

Brokenness

*The journey of a thousand miles begins
with a broken fan belt and leaky tire.*

—Anonymous

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I don't believe in original sin or the possibility of Eden. I do believe in brokenness and wholeness. I do believe that all humans are inherently whole, full, enough, but that all can and likely will experience brokenness. Brokenness is anything that threatens to separate one part of us from another, or anything that blurs our realization of our wholeness.

I take yoga for many reasons. One is that I had to stop running. Nearly 15 years ago, I tore the cartilage in my right knee. A year ago, while running, I re-injured the same area. The yoga that I take can, over time, reduce the scar tissue from old injuries. One position is particularly effective, but when I do this position, the scar tissue prevents me from reaching the extent of the posture. I used to struggle with this. Nearly everyone in the class achieves a fuller posture and makes it look relatively easy! I might respond to this reality with self-chastisement—rejecting my knee for its failings, feeling less than enough. It's my practice, if I catch myself chastising, to smile and remember that I am whole and enough, just the way I am.

This past month, our community experienced a loss far deeper than scar tissue on a knee. Bob Schoppet died. We came together to remember his life and memorialize his passing. A death in a community rends a tear through the fibers of that community's life, as it rends a tear through individual spirits. We do not need to forget our loss to remember the reality of our wholeness. It can help to speak

to others, to share stories of your experiences with Bob, whether they are profound or mundane. It can help to pray for Bob and his family or meditate on the gift of Bob's life. It can help to pay close attention to the pain of your grief—not to dwell upon it, but to recognize its truth and honor it as part and parcel of your wholeness.

None of us makes it through this life without a tear—whether it be in our knee, our heart, or our spirit. There is no Eden on this Earth, no land free from the tremors of loss. But none of us is

made unworthy by our brokenness. None of us is made less whole. Just as we do in yoga class, breathe into the places of hurt; claim them as your own; know them and, in time, love them. They are the result of a full life, a life that reached out in love, that gave with energy—a life lived in purpose.

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

*Not Original Sin,
but Brokenness*



Rev. Anya
Sammler-Michael

RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

Love Surrounds Us

At one place I worked, much of the communication was done through yelling. It seemed like there was a belief that whoever yelled the loudest was right or would at least get his or her way. I was on the fringe of one especially contentious yelling match when I realized that both people were arguing for the same solution. Luckily, I was able to demonstrate this, but it was difficult to do because each was convinced that he or she was right and the other was wrong.



*Linda Weaver,
Director of Religious
Exploration*

In most cases at this company there truly were disagreements, but I was fortunate to be new to the industry and eager to learn. I asked as many questions as possible when working with people in other divisions, and when there were differences of opinion I asked how we could work together to find the best solution. I discovered that everyone really had the same goal even though the focus of the divisions was different. This is true in so many areas of life. Without listening from the heart—listening out of sincere interest in the other person—relationships often break down and we lose sight of our shared goals.

I think of this often and know it is so easy to not hear or understand someone. To truly hear another person, we have to suspend judgment, concentrate completely on what the other person is saying, and ask the right questions to make sure we understand. However, it is often very difficult to see past long-held assumptions and to accumulate enough experience to feel what another is expressing. I know that for me, this will require a lifetime of learning and repeated practice. I also know that it cannot be done in isolation. It must be done with other people and in community so that we can listen to and learn from others and receive support. UUCS is already doing this work in so many ways. We hope you will join us as we come together with open and listening hearts.

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.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



*Dorine Colabella
Scher,
Board President*

I can't help but think of Bob Schoppet's stained glass pieces hanging in our sanctuary as I write about brokenness. I know that we often view brokenness as something that was once whole and complete that is in need of repair. This is not the case with stained glass. When we look at a completed work, its wholeness is formed from many "broken" pieces that have found a way to be both special and separate and at the same time encourage other pieces to express more beauty than they could on their own. I believe our congregation offers the same opportunity.

When we look at the pieces Bob created for us I think that most of us marvel in the craftsmanship, the talent that is required to produce such work. But I think we mostly see the completed piece; the brokenness that was required to create it may not be obvious because of the support of the other pieces.

