

January 2013

## Grace

***Nothing is quite beautiful alone; nothing but is beautiful in the whole.  
A single object is only so far beautiful as it suggests this universal grace.***

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

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### Leaving a Legacy

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We will never know the ends of our actions. If you took a moment this past holiday season to remember the least of us—to give a gift to an underprivileged child, to send a check to a charity, to inscribe a letter to a once-isolated member of your family—you reached out beyond your usual influence and changed the world. The truth of your generosity will outstretch your witness. No good act fades into obscurity, yet we, as individuals, only inhabit inches of a truth that unfolds for untold distances.

This is where I land on the reality of grace. No human understands the untold distances—not time nor space. And not a one of us could level these reaches with a description fit their magnitude nor their beauty. Still they exist and they exist in relationship to us, and to each and every being gifted by life.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the transcendentalist and once Unitarian minister, attempts to unveil the mystery of this relationship. In his essay on beauty, he notes, “Nothing is quite beautiful alone; nothing but is beautiful in the whole.” Even though we can’t comprehend the whole completely, Emerson discerns that the beauty we can and do appreciate wins its truth in relationship to that “so much more” that

we do not comprehend. He goes on, “A single object is only so far beautiful as it suggests this universal grace.”

Everything we see, touch, feel, hear, or understand is restricted by our limits, but everything also unfolds beyond us and calls us to appreciate the whole of which we are a part. Some call this whole *God*. Others term it *infinity* or *creativity*. Emerson uses the term *universal grace* to explain both our relationship to the whole and our experience of that relationship.

### MINISTER'S MESSAGE

***Untold Distances and the Unfolding of Grace***



Rev. Anya  
Sammler-Michael

Imagine you are watching a sunset in stillness and peace. You may feel both utterly present to the moment and held by an infinity of moments. You may feel awake to the beauty before you and held by the beauty that ever is and every will be. This is grace—it is what connects us to that which is beyond, yet ever present. Though we may never know the ends of our beneficent actions, nor the name to give the beneficent whole to which we are a part, I pray that we will experience what Emerson calls universal grace, what you may call *connection*, what I simply call *grace*. We are a part of something so much bigger than ourselves—and astounding blessings unfold from this truth. May they do so for you.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### Growing Grace

Let's think back to the night of our church auction for a moment. There was a wonderful catered Italian meal, fabulous silent and live auction items, tasty wine, a fantastic auctioneer, conversation, laughter, truffles, members, friends, guests, ministers, and a random number. Everything present that evening represented months of careful planning and hard work by several members of our congregation; my heartfelt thanks goes out to everyone who attended the event and to all those who gave generously to make it the most financially successful auction in the history of UUCS. Yet when I think about all

the bounty, it still doesn't quite represent my experience of that event. There was something more present that evening that is much harder to plan for or to describe. Not so long ago I might have characterized it as the energy of the room, but now, I recognize that extra something as grace.

Grace has been a difficult concept for me to grasp within the context of my UU faith, but thankfully several UU ministers have embraced the term and have summarily defined grace as what happens when a community (or an individual) works to achieve something greater than themselves. For me this is a very organic interpretation of grace, springing from the roots of a community rather than being received as a divine gift from above as held by interpretations from many other faith traditions. To me, this organic interpretation of grace really does fit well with what I see happening at UUCS.

Besides the auction, I also now recognize grace in other things that we do at UUCS. I feel it when our choir sings on Sunday morning and when we came together to help heal some of the loss felt recently in our community and our country. I believe grace will grow out of the work we are doing to refocus our social justice program and to renew our strategic plan. Believe it or not, I even think that some subtle form of grace arises from the work that gets done during finance committee and board meetings! Perhaps the nature of the work we do at UUCS makes it relatively easy for me to recognize grace within the walls our community. I expect that the greater challenge will be to recognize and attain grace in the things we see and do outside our community. Thanks to this community and my UU faith, I certainly feel much better equipped to do so.



Christopher Houck,  
Board President

## RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

### Unexpected Blessings

As I work to fulfill requirements for the Unitarian Universalist Association's Religious Education Credentialing, which recognizes religious educators for completing a formalized program of professional development, I reflect on how experiences in my life have informed my professional work and realize that many were blessings of unexpected connection with others.

