

Hope

*Ever since happiness heard your name,
it has been running through the streets trying to find you.*

—Hafiz of Persia

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We live in strange times, times that shimmy between a bold hopefulness and a fearful desperation.

A few years ago, our nation collapsed in an economic quagmire. Presently the Occupy Wall Street movement stands to challenge not only the forces that led our markets to ruin, but the government that failed to hold the guilty to account. I can't help but see this movement in relation to the struggles that bled through the nations of Egypt and Lybia, and throughout the Middle East; the ones that still haunt the lives of the Syrian and Egyptian people. I see a relationship in the way all these movements are born of the common desire to right wrongs and the hope that a collective power will have the capacity to overcome one that is despotic or over-indulgent.

I do not understand enough about the Occupy movement as yet, to stand up for or against it. I do see it, however, in light of our strange times. Our market collapsed. Europe is struggling to maintain some semblance of economic stability. Scientists speak of the imminent demise of our planet through global warming. Each day, we hear of new species on

the verge of — or lost to — extinction. (The Vietnamese Rhinoceros went extinct in April of this year.)

Extreme realities conjure extreme responses. In Libya, a war seemed necessary. Other protestors, like those in Egypt, achieved gains through peaceful means. Now that is being tested. I pray that the Occupy movement will find its way peacefully toward goals that reach deeper than partisan gain. The ends of these efforts are not yet told, but we can trust that they grew both from the roots of hope and desperation, as a response to strange times.

Hope does not always lead people to the best solutions or even to better realities, but it opens doors; it makes positive change possible. There is a great line from the Gospel of John, in the Bible: "A light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it." Hope draws us closer to that light. I hope that in these strange times, you will draw closer to the light. Whether, for you, that means joining with others in the work for justice or deepening in your own practice to give and know love, may hope enable you to keep opening doors.

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Hope in Strange Times



Rev. Anya
Sammler-Michael

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE*Hope Is Like Wet Cement*

*Dorine Colabella
Scher,
Board President*

I heard a story years ago that life is like a long trough of cement. Whatever is behind you is the past and is solid and unchangeable. No use spending time worrying about what you said, should have said, did, or didn't do. On the other hand, the cement that is ahead of you is still wet and able to be formed. Here's where hope comes in! You get to create your past.

Next year when you are standing a little further along in the trough, with more solid cement behind you, will you have merely arrived at that point or will you have deliberately created your past? If the past has been dreary to that point, maybe it is hard to have hope that things can be better, that you can effect a change in your life that you will benefit from or that you will be satisfied with one year down the trough.

Can you muster some hope or positive thoughts for one thing that inspires you to do something you've always wanted to do? Can you hope for something enough that you overcome some obstacle in your thinking or behavior that will have you standing satisfied with what's solid behind you?

Some people hear the word *hope* as a cop-out word — you are merely “hoping” things will be a certain way, but not taking action to make it that way. My feeling is that hope is the beginning of doing. You must have hope that a situation can be altered before you can take action to attempt to meet a challenge.

I am sure that most of us have been in a place in the trough when all we have had is hope that things will turn out. What about times when fear of disappointment gets in the way of hopefulness? The outcome of the hopefulness is in the future, yes, and may never be met. Hopefulness, though, is a present action that produces rewarding and powerful feelings, and the act of being hopeful in and of itself may be required to create a desirable outcome.

What do you hope for for your life? For the life of our congregation? For the people of the world? What will your cement look like a year from now?

**RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION
MESSAGE***Hope in Every Child*

Each night a child is born is a holy night. A time for singing, a time for wondering, a time for worshipping. — Sophia Lyon Fahs

I write this article after a week of planning programs for children of all ages and being around groups of high school students playing in a soccer tournament and preparing for a musical. In the midst of all of this activity, I appreciate what an incredible gift each and every child and youth is, no matter the circumstances of their birth or their life. It is a wonder that there are human beings living and interacting with the world and with each other at all.

This is a great time of year to recognize that wonder. As many of us celebrate the hope brought by one special birth, we can also celebrate the miracle and the spark of divine brought into the world by each child. This is one of the greatest hopes and joys of the season.

Each child has so much to share with those who take the time to notice. It may be exuberance or reticence, curiosity or certainty, or the ability to live in the present or to dream. It may be in a variety of talents or the endurance to face many challenges.

Don't Fix Me, I'm Not Broken is the title of a book by Sally Patton, a developmental psychologist and the parent of a child with special needs. The title, which comes from a plea made by the author's son, reminds us that each person really does have inherent worth and is whole right now, no matter what others may think or see. May we come together at this time of year and recognize the wonder that was born and continues to live with each one of us.

We welcome you to join us at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling as we celebrate the hope of the winter holidays and of every day.

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 UUCS website at www.uusterling.org.



