

# Unitarian Universalists of Sterling

*a congregation of open hearts and open minds*

November 2011

## Death

*While I thought that I was learning  
how to live, I have been learning how to die.*

—Leonardo daVinci

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### Annual UUS Auction

See page 4  
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details!

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### MINISTER'S MESSAGE

#### *Death in Plain View*

As a child, I was fascinated by mummies. When Natural History Museum of the Smithsonian hosted a traveling Egyptian exhibit, my mother and I took a train from Connecticut to Washington, DC. I stood for hours peering into the glass cases. I was awestruck.

Kate Braestrup, a Unitarian Universalist minister to the game wardens of Maine, wrote a memoir titled, "Here if You Need Me." The work traces her husband's early death and the years just before and after the loss. In one chapter, she gives a detailed account of the way she dressed her husband's body for burial. Rev. Braestrup, well acquainted with death through her profession, did not want a stranger to tend her husband's body; she wanted to serve every inch of his frame with her own attention and love.

Today, mummies scare children in a series of (pardon my judgement) despicable horror movies. Gore threatens to replace, for today's children—and

maybe adults—the awe we might otherwise feel at the sights of an Egyptian exhibit or the retelling from Braestrup's memoir. When I stared into the glass cases as a child, I wondered what it had felt like to dress a body—what it had meant to the caretakers to tend to a frame with every imaginable luxury: the oils, the perfumes, the time and attention.

Too often today, we fall prey to a dark fascination or fear of death. It is the stuff of horror and terror, from movies to the late night news. As we go forward into this month, with its liturgical theme of death, my hope is to take death out into the light, as Rev. Braestrup did with her husband's body, and tend to it with our deepest attention and awe. Death is, after all, one certainty of life, and it can be that which reminds us of life's ultimate meaning.

As always, I am available for pastoral care, should you wish to wrestle personally with this difficult topic.



Rev. Anya  
Sammler-Michael

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE***Can Death Enable Joy?*

*Dorine Colabella Scher,  
Board President*

I have read and heard that only in having an awareness of death can life have meaning. We have all probably heard the expression, "Live with the end in mind." Can we have an appreciation of how precious life is on a day to day basis only if we are cognizant of the immediacy of our days, whether we have 90 days left or 90 years?

Years ago, I took a class that encouraged living like today was your last day. "If that were the case," the course leader asked, "how much time would you spend being upset with people over silly things? Or would things that normally upset you seem silly? Would you take the time to tell the people who mattered to you that they'd made a difference in your life? How many things would you find as flaws in people around you if it were your last day? How much less flawed would our children or our parents be? On a purely selfish level, would you waste your time on these things?"

We were challenged to keep track of our actions for three days, writing down as much of how we spent our time as possible, paying special attention to what upset us. Drivers around us, long lines, people with poor manners... At the end of the experiment, we discussed the possibility of more-joyful, less-stressed, and less-encumbered lives if we remained cognizant of the fact that most of us really don't know how long we have. Would we be happy with how we had spent our last days? From there we created a context to live by that was consistent with living with the end in mind.



*Friends gather on Family Game Night*

**RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION  
MESSAGE***Mission to the Rescue*

*Linda Weaver,  
Director of Religious  
Exploration*

My parents had very different approaches to death. To my mother and her family, death was a sad but inevitable part of life. When someone died, everyone in the community attended the funeral. All ages of close family friends and mere acquaintances were there. In my father's family, children did not attend funerals and he seemed very uncomfortable with most aspects of death and funerals.

When my paternal grandfather died, my mother's explanation was matter-of-fact and comforting to me as a six-year-old. However, my father's reaction to my request to go to the funeral "to say good-bye" was that I most definitely would not go, and I did not. I could not shake the feeling that his response must mean that death was a whole lot scarier than my mother had indicated. I had trouble sleeping for a long time, wondering what happens to us after we die and what could be so terrible that I could not go to a funeral.

Talking with children about death can be very hard. However, experts in grief and children encourage parents to talk matter-of-factly with children, answer all questions in an age-appropriate manner, avoid euphemisms such as "sleeping" or "went away" that may be misunderstood, and be reassuring about the likelihood that the child or others close to them may die. It can be especially confusing to decide how to respond to questions related to beliefs about death. As a parent of a young child, my favorite approach when asked this type of question was to ask what the child thought, affirm those thoughts, and then, with a better understanding of the need being expressed by the question, share my own beliefs and an indication of the variety of beliefs that exist around the question.

