



Can a Family Become an Institution?

by Rev. Dr. Gordon McKeeman, Minister Emeritus at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron, Ohio

Before we decide whether we want to be an institution, it might be helpful if we thought about what an institution is, and what it is not.

- An institution is not necessarily large.
 - It can be quite small.
- An institution is not necessarily complex.
 - It can be very simple.
- An institution is not necessarily powerful.
 - It can be quite weak.
- An institution does not necessarily concentrate its power in the hands of a few.
 - It may offer its power to an inclusive group.

All institutions share a common purpose: they possess something that they believe is worth keeping, worth holding on to, worth conserving.

All institutions, including religious ones, are by intention and nature conservative: they seek to save something of worth. It helps an institution when its adherents know what it is that the group is trying to conserve, what it is at its center, its very heart.

All institutions, large or small, weak or powerful, face the same dilemma – the dilemma of change. Sometimes folks believe that the way to conserve something is to oppose all change. This approach does not and cannot work, because anything that does not change eventually dies.

The dilemma is in deciding whether the proposed change will contribute to or detract from the values that the institution seeks to conserve – that which is its core, center, heart.

A related and fundamental question is how large a proportion of its members or adherents will be involved in reaching these decisions. Those who participate in the decision-making may feel like a family, but they are, in fact, an institution.

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