Several times while I was growing up, my mother woke the family early in the morning to go birdwatching. We would get up before the sun rose, usually with grumbling about the early hour, and then drive to Wild Cat Den State Park. We tried to identify birds by their sounds. Then, as it got lighter we attempted, to see the birds. Although we were not very successful as birdwatchers, we enjoyed the changing morning light and appreciated the trees and cliffs that hid the birds from our view. My mother introduced me to the wonder of the world in many other ways. We planted flowers and vegetables; identified rocks and leaves; visited the homes of people who changed the world or their small corners; and discussed the nature of God, death, and evil, exploring our own answers and those of others. Each of these shared experiences provided a glimpse of grace, a recognition of unexpected blessings from God or the universe.



Linda Weaver,  
Director of  
Religious Exploration

I have felt the grace of shared experiences while at a graduate seminar in which each participant was exploring a different aspect of African American history. One researched the Harlem Renaissance and created lesson plans for her fourth grade class. Another studied the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) discovering connections between his Jewish roots and the civil rights movement. Yet another, a semi-retired minister, explored the history of the African American family in the hope of discovering new ways to address challenges faced by families he served. He recognized the relationship between past oppression, including slavery, and the challenges members of his own family had faced, while discovering the powerful working of agency in the lives of individuals who refused to let prejudice define them. We each brought our own experiences to the group and we learned from each other. We were all transformed in some way.

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## IMMIGRATION TASK FORCE

### *Introducing Your Immigration Task Force*

At our annual retreat in October, members of this church gathered to develop our focus for the year. The theme of the retreat was social justice. With the expert guidance of Rev. Louise Green (former Social Justice minister at All Souls DC), we learned about building coalitions that represent the community and achieve great things. One of the challenges here at UUCS has been making an impact when there are so many avenues for fighting injustice. We came to realize that all of these efforts, although noble, are not the most effective use of our resources, knowledge, experience, time, money, and passion. We want a social justice issue that offers ways for all of our members to participate and join in the work of building the world we dream about.

After a lot of soul searching, we selected immigration as our issue. This issue demonstrates our affirmation of the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and it fits with our UUA Welcoming Congregation program and our Journey Toward Wholeness work. This issue is acute and chronic and although it is a national (actually worldwide) issue, it also has direct, immediate, local impact.

We have taken up the challenge to put our faith in action and develop programs that address immigration and associated issues of injustice. The Immigration Task Force (ITF) is proud to announce the Family Connections program. The idea is to bring UUCS families into direct relationship with immigrant families through Ayuda. Families joining the program make the commitment to meet regularly and share experiences, resources, and fellowship. The ITF will provide support, such as info about interpreters in the congregation and other community resources. We will host events for the Family Connections participants, such as potluck dinners and movie nights.

Our goal is to have 10 or more UUCS families actively involved in the Family Connections program by March 2013. We are designing and planning the program organically and your input is vital. We have plans for workshops and speakers on the topic of immigration and we invite your ideas. For more information, please feel free to contact Joan Johnson ([jojobeltway@gmail.com](mailto:jojobeltway@gmail.com)), Lisa Groat ([lisagroat@yahoo.com](mailto:lisagroat@yahoo.com)), or Arin Beals ([arinbeals@gmail.com](mailto:arinbeals@gmail.com)).

The ITF meets the first Sunday of every month at 12:15 in the mezzanine. Please join us!

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Due to the generosity of this congregation, I am benefiting from collaborative learning experiences in many workshops and meetings. These experiences have been brought back to the congregation in the work I do and the conversations I have with parents and leaders. In one workshop, I learned more about serving children with special needs. After that, every teacher orientation at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling (UUCS) has included ideas for adapting lesson plans and setting up classrooms to address different learning styles and abilities. Due to extensive reading and participation in a learning module with other religious educators, I identified and adapted lesson plans to help children gain multicultural awareness and practice skills necessary to stand up for themselves and others. I have also had several opportunities to join with others to consider the trends and future of religious education. During almost every workshop, learning module, online seminar, and professional organization meeting I attend, I gain knowledge and perspective from others in the room as they share their own challenges, wisdom, and ideas. I am extremely grateful to UUCS for providing these opportunities.

