

Unitarian Universalists of Sterling

a congregation of open hearts and open minds

September 2011

Mission

Hillel used to say:

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

And if I am only for myself, what am I?

And if not now, when?"

—Pirke Avot (A Jewish Mishnah) 1:14

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 President's Message
- 3 Religious Exploration
- 3 Social Justice
- 4 Calendar
- 5 A Month of Spiritual Practice
- 6 A Sacred Story for All Ages

**Annual Retreat
October 1
UU Frederick**

**See page 4
calendar for
details!**

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I am still haunted by the book *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, which I read in my early teen years. Among many other themes, the book wrestles with the way White missionaries destroyed the heart of African communities by importing and imposing "proper" ways of life and worship. I am revisited by horrors from the text each time I hear tales from a mission trip.

Some tales come from dear interfaith colleagues. I'll ask them the nature of their mission. I listen to hear one truth—do they go seeking to impose their ideals, or do they go as sojourners, hoping that their presence will help others achieve the goals they have set for their own communities?

Basically the difference is this: a mission can be one of hate or one of love. A mission of hate is bred by the assumption that there is only one right way and that the work God calls us to reject the wrong and build up the right. A mission of love is lived when we recognize that there are many paths

to God, to the holy, and to living as we are called. A mission of love serves life in its diversity of forms.

Rev. Howard Thurman famously spoke, "Don't ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

Although many specific missions have harmed life, the ideal of living into a mission is the ideal of fostering, creating, and enabling life. Ask yourself, "What makes me come alive?" By doing those things that make you come alive, you are living your mission. How has your participation at the Unitarian Universalists of Sterling enlivened your call and provided you the means to further your mission? A religious community is by nature mission based. If we are worth our salt, we will help the people who call our sanctuary home come alive!

This year, beginning at our congregational retreat, we will work to name our congregation's Mission and Vision. Let it be heard that this is holy and necessary work. I hope you will give of yourself as we do this holy work together.

MINISTER'S MESSAGE *Coming Alive*



Rev. Anya
Sammler-Michael

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Mission: Living With the End in Mind



Dorine Scher,
Board President

I took a productivity course a number of years ago called "Mission Control" that was geared toward showing you how to live your life and spend your time in ways that are consistent with your commitments—living with the end in mind. In short, the course taught you how to define what mattered to you, to understand what you spent your time on that was consistent and inconsistent with these commitments, and how

you organized your time around these commitments. All the participants developed personal mission statements and backed them out yearly, monthly, weekly, daily, and hourly.

As an example, if ending childhood hunger was a cause that mattered to you today, and if during your eulogy it was noted that you had made a difference for hundreds of hungry children in the DC area, what happened along the way? What did it all look like in the world, one year after the commitment was expressed? What did it look like one year before it was fulfilled?

We were taught to map our decades, years, months, weeks, days, and hours, expressing our commitments in our calendars. It was one of the best three-day periods I have ever spent. I learned how to focus my energy on what actually mattered to me and was consistent with my personal mission.

As a congregation, we will begin a similar conversation at our retreat on October 1st. What is our vision and what is our mission? In ten years, what will UUS look like? Who will be among us, sharing worship and a personal path to spirituality? What will we have done in the world? What about in 5 years? What about this time next year?

I encourage you to think—before we gather on October 1st—about what UUS provides for you. Consider what was important for you to know before you walked through the doors the first time. What might others who have not walked through our doors but who are looking for a spiritual home need to know before they arrive? Our vision and mission should be not only for everyone already here, but also for those we have yet to welcome.

What is your personal mission as a spiritual individual? Does your participation at UUS serve that mission? What are you up to in your life? At the end, what will you have spent your time on that serves that mission? What good work will we have done together?

Our retreat is for our entire congregation to begin the work of creating our vision and mission. New members, founding members, friends—all are encouraged to attend!

Want to share something in the October newsletter?

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the October liturgical theme, *Forgiveness*.
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in October and November)
- ✓ Group or committee updates (what you accomplished, what's planned for next month, etc.)
- ✓ Recent photos taken at UUS or during UUS events (attach the file if you have more than three or four photos, email to let us know before sending them.)

Please send anything you'd like to include to newsletter@uusterling.org by September 15th.



Summer Camp councilors and campers work together

RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION MESSAGE

Mission to the Rescue

Life presents so many possibilities. So many activities, places to see, people to get to know, and ways to help others and the world. Unfortunately, we cannot do everything. It's a bit like a smorgasbord or buffet. Visiting a smorgasbord and picking whatever looks good at the moment is fun once in a while. However, as I learned as a child, too much of anything results in a stomach ache. As I grew up, I became more and more aware of the need for balance and a plan when approaching so much food.

