



Summer 2011

REACH

Our reach should exceed our grasp.

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northfield
A WELCOMING CONGREGATION

Services are held at Fellowship Hall, corner of West 2nd & Linden Streets in Northfield. Babysitting and children's religious education are provided.

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Summer

As is our tradition, UUFN will "adjourn" until we start up again in late August. During the summer, the Board, the Sunday Services Committee, and the Facilities Committee — among others — will be at work preparing for reconvening at the end of the summer. Please check your e-mail for updates on how you can participate.

On the Committee Sign-Up Form that was circulated for several weeks the end of April and in May, many of you expressed interest in attending another UU congregation's service this summer, as well as participating in a Circle Supper Picnic. Look for an e-mail invite regarding these events as well.

Enjoy the summer!

SUMMER SATURDAY COFFEE TIME

JUNE 11 - JULY 9 - AUGUST 13



BITTERSWEET COFFEE SHOP

DOWNTOWN ON DIVISION STREET BY THE ARCHER HOUSE

EVERYONE WELCOME

JOIN BETH ROBB FOR COFFEE & INFORMAL CONVERSATION

A Unitarian Universalist Blessing for Summer

by Kristin Maier

Several years ago, when I had only been attending a Unitarian Universalist church for a couple of years, I found myself helping out with a winter solstice event for children. The Minister of Religious Education (this was a large UU church) had set up a labyrinth for the kids. My job was to welcome each child as they entered the room and direct them onto the labyrinth path made of sparkly garlands. The path wound through the room and past stopping points with interesting things to look at and touch. At the end of the labyrinth, the minister waited to give each child a small ornament made of glitter and paper and to give each child a blessing.



At one point, the minister had to leave the room and she asked me to take her place at the end of the route. "Uh. What do I do?" I asked awkwardly. I didn't know how to bless someone. I had no idea what a Unitarian Universalist blessing would even look like.

I don't exactly remember the words she gave me to say, but they were something simple. Perhaps, "May the dark of the long night bring you peace. May the light of the returning sun bring you joy." The words seemed fitting, but the act of blessing still felt so foreign to me. It seemed beyond ridiculous to tell her I couldn't do it because I didn't know how to bless someone, so I just nodded and waited for the next kid.

In retrospect, I am pretty sure I was in the running for the most-awkward-blessor-of-children-ever award. Still, even in my awkwardness I found the experience deeply moving. The words were not

radical, but the act of kneeling down so I could be level with each child, looking him or her in the eye, and for a moment giving each my whole attention and my whole intention, that act felt radically powerful.

Some Unitarian Universalists may feel suspicious about the act of blessing. Questions arise about who or what gives the authority to bless. Theological debates might ensue as to whether such blessing has metaphysical or metaphorical power. And, frankly, many of us might be uncomfortable with the intimacy of such a gift of attention and intention.

Yet, at its core, a blessing is an extension of just that, one's attention and intention for the wellbeing of another. It is an extension of kindness, of thought, and of one's energy toward another. It is an expression of love and concern. We need not interpret an act of blessing the same way to recognize it as a beautiful gift from one human to another.

I hope you will accept this gift of intention from me to you. For most of the summer, we will be apart. Many of you will travel this summer and others will have adventures in your own backyards. Wherever you go, wherever you stay, I wish each of you blessings of safety, fun, peace and joy. I sincerely wish each of you finds some time for the re-creation of your own spirit. I sincerely wish each of you finds some time amongst trees or prairie grass or open water that helps you to feel the spirit of life all around us.

And I offer this traditional Gaelic blessing (that I hope you interpret with the metaphorical ear that suits you best):

May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face;
the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of God's hand.

Have a wonderful summer!

Kristin

So, What's the New Date?

by Bob Ciernia

According to at least one prophet, the world should have ended last Saturday, May 21, at 6pm. Disappointed? Not to worry, I prophesy that another seer will appear with another date soon enough. And, if you find Biblical inference too cryptic to be a trustworthy guide, you may have better luck with the Mayan calendar or the writings of Nostradamus and other soothsayers.

What is it about this life that makes some people practically gleeful it will all come to an end? Seems to me that life is amazing, beautiful, and



wondrous. Why would you WANT to be somewhere else? A desire to be elsewhere likely says more about how you feel about your own life at the moment than it says about what God has in store for you in the hereafter, or what you need to do to qualify for it.