I often thought while I sat listening through the memorial service that each one of us in the congregation is a beautiful being, whole and complete, even in our times of brokenness, and when we come together in worship, in support, and in service, we become an entity of beauty that we may not always be able to see in ourselves. Even as we were mourning Bob with our testimony, pieces of his beautiful life came to light and shone through in a glorious wholeness.

Throughout my 12 years at UUCS, I have felt the strength of the wholeness and beauty that our congregation provides. Each one of us brings who we are to form the structure for that wholeness. There are times when I venture out to a meeting or to Sunday morning services when I feel less like I have something to contribute and more like I need something from all of you. I know we all have times like that. I encourage you to bring your gifts even if you may think they are small and to borrow from others' strengths when you need it. All of us have our flaws and strengths that come together to encourage beauty in others. It is truly what makes the light shine at UUCS.

SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL

Updates From the Social Justice Council



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

To honor the March liturgical theme of Brokenness, UUCS will be promoting the Journey Towards Wholeness (JTW) program. The JTW Transformation Team selected Mosaic Harmony as the recipient of our March loose plate Sunday collections. Mosaic Harmony is a multicultural, interfaith choir founded in 1993 and based in the Washington, D.C., area. Now the choir has about 60 members who belong to

more than 17 faith traditions. Mosaic Harmony draws on the rich heritage of African-American inspirational music to “unify the world, one song at a time.” Several of our fellow congregants are members of this choir.

Thanks to your generous contributions during the month of January: we sent \$361.35 to Ayuda.

Don't forget to check out the Social Justice Nook at the back of the building past the nursery. We have informative articles posted on the bulletin boards, a lending library, and collection containers for the Loudoun Interfaith Relief food pantry and for recyclables. We are also now making use of the kiosk in the fellowship area. Currently, there is information and pictures of the New Life School in Uganda posted by Lindy Reeder. Keep an eye out for social justice-related announcements and articles.

Also, don't forget that the UUA General Assembly is centered around a social justice theme this year. It's being held in Phoenix, AZ, June 20–24. Registration and housing reservations open on March 1.

The SJC March meeting will be held in the RE space on Sunday, March 4, at 12:30 instead of the usual 12:15 pm. (This is to allow meeting participants to join in the after-service discussion with our guest speaker that day, Paula Cole Jones, the director of racial and social justice for the Joseph Priestly District.) Please join us.

LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION

Who Keeps Our Congregation Safe?

Because of recent news about charges of sexual abuse by coaches and teachers and within religious communities, we are reviewing our safety policy in a series of articles. This is the second of three articles in the series.

Everyone at UUCS is responsible for helping to create a safe place for children, youth, and adults to worship, explore, share, and celebrate. Our safety policy for children and youth includes procedures that help us screen for known abusers and for behaviors that may compromise the physical, emotional, or spiritual well-being of children, youth, or adults.

- Everyone who works with children and youth must complete an application form with references, read the RE safety policy, and sign the code of ethics.
- All regular RE volunteers will be trained and oriented to the RE program, policies, and expectations.
- All adults working with children and youth will have been an active participant at UUCS for at least six months so that they can get to know the congregation.

- RE staff members and youth advisors undergo background checks.

Leaders in our Religious Exploration program feel that our staff members and volunteers care deeply for the well-being of everyone at UUCS. They are impressed with how well they work with all ages as well as the dedication they exhibit in continuing to improve the RE experience for the children and youth in their care. Despite the screening and the trust we place in our staff members and volunteers, we rely on the presence of two adults in rooms with children or teens, knowing that most abusers abuse many times before their actions are discovered and most are well known and trusted by the person abused and by the community.

We invite you to think of UUCS as your religious home and to help keep it a safe place for all ages. If you have any questions about our safe congregation policy, please contact our Director of Religious Exploration, Linda Weaver, at redirector@uusterling.org or Rev. Anya Sammler Michael at minister@uusterling.org.

OUR NEW PARTNERSHIP

New Life School in Uganda (part 1 of 2)

As a result of the recent visit by Rev. Mark Kiyimba, a UU minister in Uganda, we learned of an opportunity for UUCS to participate in a consortium of UU churches who are working to improve educational opportunities for children in rural Uganda while building special relationships with the children and their families.

