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### Plan Your Trip to GA!

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## Prayer

*The Hopi Indians of Arizona believe that our daily rituals and prayers literally keep this world spinning on its axis. For me, feeding the seagulls is one of those everyday prayers.*

—Brenda Peterson

The Hopis believe that our daily activities as well as our prayers keep the world spinning on its axis. The ancient Hindus who composed the Vedas held that their rituals produced food for the gods. Whatever tradition you study, our spiritual feats are viewed as fodder for life—the stuff that encourages growth and sustains what is necessary.

My father is accustomed to sustaining what is necessary. He grew up as a dairy farmer in upstate New York, where the cows needed to be tended, morning and night, every day of the year. Between feeding the cows and threshing the hay, he helped his father with a large garden plot, growing enough to maintain his family on vegetables through even the deepest winters. When he left the farm for city living in his early adulthood, he kept planters on fire escapes, growing herbs and lettuce. Later, once settled in Connecticut, he kept rescue horses and a lone rescue sheep. When it snowed and the water trough for our beasts froze, he would heave heavy buckets of hot water out to the barn so they could drink. My father still keeps a giant garden and brings his extras into his office, where hordes of hungry students and faculty and staff members fight

one another for the fresh and beautiful fare. My father taught me to garden. He taught me how essential it is to feed the world.

This past summer, we visited the beach in southern New Jersey. Our place was just behind the dunes. One morning, my father toted a bag of dry bread to the sand and began hefting it for the shore birds. I bent down low and photographed some astounding scenes as the birds lifted and landed with grace. Centered in the frames is my father, his face a pure grin.

### MINISTER'S MESSAGE

#### *Prayer: Feeding the World*



Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

What is prayer? It is lifting what we have, what we can offer, and giving it to the soil, the water, and the winds. It is sending what is in us to what is in all. It is holding our heavy burdened hands out to that which has no easy name, so that they may be emptied and made light again. Prayer is all of this. It is also feeding the world with that which grows in us, that which

knows no other garden than our souls. It is giving what is only ours to give, because we must. Because we must, because it makes us whole.

Amen, and may it be so.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### *A Prayer in the Wind*



Chris Houck,  
Board President

I've become fascinated by Buddhist prayer flags. The flags are traditionally blue, white, red, green, and yellow colors that respectively represent the five basic elements of sky, wind, fire, water, and earth. They are typically emblazoned with Buddhist symbols (commonly a Lung Ta or wind horse) and various mantras. It is believed that the flags promote peace, compassion, strength, and wisdom. The flags are traditionally hung outside—commonly at high elevation, such as on temples or mountain passes—so that the prayers and mantras will be blown by the wind to spread good will and compassion into all pervading space. The flags thus bring harmony to things that are then touched by the same wind.

There are many things I find intriguing about prayer flags, but perhaps one of the most is the manner in which they symbolize impermanence and renewal. Buddhists understand that the flags themselves are impermanent,

but that the prayers of a flag will eventually become a permanent part of the universe as the symbols fade and the fabric tatters from exposure to the wind and other natural elements. So the very thing that the flags seek to purify (the wind) will eventually lead to their physical disintegration. Fascinating; however, hope is not lost with the destruction of an old flag. New flags can be continually mounted alongside the old, which is an act that symbolically welcomes change and serves to acknowledge the ongoing cycle of existence.

I think the impermanence and renewal symbolism of the flags is especially fitting this time of year because a new year has recently begun and I'm sure we're all anxiously awaiting the arrival of spring. Coincidentally, February 11, 2013, is also the time of Losar (the Tibetan New Year). So it seems to be a good time to think about what our prayers will be for the coming year and to consider where new flags may need to be hung. If you are feeling a bit tattered, my hope is that you will find some sense of renewal in whatever manner suits you best. Maybe it'll be found spending time with friends and family, reading, exercising, attending Sunday service, or literally hanging a new flag, but however you find it and when you are ready, may your new prayer flags hang boldly in the wind throughout this coming year.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### *Children and Prayer*



Linda Weaver,  
Director of Religious  
Education

Prayer is often thought of as a quiet and contemplative appeal directed to a personal God who listens and answers. There are many other forms of prayer, however. Some people move, dance, chant, or even shout as they pray. Many people stress the effect prayer has on the person praying rather than the effect on God. In a story from the Unitarian Universalist curriculum that the 4th–6th grade group is using this year, a minister defines prayer as an “honest expression of some of your feelings, especially thankfulness, sorrow, and hope, that may not change God or things or other people, but will change you and how you think and feel

about God and things and other people.” Prayer, meditation, or other spiritual practices can provide a powerful way to connect with the wonder and awe of the universe and gain perspective on our own lives.