I appreciate each person who has been part of these moments of grace when wisdom, understanding, and wonder were shared. I realize that as much as from anyone else, I have learned from the unique experiences and perspectives of each person at UUCS and I am grateful for the open hearts and minds that share so generously. We each have something to offer and I encourage you to recognize the wonderful blessing of grace that is available to you and that you make available to everyone you meet.

*Children's Religious Education topics and a list of programs and events for children and families is on the calendar at the UUCS website, [www.uusterling.org](http://www.uusterling.org).*

# A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

## January: Grace

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. 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.

*we do not need.*

*In plenitude too free,  
we have become adept  
beneath the yoke of greed.  
Those who will not learn  
in plenty to keep their place  
must learn it by their need  
when they have had their way  
and the fields spurn their seed.  
We have failed Thy grace.  
God, I flinch and pray,  
send Thy necessity.*

### January 28–31

From Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve.... You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.*



## RECYCLING ETIQUETTE

There are recycling containers in three locations at UUCS: in the fellowship area, the RE space, and the Social Justice Nook (at the back of the building past the nursery). Volunteers from our congregation are maintaining the recycling program because recyclables are not collected from our building. Please be especially careful to not place actual garbage in any of these containers: doing so creates a hardship for our volunteers.

Please pay careful attention to what may be placed in the containers: each one has a sign either on or above it indicating what may or may not be recycled. Paper cups and napkins belong in the garbage containers, not the recycling bins.

Please rinse cans and bottles that do not have tops to eliminate spills of the contents.

If you have children who are old enough to roam the fellowship area on their own, please be sure to point out the difference between the recycling container and the garbage containers.

Thank you so much for helping UUCS to be green!

### January 1–6

Lyrics from John Newton

*Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*

### January 7–13

From Simone Weil

*Just as the power of the sun is the only force in the natural universe that causes a plant to grow against gravity, so the grace of the holy is the only force in the spiritual universe that causes a person to grow against the gravity of their own ego.*

### January 14–20

From Marcus Aurelius

*He who lives in harmony with himself lives in harmony with the universe.*

### January 21–27

We Who Prayed and Wept by Wendell Berry

*We who prayed and wept  
for liberty from kings  
and yoke of liberty  
accept the tyranny of things*

## SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

### *Indra's Magnificent Jeweled Net: A traditional Buddhist and Hindu story*

Far, far away, in the abode of the great god Indra, king of heaven, hangs a wondrous vast net, much like a spider's web in intricacy and loveliness. It stretches out indefinitely in all directions. At each node, or crossing point, of the net hangs a single glittering jewel. Since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. The sparkling jewels hang there, suspended in and supported by the net, glittering like stars, dazzling to behold.

Close your eyes, now, and imagine what this magnificent jeweled net looks like, spread across the vast expanse of space. Now, keep your eyes closed and move in close to one jewel in the net. Look closely, and you will see that the polished surface of the gem reflects all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number, just as two mirrors placed opposite each other reflect an image ad infinitum. Each jewel reflected in this gem you are gazing into also reflects all the other jewels, so that the process of reflection is itself infinite.

Now open your eyes, and know that you are a sparkling jewel in Indra's net as is every person around you. Every jewel is connected with all the other jewels in the net; every person is intimately connected with all the other persons in the universe. A change in one jewel—or person—produces a change, however slight, in every other.

Whatever you do to one jewel affects the entire net, as well as yourself. You cannot damage one strand of a spider's web without injuring the entire web, and you cannot damage one strand of the web that is the universe without injuring all others in it, whether that injury is known or unknown to them. This can work for good or ill because, of course, just as destructive acts affect the entire net, so do loving, constructive, compassionate acts affect the entire net. A single helpful act—even a simple act of kindness—will send positive ripples across the infinite net, touching every jewel, every person in existence.

### *Family Discussion*

How does it feel to think of yourself as one of the jewels in Indra's net?

Does thinking of other people or creatures as jewels in Indra's

net change how you feel toward them? Does this change how you would like to act toward them?

Have you ever seen a harmful or destructive act cause further hurt or damage? What happened?

When have you experienced or seen a simple act of kindness ripple beyond the person who first received it?

How can you add to the positive ripples in the net of the universe?

