloping driveway and into the Hudson River across the way.

He runs down the drive and, sure enough, where the lane turns, he sees fresh tire tracks heading down the hill toward the river. He sprints over to the edge of the bluff. He looks 20 feet down and there, looking back at him, were the headlights of his father's brand-new car. He stands frozen. He sees the car slowly being sucked under the water and out of sight.

So, he walks, numb, back up to the house. He walks inside the house. He sees his father in his wingback chair, reading the paper. His back is towards Lou. And without turning around, his father just says, *"Forget something?"*

And Lou responds, *"No."* But now he realizes there's nowhere to hide. He's got to tell the truth. He says, *"Dad, I ..."* and his voice is breaking. *"Dad, I ..."* His voice is shaky. He's trying to get the courage up to tell him what happened. Finally, he just spits it all out and says, *"Dad ... I ... The car. I forgot to set the brakes. It's in the river, Dad. The car's in the river. I'm so, so sorry."* He starts sobbing and crying and breaking down. And now he's also starting to tremble. What is his dad's response going to be?

But his father doesn't turn around. He just stays in his chair and says, *"Well, I guess you'll have to take the old truck then."* No retribution. No lecture. No visible anger. Just, *"I guess you'll have to take the truck then."*

This is what it says in the Anatomy of Peace: *"We become agents of change only to the degree that we begin to live in a way that helps things go right rather than simply to correct things that are going wrong."*

So instead of correcting, lecturing, expecting the other person to change, what if, instead ... What if we helped? What if we listen? What if we learn? What if we consider the impact of what is below our words? We consider our actions; our thoughts. What if we show up focusing on love: on that living, loving Presence that animates both of us? Both individuals?

What if we focus purposely, intentionally on what we both have in common? We both love chocolate. We both appreciate air conditioning. We both love a sunset.

But it really does come back to having the willingness and the intention to be peace and unity in action, word, and deed. To take action. To soften our hearts. To extend loving kindness -- peaceful presence -- to another person or people.

It's up to us! We bless ourselves. And then we remember and bless the divine in the other.

So, let's put this idea of building a bridge between ourselves and another person through Unity's five principles. Because a lot of times people say, *"Okay, you've gone through the five Unity principles. Now how do we apply that?"*

So, **the first principle is that there is a loving, wise Divine Presence that animates all living beings.** So, when we are with another person that we disagree with, or are in conflict with, we pause. We take a breath. We remember the Divine is here: Love -- that which God is -- is here. Eternal Loving Presence is everywhere present.

And then **the second principle states that every person is inherently good, as they are expressions of the Divine.** So, perhaps we have a mantra or an affirmation that we repeat, such as, *"The light in me acknowledges the light in you. We are One."* We can say that quietly to ourselves.

And then **that third Unity principle reminds us that our thoughts have the power to create our reality and influences our experiences and our outcomes.** We can choose peaceful thoughts. We can choose to soften our hearts. We can choose to be the peace we wish to see in the world. And that's how you prevent the birds from setting up their nests in your hair. Your thoughts and actions influence your experience.

And so then, **Unity principle number four says how important it is to have regular prayer and meditation.** This allows us to apply that third principle, right? So, if we're prayed up, it helps us to choose a heart of peace. To show up and have these experiences that are more peaceful, more heart-filled. Again, that simple prayer, too. And our regular prayers can be so simple! Just says, *"God is peace. So I am peace. Therefore I can bring peace into this situation. I can bring peace into this relationship."*

And then lastly, the fifth Unity principle. It states: **It's not enough to fill ourselves with spiritual knowledge or information; we need to live these ideas.** We need to embody these ideas. We take action on what we learn. So, again, we can say, *"As an expression of God life, I choose to express peace with my words and my actions"* -- including on social media, including in a text message. All the time. I choose to express peace with my words and my actions.

Wherever I am, let there be peace. We sing that every Wednesday night and Sunday morning! *"Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."* Okay, wherever I am, let there be peace.

So, our spiritual practice isn't measured by how much truth we know -- how much spiritual truth or understanding we know or have. It's measured by how much spiritual truth we live. How much spiritual truth we live.

Every day we have the opportunity to embody the five principles by remembering: Love is here; God -- this divine spark -- is within me and within everyone; my thoughts create my experience; prayer keeps me centered; and our lives become our greatest teaching for ourselves and for everyone we come into contact with.

I love how well-known Unity minister Eric Butterworth -- I'm paraphrasing here, but the heart of his message was this. You can become bitter or better as a result of the experience.

You can become bitter or better as a result of the experience. The choice is yours -- in every situation, in every relationship.

So, the message tonight is that we choose to be the ones who build the bridges instead of the walls. The world doesn't need any more people winning arguments! It needs more people being the peacemakers, building the relationships, building the connections. Every interaction is an opportunity to choose peace over pride, curiosity over certainty, love over fear.

That, when we understand that we're equal divine beings, the present moment can be even more beautiful, more enriching, more rewarding, filling us with connection instead of separation. So, as we embody Unity's five principles, we become living demonstrations of the truth that we're all connected to God.

So, in a nutshell, to create more Unity in the world, we show up with the intention to help things go right. We bring an open heart to the present moment. And we be that which we want to see and experience.

This is your homework for the week, my friends. You've got more soul work. Find common ground. Be the bridge that awakens and leads us back to the Oneness that we are. That Oneness that connects us all. That's what we'll all be participating in this week. Yes? Yes!

Amen, everybody. Thank you so much! Blessings.