How does the partnership work?

New Life School (NLS) is a primary school in rural Uganda. There are no public schools in the area, and NLS serves approximately 500 students: two kindergarten classes and one class for each grade from first through seventh. NLS does not receive any government funding and it does not have any long-term source of sustainable and reliable support.

NLS was founded by the Rev. Mark Kiyimba and is located near the village where he was raised. Rev. Kiyimba serves a congregation in Kampala and a fellowship in Masaka, and has become internationally renowned for his courageous work on behalf of Uganda's disenfranchised gay and lesbian community.

The UU Partner Church Council (UUPCC, the national organization that supports partner relationships between UU congregations in North America and congregations, orphanages, schools, and students in other countries), in conjunction with All Souls UU Church in Tulsa, has established a consortium of churches to partner with NLS. Each church partners with one class or grade of students and stays with that group until they graduate from seventh grade.

Our congregation is now partners with the fifth grade class at New Life School! The commitment will last for three years, until that class graduates in November 2014.

As with all UUPCC partnerships, the Partner School Consortium will emphasize building relationships with the children and families at NLS. We have as much to learn about the realities of their lives as they do about ours. Getting to know each other is the best part of a partnership and our congregational life will be enriched as we connect with another culture in friendship.

What is the school like?

NLS is located in the village of Kkindu about 80 miles from Kampala. The school had an enrollment of 505 students during the spring 2010 semester. Schools in Uganda follow the British educational model. They have three trimesters per year. Each semester is three months long, with a one month break between semesters.

Most children live nearby and walk to school, but the reputation of the NLS has reached a point where some students are coming from too far away to walk each day, so these students live through the week at the school, sleeping in a converted classroom.



The New Life School in rural Uganda

There is no electricity or running water at the school. The girls have a latrine, while the boys have just a bamboo enclosure. Children are fed lunch at the school—typically a rice broth, but on some special days the meal may include rice, mashed, cooked bananas, and brown beans. Although it is not a requirement, most students wear their school uniform, a simple purple dress or shirt. Most are barefoot.

NLS does not receive any revenue from the Ugandan government. Technically it is a private, tuition-funded school, but students are not turned away for lack of funds. The school is funded by about one-third of the students who do pay tuition. Teachers are paid between \$50 and \$80 per month, depending on seniority, and are paid year round. Along with salaried teachers, the school is staffed by volunteers, typically college students from Europe and America.

How is the partnership program managed?

To strengthen the connection between and among the US Partner School participants, the US churches will be linked by a steering committee formed with a representative from each church. This steering committee will manage the Partner School Consortium's funds and funding and will work with the New Life steering committee to develop goals and plans. It will also coordinate communication, efforts, and visits between NLS and the partner churches. One coordinator will be selected by and from the US steering committee to call meetings and serve as the committee's spokesperson.

The NLS also will have its own steering committee. This committee will be composed of NLS teachers, administrators, parents, and possibly older students. They too will appoint one of their members as their steering committee coordinator and spokesperson, and he or she will facilitate steady communication between NLS and the US partners.

Part 2 will be included in the April newsletter

Lindy Reeder

A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

February: Brokenness

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.

February 27–March 4

From “Choices” by poet Nikki Giovanni

*When i can't express
what i really feel
i practice feeling
what i can express
and none of it is equal*

*I know
but that's why mankind
alone among the animals
learns to cry*

March 5–11

Genesis 4:1–7 (NRSV)

Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced a man with the help of the Lord.” Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

March 12–18

From Leonard Cohen’s “Anthem”

*Ah the wars they will
be fought again
The holy dove
She will be caught again
bought and sold
and bought again
the dove is never free.*

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

March 19–25

“Dreams” by Langston Hughes

*Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.*

*Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.*

March 26–April 1

Psalms 121, Revisited by Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

*I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Love, which made heaven and earth.*

*Thou will not let your foot be moved; Thou who keeps you
will not slumber.
Love is your keeper; Love is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
Evil will not weigh you down or capture your life.
Love will keep your going out and your coming in from this
time on and forevermore.*

SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

Cracked Vessels

by Chaya Sarah Silberberg

An old woman had two water cans which were attached to a yoke. Each day, she put the yoke over her shoulders and went down to the river, filled the cans, and walked back to her modest hut. The water can on the right side of the yoke was fine and sturdy; when she arrived home it was always full. But the can on the left had a crack in it. By the time the woman arrived home, half the water was usually gone.

