

# Unitarian Universalists of Sterling

a congregation of open hearts and open minds

October 2011

## Forgiveness

***“Forgiveness is the answer to the child’s dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is again made clean.”***

*—Dag Hammarskjöld, Unitarian and World Leader*

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### Lectio Divina Prayer and Meditation Circle

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for details.

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Borders, the bookstore, was closing. Three full shelves were lined with books on forgiveness. Some spoke of Christian precepts, others were from the Dalai Lama, but most dealt primarily with the psychological merits of forgiving oneself or another. Forgive and you will find salvation. Forgive and you will be free. Forgive and you will live fully.

In our era, British Prime Minister Tony Blair apologized to the Irish for the potato famine, the Pope apologized for the crusades, and mass murderers apologized in front of the South African Truth Commission. Is all of this apologizing simply moral exhibitionism? Are we one step closer to creating a moral landscape where people honestly have the means to forgive and be forgiven, or are we simply subverting moral thought? In this era of public apology, how do we tease the morally relevant from the morally subversive?

Looking back, one apology stands out. German Prime Minister Willy Brandt fell to his knees in front of the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial in 1970. Admitting that he had no words to nullify, to transcend, to escape

the tragedy of a history his nation had perpetuated, he fell to his knees. (Read the article from Facing History and Ourselves at <http://tj.facinghistory.org/reading/what-people-do-when-words-fail-them>.)

For some reason, Brandt’s apology, more than so many others, feels saving. If something is saved, maybe it is the hope we have in the hu-

man soul’s ability to feel honest contrition, and act accordingly. Maybe what is saved is the human soul’s relationship to the holy—a relationship that, from time to time, is manifest in acts that derive solely from love.

This month, we will wrestle with forgiveness, teasing its meaning and power from this era of public apology that threatens to cheapen one of the most essential human expressions. This is necessary work, and it can be difficult work. One thing I have learned while preparing for this

theme is that forgiveness is hard to achieve alone. Forgiveness comes with more ease when an individual feels supported by others in community. Please know I am available for pastoral conversations; just call or email in advance.

### MINISTER’S MESSAGE

#### *The Era of Public Apology*



*Rev. Anya  
Sammler-Michael*

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE***The Gift and Art of Forgiveness*

Dorine Colabella  
Scher,  
Board President

I have a very dear friend. The operative word here is “have.” It could have easily read, “I *had* a very dear friend.” Many years ago, I did something that hurt him deeply. It challenged our friendship to such an extent that even as I asked to be forgiven, I could not have faulted him for denying my request.

Last week as I spoke to him about this article topic, I thanked him again for the gift of forgiving me. He said that he was the one who has been given the gift. “If I hadn’t forgiven you, not only would my pain not have been lessened, I would have missed out on all the beautiful memories we have made since. You gave me the gift of forgiveness.” This is such an interesting twist on our typical concepts of forgiveness. Who gives and who receives the gift? Maybe we never considered that forgiving someone is actually a gift to ourselves.

Is forgiveness more difficult to ask for or to grant? I say that both can require tremendous courage. To ask for forgiveness, one has to recognize that what they have said or done has offended another, appreciate the relationship enough that they care to preserve the integrity of it, and then actually ask for forgiveness, putting themselves at risk of having their request rejected. It also likely involves needing to forgive yourself in some capacity.

To forgive, does one have to be offended or hurt in some way and either be asked for forgiveness or make a request that an apology be made? Or can it simply require letting go of the offense and moving past it to restore the relationship?

Maybe the more we are connected to one of our basic UU principles, *respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part*, the easier it is to appreciate one another’s flaws and thus give and receive the gift of forgiving.

**RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION  
MESSAGE***Covenant and the Gift of Forgiveness*

*We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. [One] who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us.*

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Forgiveness is a gift you can give to another person, yourself, and your community. When you say, “I forgive you,” you may open the path to friendship, offering a connection to yourself. Forgiveness can be a gift you give yourself as you let go of hatred and resentment. It is also a gift you give your community as you restore peace and open yourself to deeper relationships with others.

A big part of being a Unitarian Universalist is learning to live together in a community of peace and justice. It can be both a joyful and challenging endeavor, requiring compassion and forgiveness. Our children begin to experience this in the religious education groups on Sunday mornings. In September or October, each children’s RE group creates its own covenant. This is an agreement that addresses how the members of the group want to be treated and how they will treat each other. The covenant is the foundation for creating a community that allows the entire group to build trust and connect with one another openly and honestly. We recognize that these promises are not always easy to keep, so groups are also encouraged to discuss ways to help members return to the covenant when they stray. These clearly stated boundaries help create a place where everyone knows what to expect of others and where forgiveness is more easily given as processes are already in place to make sure everyone in the group feels welcome.

We hope you will join us this month as we explore forgiveness and covenant.

*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](http://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*

**October Offering:** To honor the October liturgical theme of Forgiveness, the UUS Social Justice Council (SJC) has chosen to give the October loose plate Sunday collections to LAWS, the Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter. UUS has supported LAWS since our early days and we are proud to continue our support of this worthwhile cause.



