

# "Showing Up When it is Difficult "

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Well? How about that extra hour of sleep? Anyone still feeling exhausted? Like you just can't manage the weight of the world and all that is before you—responsibilities to work and family... self-care, exercise, taking care of yourself. There is so much that demands our attention. We're pulled in different directions, and we're tired...

Thankfully self-care is at the front of our consciousness like never before, but in a changing world where society has shifted towards experiencing community virtually, working remotely, placing a reduced emphasis on steadfast commitment, and providing greater accommodation for people's personal needs, it has become more difficult to 'show up'. When we feel the weight of the world, or the gloom of the season, overwhelmed by war and terror, gun violence, climate catastrophe, the long road to reconciliation and justice for indigenous peoples, it's easy to just want to shut down.

All of this makes engaging in our community more difficult. We've handled so much tumult and change... we're holding together, but we continue to have disruptions in our gathering. At the time of choosing this topic I had assumed I would be sharing this sermon in person... but now we are on a 10-week hiatus from OCI, just as we were getting comfortable there... but even though we are online for the coming months, it is imperative that we keep showing up for one another—for this congregation..

Why show up? Because we know that engaging with our community feels good even when it is hard!

Take a look at the gallery of faces gathered here. If you're willing, take a minute to share your camera. This is why we come together.

Now I want you to tap into the love you have for this congregation. Scan those present and recall a good memory you have of that person. Maybe you want to share that memory with them sometime this week.

Now take a look at who isn't present. Is there someone in the congregation that you have been in relationship with whose presence you miss? Let's let them know and see if we can draw them back into the fold.

This congregation is going to change a lot over the coming years. Not everyone is going to make it through the journey to our new home and a new settled minister—but with a little help—just small acts—we can hold more people in the nucleus as we journey together.

Charles Vogl in his book *The Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging* explains the difference between a group, and a community. A group just shares a common interest—a common cause, share their belief in it, but aren't connected to one another, for example; greenpeace, the american medical assoc, etc. A \*community\* also has mutual care for the well-being of the members. We invest more in community when we feel others care for us!

We're all looking for belonging. CS Lewis, in his work *The Inner Ring*; recognized humanity's curse of always seeking narrower circles of exclusivity. Instead, Lewis said Find something you like and do it. Do it often. Then invite others to do it. The people who join are new people to be in relationship with, and relieves us of the longing for the inner ring. In relationship = friendship!

Loneliness is literally killing people. The Number of people who say they have no one to talk to, no confidante has tripled in just a few decades. People are not participating in formal religious organizations; the places that brought together people of shared values. Thankfully we still see the value there.

1/3 of adults in the USA are religiously unaffiliated and I would imagine the number in Canada to be even lower. .

It isn't just religious institutions. In the 70s two-thirds of Americans participated in a club of some kind. Even into the 90s that number had shifted to  $\frac{2}{3}$  not participating

You can see some of the generational shift by looking at the millennial generation, now entering the height of their careers. They are more interested on values-based activism than prior generations—but they don't want the organizational baggage that was abandoned a generation ago. They like high-density living, being close to the action in urban villages. They are more likely to join a cause—and they want to make a difference in their communities and be leaders. This is evidenced in the high rate of charitable giving among high school seniors, which one study put at 84%.

We're all desperately seeking connection, purpose, and meaning...

Have a look at the congregation's annual report. It gives such a great picture of the vitality of the congregation; with so many people involved in so many activities and causes. We have lots of official gatherings and opportunity for connection. You can join a journey group; join the choir; play bridge; attend the awakenings, poetry, or meditation group... you can get involved with our social justice teams; the green sanctuary team, the reconciliation working group, the refugee sponsorship and settlement committee, the Amnesty group. You can join the relaunched dinner series. What better way to connect with members of the congregation than over a great meal and conversation.

And as noted, you'll have three opportunities to connect with the congregation in-person in the coming months; an open house with Rev. Victoria and leaders at the end of November, and our Winter Solstice and Christmas Eve morning services.

And you can always hold Unofficial gathering; making connections on your own initiative. Respecting boundaries, consider who you have a close enough relationship with to schedule a small group to enjoy a walk together, or a chat over tea or coffee, a trip to the AGO... What if we measured our congregational health and success, not by the number of people in worship or

the dollars pledged, but by how many text messages or phone calls of care and concern our members sent to other members; how many attended social or social activism events together. How many took a walk together, had a beverage together, watched a documentary or read a book and talked about it together. If we strengthen those interpersonal bonds, then the rest of our congregational matters will take care of themselves.

So in this month where we are exploring the theme of generosity, consider the generosity of your presence. This congregation is not the building we are in—it is the people and the relationships therein. It's those who are present.

So let's keep making connection; keep showing up... keep reaching out to those you care for.

It may be hard, we know, and the road will be muddy and rough—but we'll get there. Heaven knows how we will get there—but we know we will. Woyaya woyaya woyaya