The water can always felt inferior to his partner. He was ashamed that he was cracked and wasn't pulling his weight. One day he turned to the woman and apologized for being defective. The woman smiled gently and said, "Did you think I didn't know that you had a crack, and water dripped from you? Look at the path from the river to my hut. Do you see all the beautiful flowers that are growing on the one side of the path? Those are the flowers that I planted there, that you watered every day as I walked home from the river."



Family Discussion

When have you felt broken? Have you been unable to do what you wanted because of a broken bone or a sprain? Has anything else kept you from doing what others could do? How does this feel?

How have you healed after being broken or how have you accepted and made the best of something you can't change?

Has this allowed you to do something you would not have done otherwise? (Did friends sign a cast? Did you get to know people in a hospital or doctor's office or discover a book when you were sick?) Have you gained a new perspective?

What do you do well? What talents or gifts do you have that you share with others?

Your presence is sometimes the greatest gift of all. How can you be a friend to someone who is hurting?

Want to share something in the April newsletter?

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the April liturgical theme, *Salvation*.
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in April and the first two weeks of May)
- ✓ Group or committee updates (what you accomplished, what's planned for next month, etc.)
- ✓ Recent photos taken at UUS or during UUS events (send an email and attach the file you have: don't try to put the photo in a Word document or anything. 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 April 15th.

CALENDAR

Stay Up to Date with UUCS Events

M A R C H	////////////////////////////////////
Friday, 3/2	<p>6pm — “First Friday” event: All-Church Family Bingo Night First Friday in March kicks off the 2012 Stewardship Campaign! Join fellow members and friends of UUCS for a night of bingo and stewardship conversations. Dinner and beverages, including a tasting of home-brewed beer, will be provided. All ages are welcome. Gather at 6 pm; Bingo starts at 6:30!</p>
Sunday, 3/4	<p>10:30am — Worship Service: “Brokenness” Paula Cole Jones, the Joseph Priestly District Director for Racial and Social Justice, joins Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael in the pulpit. Their reflections will deal with the possibility and power of work for reconciliation. Our choir will sing, backed by our band.</p> <p>Noon — Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</p> <p>12:15pm — Social Justice Council monthly meeting in the RE space: all are welcome</p>
Sunday, 3/11	<p>10:30am — Worship Service: “Pride” Rev. Anya delivers the sixth sermon in her series on the seven deadly sins. We will have special music and the final stewardship testimonial.</p>
Sunday, 3/18	<p>10:30am — Worship service: “Be The Change You Want To See” In a world where too many churches offer either hell or cheap grace, Unitarian Universalism has so much to offer, but it is up to us to make it more than just a promise. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi “You must be the change you want to see in the world.” Guest minister Rev. Craig C. Roshaven.</p>
Sunday, 3/25	<p>10:30am — Worship service: “True Stories” There are often many different truths to one story, especially the stories of the bible. Rev. Anya will parse some biblical truths with reference to the Thomas Jefferson Bible while reflecting on the stories we tell ourselves about our congregation. This service is fully all-ages with great music from our choir.</p>
M A R C H	////////////////////////////////////
Sunday, 4/1	<p>10:30am — Worship Service: “Salvation”</p> <p>Noon — Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</p> <p>12:15pm — Social Justice Council monthly meeting in the RE space: all are welcome</p>



Students at the New Life School in Uganda get in line to start their day



Gathering at the Fairfax Courthouse on Valentine's Day to support a same-sex couple applying for a marriage license: Rev. Paige Getty, Channe 8 reporter, unknown, Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael, Kim Cleland, Unknown, Shelley Tamres

WEBS

Women's Earth-Based Spirituality at UUCS

The UUCS Women's Earth-Based Spirituality group has been meeting on the fourth Friday of every month since 2000. Recently, I had a chance to reflect on the group—past and present—with Kim Fitzgerald, a founding member who has been the group leader since 2009.

