



Why "Liberal" Matters Members of many churches are troubled by the deaths of two during a religious service in Knoxville, Tennessee. This pain is particularly felt by local Unitarian Universalists because it happened at one of our sister congregations. We have carefully watched the news. We paid close attention to reports from leaders in our Association. Some have visited with friends or family members in attendance at these services. The horrific nature of this crime revolts us. "How could someone decide to shoot people during a church service?"

As liberal religionists we are dismayed that the shooter decided to attack "liberals." This action reminds us that one of the most misunderstood terms in our society is "liberal." In recent years, many politicians and commentators have smeared their fellow candidates simply by calling them a "liberal." The use of this word "liberal" has, by itself, raised the political fears of many.

However, Unitarian Universalists do claim to be "religious liberals." Our meaning is that we are not tied to dogmatic positions on matters of faith. Our attitude begins with an understanding that God is Love and that every person reflects this Love in their "worth and human dignity." We are open to discussion; we welcome people to express their sentiments; and, we are willing to accept a wide swath of ideas. People are free to bring wisdom from the Buddha or Dalai Lama, shamans and imams, native Americans or Hindus, women's spirituality or insights from womyn, and Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves. Whether your questions have arisen in your heart or mind or both, we affirm and promote your ability to share your questions and insights.

This act of being a "religious liberal" opens the door to a personal search for truth and meaning. It is our intention to offer people the opportunity to find a system of beliefs that serves them well in their lives and to hold a faith position that offers a consistency between "matters of faith" and "modes of action."

One of our favorite hymns is "Spirit of Life." It contains a line that says, "Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion." This open attitude toward "all" this compassion encourages us to grow into a deeper awareness of how it is working within us. We lift up a challenge to extend our search, to find methods that allow the stirrings of this Spirit to integrate more deeply into our souls. As we grow into a discovery of these insights we support those who adopt positions that favor a "liberal" or a "conservative" political agenda. Our only question is whether they represent the deeper sentiments of one's faith.

Given the open attitude of our faith we are doubly aggrieved as we ask, "How could someone decide to kill those who attend one of our church services? What would lead a person to 'take out' those who so openly explore the insights available within this great creation of life?"

Those who have maximized the punitive nature of "liberal" have not felt a need to separate a

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distinction between liberals in politics and liberals in religion, yet Unitarian Universalists find great value in the "liberal" nature of our faith. We continue to be proud of our association together as "religious liberals."

With faith in life,

Rev. Jim VanderWeele