If you would like to find out more about how to talk with your child about death, there are many good resources. One excellent article is *Talking to Children About Death* from the National Institutes of Health; it's available at [www.cc.nih.gov/ccc/patient\\_education/pepubs/childeath.pdf](http://www.cc.nih.gov/ccc/patient_education/pepubs/childeath.pdf).

## CALL TO ACTION: A SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL JOURNAL

### *Another Year of Social Justice*

**November Offering:** The UUS Social Justice Council (SJC) selected the Greater Washington Interfaith Power & Light (GW-IPL) as the recipient of our November loose plate Sunday collections because death is what will happen if we don't become better stewards of our world.

GW-IPL works with hundreds of congregations of all faiths across the DC area to save energy, go "green," and respond to



*Shelley Tamres*

climate change. GW-IPL helps congregations promote environmental education in worship, teaching, preaching and advocacy. GW-IPL helps congregations go green by supporting energy conservation and clean power. GW-IPL is part of a network of local Interfaith Power & Light groups across the country that are building a national religious response to the climate crisis.

**October News:** Thanks to your extremely generous contributions during the month of September, we sent \$422.65 to the Jeannie Schmidt Free Clinic in Herndon.

Yvonne Centala and I attended a rally downtown on October 7 outside the final State Department hearing on the Keystone XL Pipeline, aka the Tar Sands Pipeline. We also attended the last hour of the hearing and listened to interesting speakers on both sides of the issue. We will be attending the last big protest rally at 2 p.m. on Sunday, November 6, hopefully with several other UUSers. The rally organizers plan to encircle the White House with people 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!" Please contact me if you would like to participate.

Kim Cleland led a group of UUS parents and children (Alyssa Lum with Molly, Maggie, and Charlie; Paul and Stephanie Roche; Linda Weaver; and Kim's son Xavier) to participate in a Complete the Circle event in Fairfax County on October 16. The participants, wearing colored T-shirts, were arranged in a design of two hands holding an ear of corn and an apple so that an aerial photograph could be taken. Participants donated nonperishable foods to the Our Daily Bread food pantry. A total of 3,000 lbs. of food was raised. UUS food donations filled up the back of Kim's car. Way to go, UUS!

**Join Us:** The SJC meetings are normally held the first Sunday of each month after the service at 12:15 p.m. in the RE space. However, the November meeting will be the 2nd Sunday (same time and place). Hope to see you there!

*Shelley Tamres*

**December Service Opportunity:** This December the Social Justice Council will again be 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](mailto: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 11, and receipts for tax purposes are available upon request.

*Lisa Groat, Ayuda social worker*

### Want to share something in the December newsletter?

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the December liturgical theme, Hope.
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in December or the first two weeks of January)
- ✓ Group or committee updates (what you accomplished, what's planned for next month, etc.)
- ✓ Recent photos taken at UUS or during UUS events

Please send anything you'd like to include to [newsletter@uusterling.org](mailto:newsletter@uusterling.org) by November 15th.



## CALENDAR

### *Stay Up to Date With UUS Events*

#### ***Friday, November 4th, 6:30pm – First Friday event***

Movie night and auction preparations. An evening of fellowship, fun, potluck food, auction preparations, and a movie for children.

#### ***Sunday, November 6th, 10:30am – Worship Service: “Death: Love and Life”***

Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael invites deep and honest consideration of this month's liturgical theme. The choir will sing and an inquirer's class will follow the service at noon.

#### ***Saturday, November 12th, 6–10pm – The UUS Auction***

Our annual fundraising gala that is too much fun to miss and too important to the vitality of our congregation to ignore! Live Auction, Silent Auction, Children's Auction where all are winners, Potluck Chili and Cornbread Dinner, and more fun than a barrel of monkeys! Bring your family, bring your friends. To donate items, vacation weeks, dinners, events, or services, email Nancy McCormick [nbmuus@verizon.net](mailto:nbmuus@verizon.net). To donate gently used children's items to the Children's Auction, email Karen Houck [Kubbieh@hotmail.com](mailto:Kubbieh@hotmail.com). To help with the event, email Dorine Collabella [scherchef@msn.com](mailto:scherchef@msn.com). To sign up for the potluck, email Shelley Tamres [shelleytam@aol.com](mailto:shelleytam@aol.com).