Patty: Can you believe that WEBS will celebrate its 12th anniversary in 2012? I remember what drew me to the already existing group in 2002, but what caused the group to start in the first place?

Kim: It started as a women's discussion group. We had some difficulty early on, determining what kind of group we wanted to be. One of the early members, Alissa Sorenson, introduced the idea of establishing a Pagan group, as she had been part of such a group at some point in her past. As I recall, we embraced the concept right away, and we looked to Alissa to lead the way. Unfortunately for us, her husband's job was transferred and they left the area. The group threatened to disband more than once, but in about 2002 when Becky Fockler took the reins, we found our voice and we became WEBS.

You've been part of the group for several years yourself, since before Katie was born. In your opinion, how has the group changed in that time?

Patty: I remember leading a "Witchcraft 101" workshop WEBS meeting when I was extremely pregnant with Katie, and then including her maybe four months later in her Naming or Wiccaning ceremony. What a contrast!

When I look back over the decade, I recall lots of changes, rather than a sense that the group used to be one thing and now it's another. There has always been a hunger for knowledge and instruction on a wide variety of subjects and a lot of people who are always willing to either bring their expertise to the circle or learn enough about a subject in order to present it to the rest of the group. Sometimes we gather together with potfuls of plant seedlings and spend the time exchanging plants. Regardless, there's always a lot of laughter and tasty treats to share. Several ladies have moved away over the years and one passed on several years ago.

However, what I love most is the dynamic of the circle when we gather. A buzz of our modern energy is always detectable, but somehow it still feels ancient, like something that might have much older roots. So much about modern earth-based practices relies on oral tradition and doing what "feels right," therefore I consider perception to be very important. When my eyes travel around the circle, making contact with the other participants, and my ears listen to their stories, I sense how women have probably always gathered stretching back many thousands of years. To me it definitely feels "right."

In addition to casting a circle of a particular tradition, and our sharing of stories, every month we cover a particular topic. Would you give some examples of what we have investigated, or what we might work on in the future?

Kim: As you pointed out, Patty, we've covered a wide range of topics, such as quantum physics, numerology, yoga, meditation, the power of crystals, healing rituals, reiki (a healing and relaxation technique that often includes laying on of hands), gardening, composting and rain barrels, plant exchange, the Incan calendar and 2012, and mandalas (concentric diagrams that have spiritual and ritual significance in both Buddhism and Hinduism).

Additionally, we've engaged in craft making, such as beading, drawing our own mandalas, candle making, blowing and decorating eggs, knitting, origami, and wheat weaving, including the making of Brigit's Crosses. We're not always good at these activities, but it is always a lot of fun!

As for what topics we might work on in the future, the group has always been open to learning about new things, although we enjoy sharing familiar rituals periodically, like drumming and guided meditations, usually every 3 or 4 months.

Personally, I have become interested in the idea that the collective thoughts of many people can be manifested into reality—the science behind the power of prayer, if you will. I hope to explore that idea further and to discuss it with the group. And frankly, there seems to be no end to the possible topics of the ways in which we as people can be spiritually fulfilled by interacting with the natural world around us.

I don't know how many people know that you will be taking over as the facilitator of WEBS within the next couple of months. I think it's going to be a very good change for the group, as you will bring a different energy and focus to WEBS. Perhaps you will provide some insight into your thoughts on topics for this year.

Patty: Including Mike, you, and myself, only three people knew! I look forward to leading the group as facilitator and hopefully presenting enough interesting subjects to keep members, both current and new, seeking and learning.

To take part in a WEBS gathering, you just attend. They are held every fourth Friday at UUCS at 7:00 pm. We always have a small potluck (sweets, cheese and crackers, fruit, tea, etc.) afterward, so feel free to bring a little something to share. You don't have to have any Pagan or earth-based spirituality background to take part. We look forward to welcoming new people to WEBS and continuing our journey of discovery of our ancestors' ways.