Who made the Universe, or why, or when it will end all make for entertaining conversation but are somewhat beside the point. It feels a little like debating how many angels fit on the head of a pin. Am I supposed to believe that God cares about my opinion on these matters? Isn't what we *do* more important than what we *profess*? Like most Unitarian Universalists, I side with Bertrand Russell on this one: "And if there were a God, I think it very unlikely that He would have such an uneasy vanity as to be offended by those who doubt His existence."

It bothers me greatly that those with the greatest certainty on religious matters are all too often the ones who do their fellows harm. Having absolute clarity of God's will permits — and may even require — that they become suicide bombers, Crusaders, Inquisitors, and jihadists. We humans have a long history of fervent believers who somehow think death and destruction fulfill the Creator's wishes. How very sad — and scary.

Here's a high probability prophecy for you: Those who know "the Truth" are a threat to all who disagree with them. And when two such persons or societies clash, the greater their weaponry, the greater our collective danger.

The solution? Looks like Jesus, Buddha, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. all embodied its essence: loving kindness and compassion. It can get you killed but you won't have *died* for your beliefs, nor killed for them — you will have *lived* for them. That's something a God worth the name would approve of.

Pick any moral or political debate you like, then ask what would Jesus or Buddha or Gandhi or MLK do? Fictional characters, flesh and bone activists, or incarnated particles of the Divine, the message looks to be the same: love.

So, what's the new date for the end of time? Let's ask a better question: When will we start acting with the love and compassion that would make a Creator proud? It seems clear that our individual, and collective, fate rests on our answer to that question.

Board Bits

Two book carts have been purchased with generous gifts in memory of Joy Wolf. The Library Cart Committee decided to buy two slightly lesser expensive carts. By next Fall, the Bruce Burnes collection of books on religion will be available for check-out. The Wolf family recently donated some of Joy's books too, so we will have a good little library for members to use.

A new insurance policy cover liability and worker's compensation for the minister and the director of religious education.

The board decided that the treasurer, as one of his or her duties, and to comply with IRS rules, will send a written acknowledgment of each single contribution that is \$250 or more.

Ideas for raising money in addition to pledges were discussed. Among them were a yard sale, silent auction, wine and cheese in the summer on a Friday or Saturday evening or a concert by Peter Mayer or Sara Thomsen. Other ideas are welcome!

If you have questions about UUFN, please contact one of the Policy Board members. Until June 30 are Bob Ciernia, Pat Tullo, Mike Jonas, Mairi Doerr or Janet McGrath.

Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice

Do you know that livestock agriculture is the biggest cause of global warming, producing more greenhouse gases than cars, trucks, planes, trains and all other forms of transport combined?

(Source: U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization)

Do you know that oceans are being emptied of life to provide fodder for chickens and other factory-farmed animals?

(Source: Greenpeace International)

Do you know that these same factory-farmed animals are slaughtered under conditions that would constitute a criminal felony if perpetrated against a domestic dog or cat, or other companion animals or wildlife?

(Source: American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)

Do you know that the animal-centered diet is a leading cause of heart attack, stroke, cancer and other major killers?

(Source: New England Journal of Medicine)

Do you know of the institutional racism fostered by the animal agriculture lobby, such as the USDA dietary guidelines that recommend dairy consumption, even though most people of color are “lactose-intolerant”? (And “lactose-intolerance” is actually not a disease, but the biological norm after infancy?)

(Source: *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*)

Do you know that the agricultural/industrial complex is owned by a few large corporations that routinely place profit before human health, animal welfare, and environmental justice?

(Source: *Dominion: The Power of Man, The Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy*)

Do you know how much our food choices can lead to harm, or good?

Do you long to nurture your spirit while healing the world?

We, as a denomination, have been exploring some of these questions through the Ethical Eating Congregational Study/Action Issue. The reality that is revealed can be startling and sobering. How shall we

respond?

We urge Unitarian Universalists to greet this time as a tremendous opportunity. Please consider our Invitation to Covenant.

We present it here with love in our hearts and deep gratitude for all that you do already, to eat mindfully and conscientiously.

An Invitation to Covenant

As Unitarian Universalists we are called to shed light on the suffering of our world. At times, this prophetic task challenges the spirit, but the way becomes easier and more joyful when we walk together. We therefore invite all Unitarian Universalists to join us in a living covenant which, as part of a Statement of Conscience of our UUA, would guide us in making food choices that courageously manifest our compassion, our mercy, and our loving-kindness.