Children are spiritual beings who need ways to express their feelings as much as adults. They are thinking about big religious questions, experiencing compassion and sorrow, and recognizing the wonder of the universe in ways that often surpass anything adults experience. When they express their spiritual feelings, children and many adults may find they prefer active forms of prayer or spiritual practice. They might prefer walking a labyrinth or doing yoga. Rather than being silent, they might prefer to sing or drum. Prayer can even be part of how we do everyday tasks, as Zen Buddhists practitioners are reminded by the saying, “Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.”

*RE Message, continued on page 3*

## INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE:

### *Family Connections Program*

*Arin Beals*

We are thrilled to announce that 6 families in our congregation have each agreed to spend time building connections with an immigrant family! Our goal is to have 10 UUCS families matched with immigrant families by the end of February. The goal of the program is for families to get together approximately once a month to share experiences, language, culture, and more. Activities could be as simple as library or McDonalds outings, playing at the park, or the kids doing homework together. (Did you know that having a non-family member adult spend just one hour once a month listening to a teen has proven to reduce dropout rates more than any program?) The commitment made by both the UUCS and immigrant family is very flexible. We are also hoping to have events at UUCS, such as movie or game nights and potlucks.

It is not necessary to have children to participate. You could participate as a family of one or you could pair with another family of one at UUCS. There is endless potential for fun, cultural exchange, and the chance to enrich and be enriched by sharing experiences. Please consider joining us! Contact Lisa Groat ([lisa@ayuda.com](mailto:lisa@ayuda.com)) or Joan Johnson ([jojobeltway@gmail.com](mailto:jojobeltway@gmail.com)) for more information. Please also visit our section of the UUCS website: <http://uusterling.org/wordpress/participate/justice/immigration-task-force/>.

We meet the first Sunday of the month in the mezzanine at 12:15. Join us!

## ENDOWMENT UPDATE

*Judy Gruner*

On behalf of the newly formed Endowment Committee (consisting of myself and Isabelle Raines with Paul Roche as advisor), I wanted to inform you of your opportunity to begin thinking about leaving a bequest to UUCS. Many of you attended the very informative workshop on the subject of endowment on Sunday, January 27th. There was a lot of information and hopefully we can plan another meeting or get-together in the near future for those of you who weren't able to attend. In the meantime, we (the committee) would like to know who has already included UUCS in your wills and who is thinking about doing so. Our own Gus Douoguih is prepared to simplify this process for you by preparing codicils for you to include UUCS in your existing will. There will be special recognition and events in the future for those participating. Stay tuned while we your newly formed committee work out the details. Please feel free to give us your suggestions in the meantime.

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*RE Message, continued from page 2*

The 4th–6th grade group will try a number of different types of prayer on February 10. They will discover that prayer can include movement and sound, and they will consider the role they would like prayer or spiritual practice to take in their lives. You may wish to use parts of this session at home with your entire family. Consider sharing the story “Letter to Nancy,” which is available at [www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/windows/session15/sessionplan/stories/143925.shtml](http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/windows/session15/sessionplan/stories/143925.shtml) and one or more spiritual practices that are familiar to you. Check out examples by going to [www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/windows/session15/sessionplan/activities/143912.shtml](http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/windows/session15/sessionplan/activities/143912.shtml) and join us at UUCS as we search for meaning, discover and celebrate the wonder of the universe, gain perspective on our lives, and share our compassion with each other and the world.

*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).*

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) 2013 General Assembly (GA) will be held June 19–23 in Louisville, KY. Information can be found at [www.uua.org/ga/index.shtml](http://www.uua.org/ga/index.shtml), but here are some important highlights.

