

Michael Brill is a Financial Advisor in the greater Tampa Bay area. He holds degrees from Oklahoma Baptist University, RA, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, MDiv/SW, as well as professional designations from the American College: CLU and ChFC for his profession. He previously served in the Southern Baptist Convention in New York City, Germany, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Louisiana, Kentucky and Alabama.

A Church for People Who Don't Like Church

If you do not like Church, the Tampa Unity Church might be the right Church for you.

Moving forward around Tampa Say after having covered the very exciting "Anything is possible Congregation Beth Am where Rabbi Jason Rosenberg presides, and which is located in North Tampa on Fletcher Avenue, we are now moving forward to the South Tampa congregation of Tampa Unity Church.

Perhaps you have never heard of Unity Churches before? This would not be uncommon, as many people are not acquainted with them - and for good reason. If you grew up in more traditional Christian Churches, it is unlikely that you would have heard anything about this denomination, as it runs counter to many others in Christendom. In fact, what struck me during the interview with Rev Debbie Moss, the co-pastor of the Church, along with her husband Allen Moss and also r. Scott Barry who is on the Board of the congregation, is that ALL of these individuals, as young adults, left the organized Church because it did not speak to them. As Debbie said, when she came to Unity Church for the first time, it was the first time that she had ever left Church feeling better after arriving than before coming. Therefore, it seems to me, that many who have written off Church, Tampa Unity Church worth a second look.

How Debbie and Alan Moss became ministers in Unity is a long and complicated story, but needless to say, life events often make us reconsider what we believe - and why. In their journey found that God was speaking to them in life-affirming ways. Allen was misdiagnosed with cancer, which caused him to review life work and to pursue his calling in ministry. Debbie was not so excited, but supported him while he attended the Unity School of Christian Ministerial program, and when he finally accepted a call to Unity of Tampa in October 1997, he asked her to help with a presentation using, of all things, a Dr. Suess book. She was good and the people responded - and after she started her own training in ministry and was ordained just this past March, 2007 and is now serving as co-pastor with her husband.

Unity as denomination and Tampa Unity as a congregation a very different point of view than many other Churches. For one, Rev. Moss stresses that "we believe that God is called known by many different names." This alone sets the tone this is not a narrow doctrinaire place. When asked about "Open and Affirming" she said it is not an issue, never has been, both women and gay people have been accepted into the Unity Congregations from the beginning, both as lay people and ministry. Dr. Barry says that that is one of the things that drew him to the Church. He and his partner had been searching, trying different denominations along the way. Some were exclusively gay, which is something he did not want. In others and his partner were the token gays, which they did not want. In Unity, while it is open and affirming towards the GLBT community (as evidenced by the fact that Tampa Unity Church

was a co-sponsor of the HRC Faith & Fairness Town Hall Meeting in November, 2007), it is, in fact, a 'mixed church' with both gay and straight families. Many gay and lesbian couples with children attend the services.

Also, Unity beliefs are strikingly different than many others. For instance: "We believe in the teaching of Jesus, but not necessarily everything that was said about him," said Rev. Moss, who went on to say "we read the scriptures metaphysically, meaning we try to understand the spiritual meaning behind the stories, not just the literal stories" She continued by saying the Church is not afraid of science and it delights in new knowledge. In fact, her denomination has spoken out in favor of evolution in the Clergy Project Letter in the face of increasing opposition to teaching evolution in schools by more conservative people who are pushing creationism as science.

It always is a concern of mine that when people attend a place of worship for the first time which they are not familiar with, knowing what to expect is important. Tampa Unity Church has two services on Sunday, at 9 and 11 AM. Sunday School for the children is held during the second worship service. The first service is much more contemplative with an emphasis on meditation. The second service has more music, including a choir, which is not very common in Unity services.

From the glowing testimonies of Dr. Scott Barry, Rev Alan Moss and Rev. Debbie Moss, Tampa Unity Church is a place for people who want to develop their relationship with God in an atmosphere that is positive, reflective, and open to new experiences. It is a Church that thrives because it is actively seeking God in new ways, and is not scared of new knowledge. It is a Church where young and old, gay and straight are comfortable. It is a place where the mind as well as the heart is engaged.

Maybe you too left religion a long time ago and just have not found a place that speaks to you. Have you tried Tampa Unity Church? They would welcome you to come and see if this might be a spiritual fit for you, as it has been for many others.

Tampa Unity Church is located in South Tampa, at 3302 W. Horatio Street, Tampa FL 33609, just off Henderson Boulevard. FMI 813-870-0731 or www.UnityTampa.org.