#### ***Sunday, November 13th, 10:30am – Worship service: “Reinventing our Allegiances”***

After a loss, when all the children leave for college, when we enter our twilight years, how do we redefine our purpose and reinvent ourselves? In this new paradigm, who are we called to serve and how? With help from Trish and Harry Harris, Rev. Anya delivers the sermon purchased at last year's auction by Bill and Shelly Roman and a jazz trio will play.

#### ***Sunday, November 13th, 5–8:30pm – “Day of Thanks” dinner and performance***

The Loudoun Interfaith Bridges dinner is a celebration of the diversity in Loudoun County. Rev. Anya serves as the president of Bridges and UUS is a member congregation. For more information, see page 7.

#### ***Sunday, November 20th, 10:30am – Worship service: “Anger and the Warrior Gene”***

Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael delivers the second sermon in her series on the Seven Deadly Sins. Our choir will sing and we will spend time in prayer and meditation, contemplating the time of Thanksgiving.

#### ***Sunday, November 27th, 10:30am – Worship service: “Inclusion: Setting the Welcome Table”***

An intergenerational service led by Rev. Anya that will introduce this year's social justice theme while honoring the spiritual work of welcoming.

## 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.

### November: Death

**November 6–12**

**“Grief” by Kristina Brown**

*It has been longer this time...  
Since he has swum up to the surface again  
All hot and stinging bringing with him his weapon of sorrow  
I have wondered when he would be back  
I thought he had drowned  
Last time he was gone a few months  
The time before only three weeks  
Sometimes I miss him Like an old friend  
Who knows me too well  
Shows me myself  
And for a moment,  
Sets me free*

**November 13–19**

**From Rev. Forrest Church**

*Religion is the human response to being alive and having to die.*

**November 20–26**

**A Poem by Mary Oliver**

*To live in this world  
you must be able  
to do three things:*

*To love what is mortal;  
to hold it  
against your bones knowing  
your own life depends on it;*

*And when the time comes to let  
it go,  
to let it go.*

**November 27–December 3**

**Canto XXXIV from The Inferno by Dante**

*“To get back up to the shining world from there  
My guide and I went into that hidden tunnel,*

*And Following its path, we took no care  
To rest, but climbed: he first, then I—so far,  
through a round aperture I saw appear*

*Some of the beautiful things that Heaven bears,  
Where we came forth, and once more saw the stars.*

### First Fridays

**By Karen Houck**

Make sure to hold the first Friday of each month on your calendar—there will be many great things to do at UUS on those dates! The events will differ throughout the year, but they will always include all ages: everyone is always welcome for fellowship and conversation.

The next First Friday is November 4, which will be a movie night and auction planning event. Join us for a potluck at 6:30 and the movie *Rio* will start at 7:00. Nancy McCormick will be there and is asking for help getting ready for the auction. The First Friday event on December 6 will be holiday decorating—more information will follow.

## SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

*Adapted from "The Mustard-Seed Medicine: A Story from India" in From Long Ago and Many Lands by Sophia Lyon Fahs.*

Kisa Gotami was a beautiful young woman with a happy life and a beautiful little boy. She loved her son more than anyone else in all the world. But one day, the little boy suddenly became very sick. Even though his mother and father did everything they knew how to do for him, the little boy did not get well. In a few days he died.

Kisa Gotami could not believe her little boy was really dead. She thought some kind of medicine would surely wake him up. So she went from door to door and begged each neighbor she saw, "Please give me some medicine to cure my little boy." But each neighbor in turn looked at the boy's face and shook her head sadly. The neighbors all felt very sorry for Kisa Gotami.

Finally she met a man on the street who said encouragingly: "Go to Buddha; he can always help people." So Kisa Gotami hurried to the home of Buddha. She stood before the great man and said, "Good Buddha, I am told you are always able to help people in trouble. Please give me some medicine that will cure my child."

Buddha looked tenderly at the anxious mother. "My good woman, you must help me find the medicine," said Buddha kindly. "Go and bring me a handful of mustard seed. But remember this: The mustard seed must be taken from a house where no one has ever died or it will be of no use."

Kisa Gotami thanked Buddha. First she went hopefully to her next-door neighbor. "Have you a handful of mustard seed?" she asked. "Buddha says it will cure my child."