Whereas we affirm ...

The inherent worth and dignity of all beings;

The interdependent web of existence, which links the well-being of each individual with the well-being of all those who share the home of Earth; and,

The ethical application of religion that recognizes the capacity of humanity to bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice, as the unfolding imperatives of each era reveal themselves;

We are therefore resolved ...

To examine our assumptions, cultural practices, and traditions of dominion that create oppression and speciesism in thought and behavior;

To commit ourselves to integrating our values more meaningfully with the miracle, beauty, and interconnectedness of all life; and,

To move as individuals towards a plant-based diet, and to join together to dismantle the structures and institutions that sanction the exploitation of other beings and the consequences reaped: world hunger, human disease, worker injustice, and environmental devastation.

Delegates to GA 2011 in June will vote on the above proposed Statement of Conscience, “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice,” the culmination of a multi-year study. The Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry has presented the above basis for having the UUA adopt such a statement.

More Rainbows

by Marcia Jacobs

As a follow-up to our Rainbow dinner, a number of us in the fellowship have initiated a “rainbow ribbon” project. We have hooked up with the organizations at Carleton and St. Olaf, and the PFLAG group of Northfield. We are planning a workshop/meeting on Sat. July 9, 2011 at the fellowship hall (Masonic Lodge building) at 1:00 pm. Our first project is to make rainbow lapel ribbons to wear and distribute to supporters of the GLBTQ community. Also being considered are buttons with a logo or design, T-shirts, etc. We welcome ideas on what to do and how to use these items to promote acceptance of the GLBTQ community. Please give us your input.

Also in cooperation with the Carleton, St. Olaf and PFLAG groups, we are planning to attend the Gay Pride parade and festival in Minneapolis on June 26th. We would car pool, walk in the parade and anyone who wants to stay for the festival can do that also.

For more information and to indicate your interest, you can contact any of the following:

Marcia Jacobs, UUFN - momjacobs@hotmail.com or mjacobs1939@gmail.com Suzannah Ciernia, UUFN - syciernia@gmail.com Tim Vick, PFLAG - timothyvick@gmail.com Ashley Tanberg, St. Olaf - tanberg@stolaf.edu

When you are on one of our lists, you will be sent updates on these and other events. Let's make this a successful project with lots of participation. Thanks.

Annual Meeting

The Fellowship voted unanimously to adopt the Budget of \$37,165 for 2011-2012. This lets us give the minister a 10% raise, and gives the RE director a raise of 2%.

A recent UUFN survey indicated that the fellowship is divided on whether to keep the “Continuing Conversation,” which invites the congregation to comment on or question the Sunday service presenter following the morning’s sermon. This matter will be referred to the UUFN Sunday Services Committee.

The fellowship decided to discontinue the project of cleaning up two miles of I-35. Instead, we will look into sponsoring a section of a quieter road, or possibly a city park.

Policy Board next year will consist of Bob Ciernia (president); Lee Topp (vice-president); Marcia Jacobs (secretary); Greg Marfleet (treasurer); and Mairi Doerr (at-large).

By unanimous vote, the congregation changed the last sentence in our bylaws’ Article II to read: “We welcome all people without regard to race, color, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity who wish to unite with us in the search for truth, and the promotion of respect and love among the entire web of life.”

UUA Membership Declines Again

by Michelle Bates Deakin

Noting declines in the number of members of Unitarian Universalist congregations, UUA President Peter Morales said, “The culture is moving our way theologically, but not institutionally.” (Nancy Peirce)

Membership in Unitarian Universalist congregations has fallen for the third consecutive year, with overall membership falling to 162,796 adults from 164,196. In addition, the number of congregations has declined to 1,046, with a net loss of two congregations last year.



Amid the downward-sloping statistics, however, the Rev. Peter Morales, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, sees reason for optimism. Declines in UU membership have been slight. Declines in other denominations, including evangelical churches, however, have been precipitous. “The evangelical slide is an amazing opportunity,” he said, noting that opinion surveys on social issues, such as marriage equality, indicate that more people are aligned with UUA values. “The culture is moving our way theologically, but not institutionally.”

Morales presented the statistics in his report (PDF; 18.9M) to the UUA Board of Trustees at its April meeting in Boston. The numbers reflect membership as of February 1, 2011.

