

Session Five

We're Only Human!

The objectives of this session are:

- to consider what characteristics and traits make us human
- to think about how love and acceptance can improve our lives and the lives of others
- to explore the idea of how acting out of fear or anger damages our community and our world

Materials and supplies you will need:

- the DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Young Frankenstein*
- DVD player (or VCR) and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- a chalice and matches or lighter
- one copy of Resource #6 – Our Human Family
- a pair of scissors
- Statements of Humanity (Resource #7)
- “Agree” and “Disagree” signs for the Statements of Humanity exercise (optional)
- a flip chart & markers

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- If you will not be watching the whole video, use the DVD menu to select scene #19 (or if using a VHS tape, cue it by finding the right segment and pause the tape at that point.)
- watch the movie in its entirety prior to the session (even if you have seen it before)
- Cut apart the pictures in Resource #6 and arrange them on the worship table around the chalice.
- Review Resource #7 – post the “Agree” or “Disagree” signs on opposite walls of the room (if you choose to use them.)

Session Outline

Opening Activity: Chalice lighting, reading and check-in (10 min)

Premiere: Introduction and watching an excerpt of the movie, *Young Frankenstein*. (30 min)

Reflection: We're Only Human - Discussion questions (15 min)

Processing: Statements of Humanity (10 min)

Closing: (5 min)



Opening Activity

Light the chalice and share with the group (or have someone read) Affirmation #647, “An Eternal Verity” by W. Waldemar W. Argow from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Go around the circle of participants and ask them to check-in with their name and one thing that they are good at or really love doing. Remind the group that anyone always has the right to pass during times of sharing.

Premiere

Watching *Young Frankenstein*

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie, *Young Frankenstein*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something along these lines:

When the will of Victor Frankenstein, the famous scientist who attempted to reanimate dead bodies, is opened, his grandson, Frederick, who's become a skilled neurosurgeon and teacher, is given the castle

where all the experiments were made. Frederick has spent his life living down the legend of his grandfather, even changing the pronunciation of his name to “Fronk en steen” rather than the more infamous “Frank en stine.” Nevertheless, he takes a leave of absence to examine the family castle. Upon his arrival, Frederick finds and reads through his grandfather's book about his theories and experiments and discovers that they might in fact work. Assisted by Igor, the grandson of the Igor who assisted Victor Frankenstein, and Inga, an attractive lab assistant, he successfully reanimates a body which soon escapes and creates havoc.

Begin the video and watch scenes #19 (Rehabilitating the Monster) through the 27 (Final Transformation).

As the scene opens, the creature is lured into a trap by a violin playing stranger, who is really Dr. Frankenstein in disguise. As the creature nears an alley, Frederick shouts, “Now!” and a net is dropped on to of the unsuspecting monster. With the help of Inga & Igor, the creature is sedated and returned to the laboratory at castle Frankenstein. Frederick knows that he must try to “civilize” the creature, so he prepares to go into the creature’s cell and reason with it. He instructs, Ingo, Igor and Frau Blücher not to open the door once he is inside no matter what they may hear or how much he may plead to be let out. As he enters the cell he says of the monster that “Love is the only thing that can save him.” The creature is asleep but soon wakes up and snarls at Frederick, who immediately goes to the door of the cell and begs to be let out. Eventually, Frederick catches the creature off guard by shouting, “Hello handsome!” As he continues to reassure the creature that he is indeed handsome, strong and loved, the creature breaks down into tears.

Next we see that Dr. Frankenstein and the creature are making a public appearance. All goes well until a footlight explodes which send the creature recoiling in terror. The audience begins to boo and throw things at Frederick and the creature, sending the creature into a fit of

anger. The creature leaps out into the crowd but is immediately subdued by the several policemen who were present at the gathering. The creature is imprisoned but soon escapes after choking the guard who is cruelly taunting him with lit matches.

In the meanwhile, Frederick and Inga have sex in the lab and are interrupted by Frau Blücher who informs them that Frederick’s fiancé Elizabeth will arrive shortly. After Elizabeth and Frederick say good night, the creature breaks into Elizabeth’s room and abducts her. Just as the creature and Elizabeth are about to have sex for the 7th time, the creature is once again lured away by the mysterious violin melody which is being broadcast from the top of Castle Frankenstein by Frederick, Igor and Inga. The creature climbs up and over the castle wall and collapses in exhaustion. Frederick devises a way to “balance his (the creature’s) cerebrospinal fluid” in a very dangerous operation which involves using himself as the donor of the “normal” brain fluid. The procedure is interrupted 7 seconds before completion by Inspector Kemp and the mob of angry villagers. They seize the unconscious body of Dr. Frankenstein and lift him off the table, but are stopped in the tracks as the creature shouts out, “Put that man down!” The creature who is now able to express himself very eloquently makes a touching speech and is welcomed to the village by Inspector Kemp.