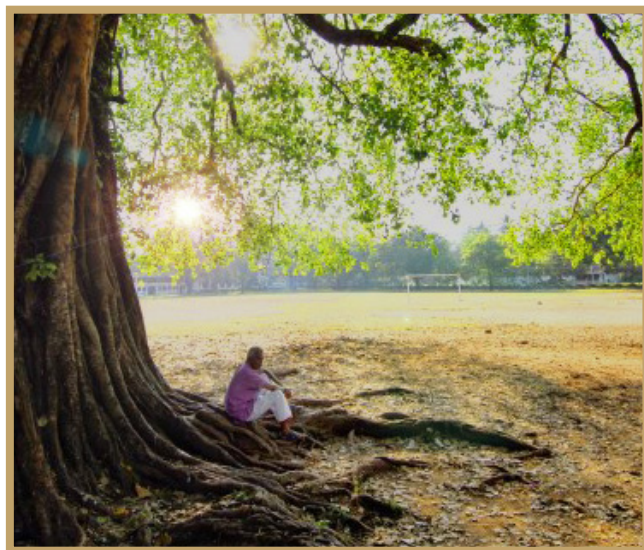
"Certainly I have mustard seed. I will gladly give you a handful and more."

"Thank you so much, kind neighbor," said Kisa Gotami, "but before taking the seed I must ask you a question. Has anyone ever died in your house—a father or grandmother or anyone else?"

"O Kisa dear, have you forgotten?" said the neighbor in surprise. "Our dear grandfather died here scarcely more than a year ago."

At every door it was the same. At last, tired and discouraged, Kisa Gotami went outside the village and sat down under a banyan tree. She knew now that even Buddha had no medicine for her child. Tears blinded her eyes. As she sat quietly, she slowly began to feel peaceful. After all, she was not all alone and deserted. Nor did she feel that her little boy was all alone. The little boy she loved was gone, his body had died, just as thousands of other persons' bodies had died before. Just as everybody in all the world must sometime die. Kisa Gotami felt that all people were together in dying. No one was ever all alone.

She was beginning to understand why Buddha had sent her to get the handful of mustard seed. But she wanted him to tell her, so she went back to his home. Buddha greeted her gently and asked, "Good woman, have you brought the mustard seed?"



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Kisa Gotami answered, "No, my lord. There is no house in all the village where someone has not at sometime died."

Buddha said, "Our lives in this world are all short, whether we live for one year or for a hundred years. Everyone who is born must sometime die—yes, everyone. There are no exceptions. We all have our times of happiness and also our times of pain and sorrow. Do not try to free yourself from suffering. Try rather to free yourself from hate and selfishness." Buddha continued, "Accept your life as a gift and fill each day as full of kindness as you can."

Now that Kisa Gotami knew how much it hurt to be lonely, she began to learn how to comfort others who also were sad. She went often to the homes of the poor. She brought them food. She played with their children. In these ways, she slowly learned how to comfort herself.

### *Family Discussion*

Why did Buddha send Kisa Gotami to get the mustard seed? How did Kisa Gotami comfort herself?

If you have had a pet die, how did you feel? What was different about your pet after it died?

What did you do or what could you do to comfort yourself?

What do you or your family do to remember a pet or a relative who has died?



*Sunset hike in the Blue Ridge Mountains*



*Family Game Night in full swing*

### *Loudoun Interfaith Bridges Day of Thanks*

The member congregations of Loudoun Interfaith Bridges are welcoming all ages to the third annual Day of Thanks. Loudoun Interfaith Bridges is a group of diverse faith communities committed to cooperation and dialogue. They are especially grateful to be celebrating the organization's five-year anniversary this season.

The event features traditional Thanksgiving favorites along with authentic vegetarian specialties. This year's special guest speaker is Bill Aiken, the Chairman of the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington. There will be inspiring live music by various performers, including some from UUS.

The event theme is "A Time to Be Thankful": please bring nonperishable food items to fill the empty cornucopias as a symbol of gratitude and in remembrance of those less fortunate. All donations of will be distributed through a local food pantry to Loudoun residents.

**Date:** Sunday, November 13, 5–8:30pm

**Location:** Northern Virginia Baha'i Center  
21415 Cardinal Glen Circle, Sterling, VA 20164

**Tickets:** \$15 per adult, \$10 per child age 12 and under (children under 5 are free) or \$40 per family

**Pre-registration required:** please visit [www.loudoun-interfaithbridges.org/events.html](http://www.loudoun-interfaithbridges.org/events.html) or send a check or money order (payable to BRIDGES) to PO Box 6165, Leesburg, VA 20178.