## FAMILY CIRCLE

### *Talking About God, Life, Death, and What You Believe With Your Children*

When your children start asking the "big" questions, how will you respond? Should you give them the room to develop their own beliefs or should you guide them? How will you respond when your child asks, "Is there a God?" or "What do you believe?" This class, co-led by Linda Weaver and Rev. Anya, is for parents with children of all ages. Our time will be devoted to learning new techniques, building relationships, and sharing our own wisdom. It will be held 12:15–1:30 pm on 1/13, 1/20, 2/3, 2/10, and 2/24. Requested donation is \$20.

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

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the February liturgical theme, *Prayer*.
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in February and the first two weeks of March)
- ✓ 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 January 15th.

## **LEAVING A LEGACY:**

### *Endowment Workshop*

Come learn about endowments at noon on January 27. This workshop is designed to help members think about their legacy and understand how to ensure that their plans will be carried out according to their own wishes. It includes a step-by-step approach to offer you the opportunity to invest in the future of your church in tax-wise ways that will help you carry out your mission and improve your bottom line. We will demystify the planned giving instruments and terms and focus on a donor centered approach to this type of fund raising. UU resources, estate planning methods, and promotional tips will be included with time for sharing stewardship ideas and best practices.

The workshop will be led by Joan Priest, the Director of Development for the Joseph Priestley District and a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) with over 25 years of experience with major gifts and capital campaigns. She is an active member of First Unitarian Church of Wilmington and its the Denominational Growth Committee.

## **CALENDAR**

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

JANUARY	
Sunday, 1/6	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship Service: “Grace, a New Year’s Meditation”</b> Join Rev. Anya, Music Director Kris Adams, and the UUCS choir in welcoming the new year with meditative chants and the annual Fire Ceremony. We release the old to make way for the grace that is and always will be.</p> <p><b>Noon — Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</b></p> <p><b>12:15 pm — Immigration Task Force meeting in the mezzanine. Please join us!</b></p>
Friday, 1/11	<p><b>7:00 pm — COEXIST Concert with jazz—the Lisa Fiorilli Quartet</b> Our Coexist concerts offer an opportunity to share in the joy of community, reflect on relevant themes, and enjoy great music while supporting our local food bank with a special collection. For this concert, early in the new year, bring a gift of diapers for Loudoun Interfaith Relief to support new families in need.</p>
Sunday, 1/13	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship Service: “Elephants Never Forget”</b> Rev. Anya delivers the Auction Sermon, won at last year’s auction by Jason and Laura Rios. This service will honor the human capacity of persistence, and will include a Naming Ceremony/Child Dedication. If your family would like to be involved in the Naming Ceremony/Child Dedication, please contact Rev. Anya.</p> <p><b>12:15–1:30 pm— Family Circle class</b> (see article for details)</p>

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<b>Sunday, 1/20</b>	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship Service: “Soul Shine”</b></p> <p>Our annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day service will include the bold and beautiful music of the UUCS rock band and the UUCS choir, both directed by Kris Adams. Rev. Anya will reflect on the shining example of Rev. Martin Luther King’s ministry—a ministry unbounded by time or space—and all will share in the joy of an uplifting message.</p>
	<p><b>12:15–1:30 pm — Family Circle class</b></p>
(see article for details)	
<b>Sunday, 1/27</b>	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship service: “Leaving a Legacy”</b></p>
	<p>District leader Mike Harris reflects on the certainty of our passing from this life and what we might consider leaving behind. Join us for this special service in which we will also inaugurate our first UUCS endowment.</p>
	<p><b>Noon</b></p>
	<p>Workshop on endowments with district leader Joan Priest (see article for details)</p>
	<p><b>Noon — 1 pm</b></p>
	<p>Training for RE Volunteers</p>
<b>F E B R U A R Y</b>	
	<p>     </p>
<b>Sunday, 2/3</b>	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship Service</b></p>
	<p><b>Noon — Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</b></p>
	<p><b>12:15 pm — Immigration Task Force meeting in the mezzanine. Please join us!</b></p>
	<p><b>12:15–1:30 pm — Family Circle class</b></p>
	<p>(see article for details)</p>
<b>Sunday, 2/10</b>	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship Service</b></p>
	<p><b>12:15–1:30 pm — Family Circle class</b></p>
	<p>(see article for details)</p>
<b>Sunday, 2/24</b>	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship Service</b></p>
	<p><b>12:15–1:30 pm — Family Circle class</b></p>
	<p>(see article for details)</p>