*Linda Weaver,
Director of Religious
Exploration*

CALL TO ACTION: A SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL JOURNAL

Updates From the SJC

Shelley Tamres & Kim Cleland, Co-Leaders



*Shelley Tamres,
Co-Chair, Social
Justice Council*

In honor of the December liturgical theme of hope, the UUS Social Justice Council (SJC) selected the **Friends of Loudoun Mental Health** as the recipient of our December loose-plate Sunday collections. Friends is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization that has been assisting Loudoun County residents with chronic mental illnesses live independent lives since 1955. Friends are mental

health advocates who, through Friends' initiatives, provide material assistance to Loudoun residents experiencing disabling mental illnesses, speak out as activists to help end discrimination, and sponsor educational programs to make the community aware of mental health issues.



Additionally, it is the time of year to participate in a holiday collection to help needy families in Loudoun County. Like last year, the Social Justice Council is partnering with Ayuda, a Sterling nonprofit serving low-income immigrants, to provide holiday gifts to local families. If you are interested in sponsoring a family or donating items for an individual child or adult, please e-mail Lisa Groat at lisa@ayuda.com with the size of the family or type of individual (i.e., adult vs. child, any gender or age preference) you would like to assist, and you will be matched with a wish list from an Ayuda client. Donations will be collected in the Social Justice Nook until December 18, and receipts for tax purposes are available upon request. For those who wish to participate but lack the time for shopping, gift cards to local stores, such as Walmart, Target, Kohl's, and Toys "R" Us, are also welcome.

Thanks to your generous contributions during the month

of October, we sent \$263 to the Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter. Additionally, the special collection on October 2 resulted in \$465 for the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC). Due to a past SJC collection that was designated for an organization that stopped accepting donations, a balance of \$260 has been sitting in the SJC account. The SJC decided to donate \$100 to Dan Spiro for use in his Jewish-Islamic Dialogue Society (JIDS), \$80 was added to the October 2 collection, and \$80 in grocery scrip was given to Loudoun Interfaith Relief. So a total of \$545 (\$465 + \$80) was sent to the UUSC for its Somalia and East Africa Relief Fund.



John Botts, Elena Botts, Yvonne Centala, Kathee Myers, and I (plus my younger son and my nephew from Pittsburgh) attended a rally downtown November 6 to protest the Keystone XL Pipeline, aka the Tar Sands Pipeline. The 12,000 rally attendees encircled the White House, with many holding signs with some of President Obama's 2008 campaign promises printed on them, such as his pronouncement that "It is time to end the tyranny of oil!" During the week following the rally, President Obama ordered the State Department to perform a new review of the environmental impact of the pipeline, and to take climate change into account in the new review.



SJCREHappenings: Joelle Novey, the Director of Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light, met with the K-1st and 2nd-4th grade groups on November 13. SJC members John Botts and Elena Botts led the 2nd-4th grade group in conducting an energy assessment that may be used in a future application for Green Congregation recognition. On November 20, Journey Toward Wholeness team members Mike Masiak and Yvonne Centala, along with RE Assistant Natalie Corbo, led the K-1st grade RE group in a session to encourage appreciation of the diversity of families, and Shumeet Baluja led the 2nd-4th graders in a special art project that celebrated differences, while recognizing the many similarities all people share.

Join Us: Our meetings are held the first Sunday of each month after the service at 12:15 p.m. in the RE space.

LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION

Joining the Children's Choir

Our celebrated music director, Kris Adams, is honored to work with all ages. If your children (ages 4–18) like to make music and wish to be involved in worship, enroll them in our second session of Children's choir.

The next performance will be the Christmas Eve pagent. Practices will be held on two Sundays, December 4 and 18, from 11:30am–12:15pm (immediately following RE). Please arrive by 4:30pm on December 24 to participate in the pagent.

UPCOMING LIFESPAN EDUCATION

Building the World

We Dream About, Session I

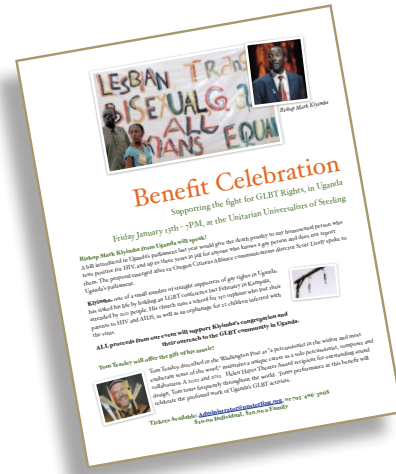
This class seeks to interrupt the workings of racism, and transform how people from different racial/ethnic groups understand and relate to one another. Anyone interested in social justice, a deeper understanding of institutional racism, or the opportunity to grow individually within a community would benefit from this class.