Similarly, when facing the many amazing choices in life, it is helpful to know what we want to accomplish. Clarifying our individual and group missions can help each of us make choices that will enrich our lives, and sharing this with our children can help deepen their faith and provide added dimensions to the work we do.

Throughout the year, the congregation will be discussing mission and vision, talking about where we want to be in the future and how we can get there. Everyone will be invited to share their hopes, wishes, and plans for making UUS an even more vibrant and contributing force in the future.

At the annual retreat on October 1st, children will have fun with the "Mission Control" theme as they explore the importance of deciding where we want to go and developing a plan to get there. They will also experience the Unitarian Universalist fifth principle, which states that all people should have a say in things that matter to them.

We hope you will join us as we consider mission at the annual retreat and throughout the year. Resources elsewhere in this newsletter will help you and your family explore mission and contemplate ways to live according to your values.

The Children's Religious Exploration Calendar and a list of programs and events for children and families is at the end of the RE column on the UUS website at www.uusterling.org.



CALL TO ACTION: A SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL JOURNAL

Another Year of Social Justice

The UUS Social Justice Council (SJC) kicked off the new year with a meeting on August 7th. Kim Cleland and I volunteered to lead the SJC for the coming year. Outgoing co-chairs John Botts and Yvonne Centala have set an example that will be very hard to follow, but we will give it our best!

The meeting attendees selected twelve very worthwhile organizations to receive half of our loose plate Sunday collections during the coming year. In honor of the liturgical theme for September, mission, we will give the September collections to the Jeannie Schmidt Free Clinic in Herndon. This clinic provides primary health care to uninsured children and chronically ill adults. Our own Jonathan Hammer volunteers at the Clinic. So next time you see him, be sure to ask him about it.

We are creating a new email discussion list for the UUS SJC so that interested members and friends can plan and discuss upcoming Social Justice events. Please let me know if you want to be added to the list. Once the event details are finalized, they will be sent to the UUS Announce list as always.



Linda Weaver



Shelley Tamres

CALENDAR

Stay Up to Date With UUS Events

Sunday, September 4th, 10:30am – Worship Service: “Honest Work”

Rev. Anya leads our service on this month's liturgical theme, mission, and encourages us to consider our mission as our salvation. An inquirer's class follows the service at noon.

Sunday, September 11th, 10:30am – Worship Service: “Healing Waters”

Rev. Anya leads our traditional ingathering service, focusing this year on the healing that has to be done after a loss or tragedy. Interfaith religious leaders from Beth Chaverim and the ADAMS center join us to share a prayer; we will have special music from a flautist who uses traditional Native American flutes; and our choir, led by Kris Adams, will sing. Bring a small bottle of water from your summer travels—whether it be literal or symbolic, from a distant ocean or a local pool—for our water ceremony.

Sunday, September 18th, 10:30am – Worship Service: “Spiritual Exhaustion”

Rev. Anya leads the first of her 2011–12 sermon series on the Seven Deadly Sins, with this service on sloth. We will have special music from rock singer-songwriter Dan Michael and our Board of Trustees will be installed with a ritual.

Sunday, September 25th, 10:30am – Worship Service: “Autumnal Equinox”

The Women's Earth-Based Spirituality group will lead our service which will honor the turning of the year from summer to autumn. This traditional earth-based service will be graced with the music of our choir, led by Kris Adams.

Sunday, October 1st, 9:30am–4pm – Annual Retreat: “Mission Control”

(Held at UU Fredrick in Maryland)

Come one, come all to this all-ages blastoff complete with breakfast, lunch, and childcare! We will learn together what it means for a congregation to develop a Mission and Vision Statement while having fun, worshipping, and sharing the bounty of community.

Location: UU Congregation of Fredrick, 4880 Elmer Derr Road, Frederick, MD, 21703.

Directions: Take U.S. 15 north to Exit 11 (the Mt. Zion Road exit). Turn right at the stop sign and then right again onto Elmer Derr Road. Go 1.6 miles, and the building will be on the right.

Please RSVP. You can fill out a form at UUS and drop it in the basket on the kiosk, or you can email Phaedra, our office administrator, at administrator@uusterling.org. Include the number of attendees from your family, their ages, and any food allergies.

A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Members of our congregation are invited to engage the practice of *Lectio Divina*. *Lectio Divina* is Latin for divine reading, spiritual reading, or holy reading, and represents a traditional practice of scriptural reading intended to promote communion with that which is ultimately meaningful. It is a way of praying or meditating with sacred words that calls one to study, ponder, listen and, finally, rejoice within the soul. Unitarian Universalists embrace a wide-reaching definition of scripture, finding words of profound meaning in the works of the world religions, scientists, poets, and the experiences of our own lives.