**Oil Protests:** John Botts and Shelley Tamres attended a rally downtown in Lafayette Park on September 3rd to encourage the administration to rule against the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline, also known as the Tar Sands Pipeline. The proposed pipeline extension

would run from the Canadian province of Alberta to the Houston, Texas, area refineries. It would greatly increase the extraction of the world's dirtiest oil deposits (extracted from tar sands), pipe it through the Ogallala Aquifer (the most important source of water for the High Plains region), and allow the Canadian owners to sell their crude on the overseas market at a much greater profit.

The rally culminated two weeks of civil disobedience in which more than 1,200 people were arrested for staging daily sit-ins in front of the White House. The Rev. Terry Ellen, Executive Director of UUSJ, was one of the protesters arrested. See [www.tarsandsaction.org](http://www.tarsandsaction.org) for more information. There will be another rally at noon on Friday, October 7th, during the final State Department hearing. Please contact Shelley Tamres if you would like to participate.

**SJC Information:** We plan to improve the signage in the Margaret Fuller Social Justice Nook in the back of the hallway beyond the pantry and nursery. We have bulletin boards, pamphlets on various subjects, recycling bins, a box for non-perishable food donations for the Interfaith Food Bank, and a small lending library of books and documentaries. Please check it out and look for improvements in the near future.

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

## UPCOMING LIFESPAN EDUCATION

### Children and Youth Choir: Session I

Our celebrated music director, Kris Adams, is honored to work with all ages. If your children like the idea of making music and being involved in worship, enroll them in one, two, or three Children's Choir sessions. Children and youth ages 4–18 are welcome. Practices will be from 11:30–12:15 (immediately following RE) on October 2nd and 9th; performance will be on Sunday, October 16 (please arrive by 9:45). Enroll by emailing [administrator@uusterling.org](mailto:administrator@uusterling.org)

### Unitarian Universalist Parents, "Family Values"

This year, children in our religious exploration classes will delve into age-appropriate curricula designed to pique and tune their ethical compasses. This class will give parents the opportunity to delve deeper into the art of ethical engagement while discovering ways to continue their children's learning at home. One focus will be helping modern UU families wrestle with societal pressures, another will be preparation for the December holidays.

**Leaders:** *Linda Weaver, Rev. Anya, and Lifespan Faith Development Council Members*

**Dates:** *October 9 and 23, November 13 and 20*

**Time:** *12:15–1:45pm*

Enroll by emailing [administrator@uusterling.org](mailto:administrator@uusterling.org)

### Spiritual Practices: Prayer and Meditation Circle

Beginning this year, congregants of the Unitarian Universalists of Sterling are invited to participate in the spiritual 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. (See more explanation on page 5.) Although *Lectio Divina* can be an individual practice, our Prayer and Meditation Circle will meet to engage the material, deepening our practice by sharing it with a community.

**Leader:** *Rev. Anya*

**Location:** *UUS, Rev. Anya's Office*

**Dates:** *Thursdays in October and November (October 6, 13, and 27; November 3, 10, and 17. Please note that the class is not scheduled to meet on October 20.)*

**Time:** *6-7:15pm*

Enroll by emailing [administrator@uusterling.org](mailto:administrator@uusterling.org)

## CALENDAR

### Stay Up to Date with UUS Events

#### Saturday, October 1st, 10:00am–4:00pm — *UUS Congregational Retreat*

At UU Congregation of Frederick, MD. All friends and members are welcome. Childcare and activities for all ages.

#### Sunday, October 2nd, 10:30am — *Worship Service: "Forgiveness"*

Rev. Anya delves into the limits and purpose of forgiveness, Andy Johnson sings Appalachian ballads (including one he wrote for our congregation), and our offering will go fully to support the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's hunger relief work in Somalia.

#### Sunday, October 2nd, 12:00pm — *Inquirer's Class*

Join Rev. Anya and Terry Dick for a conversation on Unitarian Universalism as well as the particulars of congregational life. Newcomers to our congregation are welcome to attend one or more Inquirer's classes.

#### Friday, October 7th, 6:00pm — *First Friday: Family Game Night at UUS*

Back by popular demand! Family and friends of all ages welcome for games, conversation and pizza. A donation of \$5/person or \$10/family is suggested to cover the cost of pizza. Feel free to bring a side dish, dessert or drink, and of course, your favorite games to share. Please RSVP to Karen Houck, [kubbieh@hotmail.com](mailto:kubbieh@hotmail.com) or Linda Weaver, [re-director@uusterling.org](mailto:re-director@uusterling.org) so we know how much pizza to order.

#### Sunday, October 9th, 10:30am — *Worship Service*

Rev. Scott Sammler-Michael returns to UUS and our choir, directed by Kris Adams, will sing.

#### Sunday, October 16th, 10:30am — *Worship Service: "Inclusion"*

Rev. Anya leads this intergenerational service, which will present our Social Justice theme for the year. All are invited to bring mementos of pets, living and remembered, as this service will include an animal blessing. Our choir and children's choir will sing.