Stop the video just as Inspector Kemp and the villagers leave the laboratory.

Reflection

We’re Only Human

Begin the discussion by asking for general impressions, and things which occurred to the group as they were watching the video. Then, if no one brings it up, ask the group to consider:

As Frederick enters the creature’s cell, he says that “only love can save him.” Rev. Tom Owen-Towle once wrote that our ability to feel love and compassion is mankind’s greatest gift.

*Do you agree with this? Does our ability to love make us truly human? Frederick greets the creature politely and respectfully and calms him down. In Proverbs chapter 15, verse 1 we are told that “a soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” Do you think this is true? Can showing someone love and acceptance turn aside anger or aggression? When the creature is startled by the exploding footlight, his fear soon turns to anger and violence after the crowd belittles him. Is this a human response? How does acting out of fear create misunderstanding or difficulties? After the creature learns to speak coherently, he is no longer feared by Inspector Kemp and the villagers. Why? What does this say about the ability to verbalize our feelings? In discussing the movie, *Young Frankenstein*, Gene Wilder says that the *Frankenstein* story is classic or timeless because of the theme of “a creature who has love in it’s heart, who wants to be loved but is misunderstood.” Why do you think that this theme speaks to or reaches so many people? Has there ever been a time in your life that you were unable to verbalize your thoughts or feelings? What was that like?*

After everyone has had the chance to add to the discussion, introduce the self-affirmation exercise that you have chosen for the group.

Processing

Statements of Humanity

Many poets and philosophers have speculated about the nature of humanity. Invite the group to stand as you read the quotes on Resource #7. Point out the signs you’ve posted (or designate opposite sides of the room) as the “Agree” or “Disagree” areas. After each quote is read, participants should move to the appropriate side of the room, as their opinion warrants. Ask for a volunteer to explain why they agree or disagree with the statement. Repeat the procedure until all of the statements have been read. Allow as many people to speak as time allows.

Closing

As you extinguish the chalice, read or ask for a volunteer to read #661 “The Body is Humankind” by Norman Cousins from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience and have some fun as a group:

More Discussion:

The English poet, William Congreve wrote: “Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast, To soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak.” Do you think that this is true to some extent? What other things can be used to soothe or calm an agitated mind? (One answer might be meditation.)

The Roman poet Virgil wrote: “Love conquers all; let us surrender to Love.” What do you think about this statement?

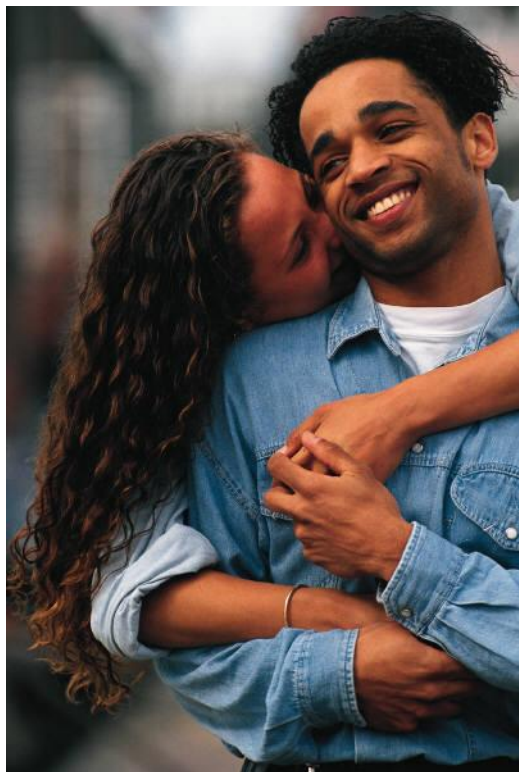
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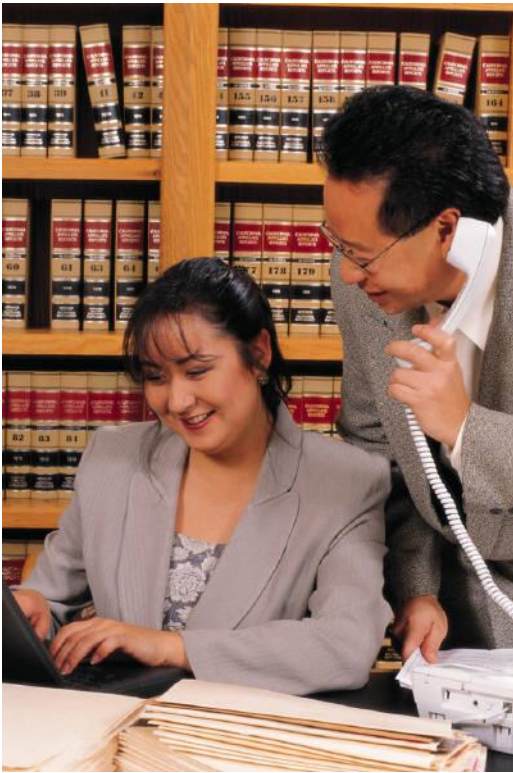
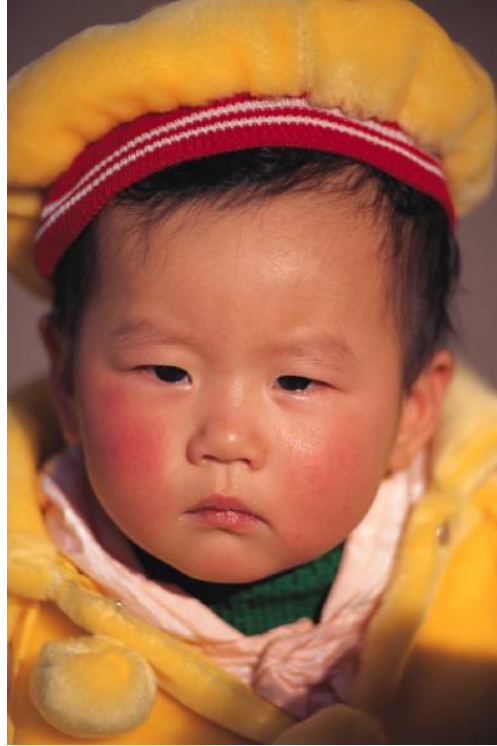
Brainstorm some other movies that talk about humanity or what makes us human. List these on newsprint.