Find the time in your day to read each piece every day for a full week, Sunday through Saturday. Read, pause, read again, pause, and then reflect. You may choose to write each quote in a journal and add notes from your reflections. You may choose to read each piece to your family at the dinner table. You may choose to read in the morning or before sleep. You may choose to use the piece to gather your spirit for prayer or meditation.

September: Mission

September 4–10

“If Love Be There” by Robert T. Weston

*This day, setting aside all that divides me from others;
This day, remembering that the world is beautiful
To him who is willing that it be so
And that into the open, eager heart
The beauty enters in, if love be there.*

*This day, I will make a part of the song of life.
There may be grief, but if there be love it will be overcome.
There may be pain, but it can be borne with dignity and courage.*

*There may be difficulty, but it can be turned to strength.
Remembering that the world is beautiful
If I will let it be so for others whom I meet,
This day I will make a part of the song of life.*

September 11–17

From the *Tao Te Ching*, #8

*The supreme good is like water,
which nourishes all things without trying to.
It is content with the low places that people disdain.*

*In dwelling, live close to the ground.
In thinking, keep to the simple.
In conflict, be fair and generous.
In governing, don't try to control.
In work, do what you enjoy.
In family life, be completely present.*

September 18–24

A credo attributed to Jack London

*I would rather be ashes than dust!
I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant
blaze than it should be stifled by dry rot.
I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in mag-
nificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet.
The proper function of man is to live, not to exist.
I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them.
I shall use my time.*

September 25–October 1

“Symphony” by Unitarian Minister William Ellery Channing

*To live content with small means; to seek elegance rather than
luxury; and refinement rather than fashion; to be worthy,
not respectable; and wealthy, not rich; to study hard, think
quietly, talk gently, act frankly; to listen to stars and birds, to
babes and sages, with open heart; to bear all cheerfully, do
all bravely, await occasion, hurry never; in a word, to let the
spiritual, unbidden and unconscious grow up through the
common. This is to be my symphony.*



Summer Campers engaged in small groups. Fun was had by all!

SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

The Life and Trance of George de Benneville

George de Benneville was born in London in 1703. At that time, children were expected to learn a trade and begin working much earlier than children now. When he was twelve years old, George was sent to sea to learn to be a navigator. The ship he was placed on went to the African coast of the Mediterranean Sea. While docked at Algiers, George walked along the deck of the ship and saw some of the people of the city bringing refreshments to sell. In *The Life and Trance of George de Benneville*, he wrote about this experience:



One of them slipped down and tore a piece out of one of his legs.

Two of his companions, having lain him on the deck, each of them kissed the wound, shedding tears upon it, then turned towards the rising of the sun, they cried in such a manner that I was much moved with anger at their making such a noise and ordered my waiter to bring them before me. Upon demanding the reason of their noise, they perceived that I was angry, asked my pardon, and told me the cause was owing to one of their brothers having hurt his leg by a fall and that they kissed the wound in order to sympathize with him, and likewise shed tears upon it and took part with him; and as tears were saltish, they [were] a good remedy to heal the same; and the reason of their turning towards the sun's rising was to invoke him who created the sun to have compassion upon their poor brother, and prayed he would please to heal him. Upon that I was so convinced, and moved within, that I thought my heart would break, and that my life was about to leave me. My eyes were filled with tears, and I felt such an internal condemnation, that I was obliged to cry out and say, "Are these Heathens? No; I confess before God they are Christians, and I myself am a Heathen!" Behold the first conviction that the grace of our Sovereign Good employed: he was pleased to convince a white person by blacks! One who carried the name of a Christian by a pagan, and who was obliged to confess himself but a Heathen. But that was soon overcome and forgot. But God who always seeks to convince and save his poor creatures, did not leave his poor wandering sheep.

Family Discussion

George de Benneville was raised in the English court, but at twelve he went to sea to learn to be a navigator. How do you think de Benneville's life at twelve compared to that of twelve-year-olds you know? What was he learning and how? What experiences would he be having as part of a ship's crew?

How much do you think de Benneville would have known about people of other races and religions? How do you think the experience in this story changed his understanding? Reread the last two sentences. What do you think happened? Why is this an important part of the story?

Is there anything you wonder about the lives of family members, friends, or people you know who are different than you? If so, what can you or your family do to learn more?

After reflecting on this story and other experiences this month, how would you like to live so that you come more fully alive? As appropriate, talk with each other about your passions, values, priorities, and goals and how they have changed over time. How can you support each other in finding and living into your own evolving missions?