#### Sunday, October 16th, 2–5pm — *Complete the Circle project for Our Daily Bread*

Contact Kim Cleland, [ballroomvet@hotmail.com](mailto:ballroomvet@hotmail.com), or Linda Weaver, [re-director@uusterling.org](mailto:re-director@uusterling.org) to participate or find out more.

#### Sunday, October 23rd, 10:30am — *Worship Service: "Sloth: Spiritual Exhaustion"*

Rev. Anya's first service in her sermon series on the Seven Deadly Sins will include the energized music of the JUUSTUUS band headed by Kris Adams.

#### Sunday, October 30th, 10:30am — *Worship Service: "Conviction and a Call for Civility"*

Rev. Rebekah Montgomery, Unitarian Universalist Military Chaplain, returns to UUS. As UUs, we are called to demonstrate tolerance, compassion, and love for our friends, neighbors, and wider community. This sermon will explore how we engage and can be in relationship with those with whom we disagree passionately, but are still called to respect and even love.

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

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the November liturgical theme, *Death*.
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in November and December)
- ✓ 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](mailto:newsletter@uusterling.org) by October 15th.

## A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

### October: Forgiveness

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 Universalist 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.

#### October 2–8

##### A stanza from “The House by the Side of the Road” by Sam Walter Foss

*Let me live in a house by the side of the road,  
Where the race of men go by—  
The men who are good and the men who are bad,  
As good and as bad as I.  
I would not sit in the scorner's seat,  
Or hurl the cynic's ban;—  
Let me live in a house by the side of the road  
And be a friend to man.*

#### October 9–15

##### Reflection from Eric Hoffer

*The remarkable thing is that we really love our neighbor as ourselves: we do unto others as we do unto ourselves. We hate others when we hate ourselves. We are tolerant toward others when we tolerate ourselves. We forgive others when we forgive ourselves. We are prone to sacrifice others when we are ready to sacrifice ourselves.*

#### October 16–22

##### “Healing” by D.H. Lawrence

*I am a mechanism, an assembly of various sections.  
And it is not because the mechanism is working wrongly,  
that I am ill.  
I am ill because of wounds to the soul, to the deep emotional  
self  
and the wounds to the soul take a long, long time, only time  
can help  
and patience, and a certain difficult repentance,  
long, difficult repentance, realisation of life's mistake, and the  
freeing oneself  
from the endless repetition of the mistake  
which mankind at large has chosen to sanctify.*

#### October 23–29

##### Selections from The Parable of the Lost Son, Luke 15:11–24

*Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.*

*“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living... When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father.*

*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

*“But the father said to his servants, ‘Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”*

#### October 30–November 5

##### From the poet Hafiz of Persia

*Even after all this time,  
The sun never says to the earth,  
“You owe me.”  
Look what happens with  
A love like that.  
It lights the whole sky.*

## SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

### *The Burden, a Zen Story*

Two monks were returning to a monastery in the evening. It had rained and there were puddles of water on the road sides. At one place, a beautiful young woman was unable to walk across the road because of a puddle of water. The elder of the two monks went up to her, lifted her up, carried her to the other side of the road, and then continued on his way to the monastery.

In the evening, the younger monk came to the elder monk and said, "Sir, as monks, we cannot touch a woman."

The elder monk answered, "Yes, brother."

Then the younger monk asked again, "But then, sir, how is it that you lifted that woman on the roadside?"

The elder monk smiled at him and told him, "I left her on the other side of the road, but you are still carrying her."



### *Family Discussion*

When the elder monk said, "But you are still carrying her," what did he mean?

What have you carried longer than necessary? Have you ever worried about something that has passed? Have you ever continued to be upset with someone long after they hurt you?

How does carrying something so long affect you? If you have something you would like to leave, consider writing or drawing it on a slip of paper and then rip up or burn the paper.

Is there someone you would like to forgive or someone you would like to ask to forgive you? Talk about how you might go about doing this.

After you have forgiven someone or been forgiven, how do you feel?

## Notice of UUS By-laws Amendment Meeting

A meeting will be held on October 23rd, 2011, at 11:45am to vote on the following by-laws change:

### Article I Name

The name of this religious society shall be  
"Unitarian Universalist *Congregation* of Sterling".

**If you are a member**, you have received official notice of this meeting. **If you are not a member** and would like to vote on this name change amendment, see any board member or our membership chair, Terry Dick, before October 23rd to sign our membership book.

**Summary of events:** UUS members voted at our Annual Meeting in 2010 to hold a series of discussions about changing our name. From October 2010 through this summer, we held small group discussions with the focus on who we are and how we want to present ourselves to the wider community. By a simple majority, UUS members voted at our Annual Meeting in May 2011 to add 'Congregation' to our name. The final step is to amend our by-laws to reflect this change.

**What does this mean?** Two thirds of our membership, not just two thirds of those present at the meeting, must vote to change our name. We currently have 85 members, 56 of whom must vote yes for our name to change. Absentee ballots will be available to members who are unable to attend the meeting. *Email ballots will not be considered.*

**Questions?** Contact Bonnie Lepoff at [blepoff@verizon.net](mailto:blepoff@verizon.net) or Dorine Scher at [scherchef@msn.com](mailto:scherchef@msn.com).