Watch the documentary *Making Frankensense of Frankenstein – the making of Young Frankenstein*.

Hold a *Frankenstein* movie festival - Watch *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein* and compare it to *Young Frankenstein*. What are the similarities in these movies? (The same sets and laboratory equipment are used in the original *Frankenstein* movie and in *Young Frankenstein*.) How is the same theme used (a creature who wants to be loved but is misunderstood) with different effect in each of these movies?

Resource #6 – Our Human Family







Resource # 7 – Statements of Humanity

After all there is but one race -- humanity.

- George Moore, (1852-1933), Irish Writer

Nature is trying very hard to make us succeed, but nature does not depend on us. We are not the only experiment.

- R. Buckminster Fuller, 1895-1983, American Inventor, Designer, Poet, Philosopher

Man is the Only Animal that Blushes. Or needs to.

- Mark Twain, (1835 - 1910), American humorist, novelist, short story author, & wit

Humans are amphibians -- half spirit and half animal. As spirits they belong to the eternal world, but as animals they inhabit time.

- C. S. Lewis, (1898-1963), British Academic and Writer

Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art.

- Friedrich Nietzsche, (1844-1900), German Philosopher

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god -- the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!

- William Shakespeare, (1564-1616), British Poet, Playwright, Actor

Poor human nature, what horrible crimes have been committed in thy name!

- Emma Goldman, (1869-1940), American Anarchist

It is human nature to think wisely and act foolishly.

- Anatole France, (1844-1924), French Writer

We are called to be architects of the future, not its victims.

- Buckminster Fuller

Feeling and longing are the motive forces behind all human endeavor and human creations.

- Albert Einstein, (1879-1955), German/Swiss Physicist

Resource # 8 – Statements of Creation

I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation and is but a reflection of human frailty.

- Albert Einstein

Love of beauty is taste. The creation of beauty is art.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty in words.

- Edgar Allen Poe

Love is the only reality and it is not a mere sentiment. It is the ultimate truth that lies at the heart of creation.

- Rabindranath Tagore

Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine and at last you create what you will.

- George Bernard Shaw

The most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose.

- **James A. Baldwin**

Without culture, and the relative freedom it implies, society, even when perfect, is but a jungle. This is why any authentic creation is a gift to the future.

- Albert Camus

A creation of importance can only be produced when its author isolates himself, it is a child of solitude.

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The whole difference between construction and creation is exactly this: that a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed; but a thing created is loved before it exists.

- Charles Dickens

To destroy is always the first step in any creation.

- e. e. cummings

Religion is essentially the art and the theory of the remaking of man. Man is not a finished creation.

- Edmund Burke