Leaders: *Rev. Anya, and members of the Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Team*

Dates: *Thursdays, January 5, 12, 19, 26, and February 2, 9, 16, 23.*

Time: *6:30–8:30pm*

Enroll by emailing administrator@uusterling.org



EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT

Bishop Mark Kiyimba Speaks on Gay Rights in Uganda

On Friday, January 13, Bishop Mark Kiyimba, a minister in the UU Church of Uganda, will be speaking at UUS about his fight for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) rights in Uganda. Bishop Kiyimba will provide background and insight on a bill introduced in Uganda's parliament last year that would give the death penalty to any homosexual person who tests positive for HIV, and up to three years in prison for anyone who knows a gay person and does not report them. Kiyimba, one of a small number of straight supporters of gay rights in Uganda, has risked his life by holding a GLBT conference attended by 200 people last February in Kampala, Uganda. His church runs a school for 150 orphans whose parents were lost to HIV and AIDS as well as an orphanage for 22 children infected with the virus.

Want to share something in the January newsletter?

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the January liturgical theme, *Justice*.
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in January and February)
- ✓ Group or committee updates (what you accomplished, what's planned for next month, etc.)
- ✓ Recent photos taken at UUCS or during UUCS 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 December 15th.

LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION

What's Your Vision? What's Your Mission?

Steve Dick, Mission/Vision Team

The UUCS Mission and Vision Committee has been meeting to begin the process of formulating a new Vision and Mission for UUCS. (That's our new name: Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling!) These are two very important statements about ourselves that are addressed to the broader community. What's the difference between them?

A vision is a carefully defined picture of the congregation's future. It is not the current reality of the congregation, but it is a dream of what the congregation wants to make of itself. The vision answers the following question: What do we want the congregation to look like in five or ten years as a result of its efforts in ministry, programming, and outreach?

Our current vision statement is:

The Unitarian Universalists of Sterling envision ourselves to be a thriving congregation offering a wide range of programs meeting the needs of children, youth, and adults. We are an open-minded and supportive community, embracing diversity, a variety of religious expressions, and social activism.

By contrast, the mission is a carefully defined, concise, and focused statement of what the congregation wants to mean to the community, and for what it wishes to be known. It is a statement of who we are and what we value, and it should be the measuring stick for all the congregation does. The mission statement should incorporate answers to the following questions: 1) if this is our vision, where does this lead us in the mission? 2) What "must" we do? 3) In what ways does our vision lead us in service toward others in the broader community?

Our current mission statement reads as follows:

Unitarian-Universalists of Sterling a place where reason and spirituality converge. We welcome members of the community who are seeking such a religious home. Our mission is to make the community a better place to live by promoting a variety of religious expressions, working toward social justice, and fostering diversity.

In order to carry out this mission, we covenant to listen to each other, encourage the exchange of creative thought, and respect our differences.

Over the coming months, we will be seeking your input to the new statements through a series of personal and group conversations. The plan is to wrap up these conversations and present the new statements to the congregation well before the stewardship drive, which begins in March.

Team members include Kevin Manuel-Scott (Chair), Gus Dougouih, Yvonne Centala, Dorine Scher, Albert Pucio, Steve Dick, Joan Johnson, Chris Houck, and Rev. Anya. Please discuss your thoughts with them, and come to one of the group conversations so we can draft statements that represent the sentiments of the entire congregation. Dates for the group conversations are below and will be sent out via UUS-Announce.

This is a rare process in the life of any congregation, so please give us your input!

Cottage Conversations: Vision and Mission

All members are encouraged to participate in at least one of the Cottage Conversations about the Vision and Mission of UUCS. The possible dates and times are below; RSVP by emailing Steve Dick at stevedick1@comcast.net.

All Conversations will be held at UUS, either in the Darwin Mezzanine or Rev. Anya's Office.

Sun. December 11th - 12:00 (*Childcare available*)

Sun. December 18th - 12:00

Sun. January 8th - 12:00 (*Childcare available*)

Mon. January 9th - 10:00am

Tues. January 10th - 6:30pm (*Children welcome*)

Wed. January 18th - 6:00

Sun. January 22nd - 12:00pm

Sun. January 29th - 12:00pm

LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION

Welcoming Our New Members

Terry Dick, Membership Committee Chair

At the Sunday morning service on November 6, eight individuals were officially welcomed to UUCS in a New Member Recognition Ceremony. Francis and Kathy Ashland, Joan Friedson, Diana Menefee, Angela Menegay, Stevens Miller, Isabelle Raines, and Rob Taylor all stood to be acknowledged and receive gifts, which included the book *A Chosen Faith* by John Buehrens and Forrest Church. New members are encouraged to read this book, jot down their reflections on the inside flap, and then return it to be read by the next group of new members.