Three of the UUA’s 19 districts showed a net increase in members last year. The Joseph Priestly District, which includes congregations in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, and parts of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, posted the largest gain, of 91 members. The Massachusetts Bay District, which includes congregations in eastern Massachusetts, grew by 41 members. And the Pacific Central District, which serves northern California, northern Nevada, and Hawaii, grew by five.

Membership fell the most in the Central Midwest District—which includes congregations in Illinois and parts of Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, and Wisconsin—and the Southwestern UU Conference, which serves Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, and parts of Missouri and Tennessee. Each of these districts lost 224 members. The Metropolitan New York District, which includes congregations in parts of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, lost 186 members.

Registration in religious education programs fell for the fourth consecutive year. It dropped 2.1 percent to 54,671.

Average Sunday attendance showed a decline for the first year, falling by 1,539 people. That’s a decline of 1.5 percent to 100,693 people.

“The numbers raise the urgency that we just ought not do business as usual,” the Rev. Harlan Limpert, vice president of Ministries and Congregational Support, told the board. “Small year-to-year changes are not that significant, because we are such a small faith. But what troubles me is the ten-year trend.”

Morales said that the nature of congregational life needs to change in significant ways to attract a new generation of churchgoers. “It isn’t about a drum set and some more modern poetry and dressing more casually,” he said.

He advocated nurturing the denomination’s base, particularly by promoting excellence in ministry. At the same time, Morales said, “we need to reinvent what religious and congregational life is a generation out.” The association has to find a way to “reinforce what is healthy and good, and also nurture something that is new and compelling to a generation that feels no obligation to go to church. And yet, it is deeply hungry for transcendence and depth.”

Morales emphasized two current UUA programs that he said are “modest initiatives . . . to make the best of our movement contagious.” One is the “Leap of Faith” program, a pilot program that helps successful congregations provide mentoring to growing congregations.

The second initiative is a growing number of meetings and connections that support multicultural ministers and congregations. “We

now have at least 26 ministers of color serving congregations,” said Morales, “and we’re starting to see the transformational impact that is having in those congregations. We are learning to cross boundaries of class and culture.”

The president’s report also highlighted four “breakthrough congregations” that have been recognized for extraordinary growth. They are:

The UU Fellowship of Beaufort, S.C., which grew to 81 members from 47 in five years;

The Westside UU Congregation in Seattle, which grew to 149 members from 116 in five years;

The UU Church of Peoria, Ill., which grew to 346 members from 270 in five years; and

The UU Congregation of Fairfax, Va., which grew to 713 members from 574 over five years.

Each of the congregations will show a video at the 2011 UUA General Assembly in Charlotte, N.C., highlighting its successes in membership growth.

Morales’s report on membership trends draws on data that includes updated figures for the past few years, including figures that differ from numbers reported by UU World in 2009 and 2010. Using the latest figures, the UUA’s membership high point was 164,505 adult members in 2008, which declined to 164,448 in 2009, 164,196 in 2010, and 162,796 in 2011.

UU World has also reported U.S.-only membership data, excluding member congregations in Canada and other countries as well as the non-geographical Church of the Larger Fellowship. Using the latest figures, the UUA’s U.S. membership was 156,077 in 2008, 155,969 in 2009, 155,729 in 2010, and 154,255.

The slight decline in membership in the Unitarian Universalist Association occurred as many other denominations posted steeper declines.

The United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church (USA) showed the largest one-year declines, falling by 2.8 percent and 2.6 percent respectively. Membership dips were also reported by the Episcopal Church; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the American Baptist Churches USA; the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod; the United Methodist Church; and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Bucking the trend, with large membership gains, were the Jehovah’s Witnesses, which reported a 4.4 percent increase in membership, and the Seventh-Day Adventists, which grew last year by 4.3 percent.

Three other denominations reported gains, according to an annual report prepared by the National Council of Churches. They were the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1.4 percent; the Roman Catholic Church, 0.6 percent; and the Assemblies of God, 0.5 percent.

Morales concluded his remarks to the board about membership trends by saying that over the next decade, the association needs to consider itself in the “culture-change business.”

“We are living at a time in history of unprecedented social change,” Morales said. “That’s supposed to be what we’re good at, and what our theology prepares us to embrace. We need to remind ourselves that we are capable of doing this—creative enough, clearly smart enough, and committed enough that we’re not afraid to move this into the future.”





The Wayside Pulpit

*The Great Tao is all-pervasive; it
may be seen on the right and on
the left. All things depend, and are
produced; it denies itself to none.*

Tao Te Ching