For many, the path to membership at UUS begins with weeks or months of attending services, an Inquirers' class, and getting to know the congregation, Rev. Anya, and the principles and sources of Unitarian Universalism. Typically, the next step is attendance at a Saturday "New to

UU" class where deeper study and dialog occur among those new to the denomination, Rev. Anya, and those who have been UUs for many

years. Folks thinking about becoming members are also encouraged to attend adult Religious Exploration classes, covenant groups, and other small groups to further explore the faith. At some time along the journey, many decide to make the commitment to full membership by signing the membership book.

Those who are interested in learning more about what membership means should contact Rev. Anya, any member of the Board of Directors, or Terry Dick, the Membership Committee Chair.



SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

Jesus Calms the Storm

From the Bible, Mark 4:35-41, New International Version

That day when evening came, [Jesus] said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side [of the lake]." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.

The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"



Family Discussion

Do you ever feel like you are being tossed by a storm—like something you are experiencing is as difficult or scary as going through a bad storm?

What do you do when you feel like this? Do you reach out for help or do you reach inside yourself to find a stillness and calm?

The disciples were frightened by the storm and then they were frightened when the storm ended, but Jesus was not afraid.

Have you ever been able to make yourself feel frightened or brave by how you think about something? What happened?

Hope can help us feel brave. Where do you find hope? Do you find hope in another person, such as a parent or friend? Do you find hope in nature, in remembering a difficult experience in the past, in love, or in God or Mystery or Spirit of Life?

A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

December: Hope

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.

December 4–10

From Barbara Kingsolver

The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope.

December 11–17

From Rumi

*My head is bursting
with the joy of the unknown.
My heart is expanding a thousand fold.
Every cell,
taking wings,
flies about the world.
All seek separately
the many faces of my love.*

December 18–24

“My Brilliant Image” by Hafiz

*One day
the sun admitted,
I am just a shadow.
I wish I could show you
The infinite Incandescence
That had cast my brilliant image!
I wish I could show you,
When you are lonely or in darkness,
The Astonishing Light
Of your own Being!*

December 25–January 31

From Aristotle

Hope is a waking dream.



Scenes from Loudoun Interfaith BRIDGES Day of Thanks, November 13, 2011

CALENDAR

Stay Up to Date with UUCS Events

DECEMBER	////////////////////////////////////
Friday, 12/2	6:30-9pm — “First Friday” event: Holiday Decorating Party All are welcome. Crafts for children, music, fun! Please bring a potluck item to share.
Sunday, 12/4	10:30am — Worship Service: “Hope, not Hell” Rev. Anya invites us to engage the faith of hope in the face of the politics and perspectives of fear. 11:30am-12:15pm — Children and Youth Choir rehearsal Noon — Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office 12:15pm — Social Justice Council monthly meeting in the RE space
Sunday, 12/11	10:30am — Worship Service: “Greed” Rev. Anya offers the third sermon in her series on the Seven Deadly Sins.
Sunday, 12/18	10:30am — Worship service: “Seeing” Rev. Anya leads this service that will flow from the scientific to the mystic interpretation of our most heavily relied upon sense — sight. 11:30am-12:15pm — Children and Youth Choir rehearsal
Wednesday, 12/21	7:00am — Solstice Service Our Women’s Earth-Based Spirituality group leads this annual solstice service based on ancient faith traditions.
Saturday, 12/24	4:30pm — Children and Youth Choir rehearsal 5:00pm — Christmas Eve Pageant The first of our two services for Christmas Eve, this intergenerational pageant led by Linda Weaver and Rev. Anya will include traditional hymns and a performance by our children’s choir. A reception will follow. 7:00pm — Christmas Eve Candlelight Service The second of our two services for Christmas Eve, this service led by Rev. Anya will include traditional hymns, new music from Unitarian Universalist composers, and a performance by our choir. We will close with the traditional candle lighting. Childcare will be available. All are encouraged to come early, between 6 and 7pm, to enjoy the reception before the service.
Sunday, 12/25	10:30am — Worship Service: “Every Day a Child is Born is a Holy Day” Rev. Anya will be present to open the doors of our congregation for anyone who wishes to enjoy fellowship, stories, prayers and meditations on Christmas Morning. Families who wish to dedicate their children are welcome to participate in the naming ceremony, included in the worship service. Naming Ceremonies are the way Unitarian Universalists honor the birth and life of children. This service is open to all ages and childcare will not be provided.
JANUARY	////////////////////////////////////
Friday, 1/6	6:30-9pm — “First Friday” event
Sunday, 1/8	12:15pm — Social Justice Council monthly meeting in the RE space
Friday, 1/13	7:00pm — Benefit Celebration for GLBT Rights in Uganda with Rev. Mark Kiyimba and Tom Teasley. (See the article on page 4 for more information.)