### 2013 Elections

The UUA will conduct its next election on Saturday, June 22. Absentee ballots will be sent to congregations by early May and will be due June 12. Positions to be elected at the 2013 General Assembly are:

- Board of Review
- Board of Trustees
- Commission on Appraisal
- Commission on Social Witness
- Financial Advisor
- General Assembly Planning Committee
- Ministerial Fellowship Committee
- Nominating Committee
- Moderator
- President
- Presidential Search Committee.

For more information, read about the 2013 UUA elections at [www.uua.org/uuagovernance/elections/281126.shtml](http://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/elections/281126.shtml).



### Financial Aid

Because traveling to and participating in General Assembly can be a costly venture, the GA Office and Planning Committee would like folks to be aware of the following opportunities for financial aid.

**Become a volunteer.** The GA Volunteer Committee funds full-time GA registrations in exchange for 24 hours of volunteer work at GA (16 hours for those eligible for reduced registration rates). Applications for volunteer positions can be found at [www.uua.org/ga/registration/financialaid/14930.shtml](http://www.uua.org/ga/registration/financialaid/14930.shtml) and must be submitted by March 31.

**Apply for a Scholarship.** Secure a pledge of support from your congregation and apply for a GA Planning Committee scholarship at [www.uua.org/ga/registration/financialaid/15005.shtml](http://www.uua.org/ga/registration/financialaid/15005.shtml). If your application is accepted, the Planning Committee may match your congregation's pledge (up to \$250) and also fund your full-time registration. Apply by March 31.



*Rev. Anya welcomes new members  
Kristin Harper and Clarisa Marcus*

## A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

### February: Prayer

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.

#### February 1–3

From Terry Tempest Williams

*The world is holy. We are holy. All life is holy. Daily prayers are delivered on the lips of breaking waves, the whisperings of grasses, the shimmering of leaves.*

#### February 4–10

From M.K. Gandhi

*Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul... It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart.*

#### February 11–17

From Ursula Goodenough

*Our story (the Universe story) tells us of the sacredness of life, of the astonishing complexity of cells and organisms, of the vast lengths of time it took to generate their splendid diversity, of the enormous improbability that any of it happened at all. Reverence is the religious emotion elicited when we perceive the sacred. We are called to revere the whole enterprise of planetary existence, the whole and all of its myriad parts as they catalyze and secrete and replicate and mutate and evolve. Ralph Waldo Emerson invites us*

*to express our reverence in the form of a prayer. "Prayer," he writes, "is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul."*

#### February 18–24

From E. M. Cioran

*To exist is equivalent to an act of faith, a protest against the truth, an interminable prayer. As soon as they consent to live, the unbeliever and the man of faith are fundamentally the same, since both have made the only decision that defines a being.*

#### February 25–28

From St. Francis of Assisi

*Our hands imbibe like roots,  
so I place them on what is beautiful in this world.  
And I fold them in prayer,  
and they draw from the heavens, light.*

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

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

## SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

### *Brother Benno and the Frogs: A Traditional Christian Story*

It was often the habit of Brother Benno the monk to go about the fields in meditation and prayer. Once as he passed by a certain marsh, a talkative frog was croaking in its slimy waters. Lest it should disturb his contemplation, he bade it to be a Seraphian (an angel), because all the frog angels are mute. But when he had gone on a little way, he called to mind the saying in the book of Daniel, from the Christian Scriptures: "O ye whales and all that move in the waters, bless ye God. O all ye beasts and cattle, bless ye God."

And fearing lest the singing of the frogs might perchance be more agreeable to God than his own praying, he again issued his command to them, that they should praise God in their accustomed fashion. And soon the air and the fields were vehement with their conversation.



### *Family Discussion*

Consider the many different types of prayer, meditation, and contemplation. Do you pray and if so, how and when? Do you have a different spiritual practice? If you have one, consider sharing your spiritual practice with your family.

Many UU congregations begin worship with these words: "Love is our doctrine, the quest for truth is our sacrament, and service is our prayer." What experiences have you had of helping others or the world? Do you feel this service could be thought of as a prayer? Why or why not?

The monk in the story was afraid that the singing of frogs might be more agreeable to God than his own silent meditation and prayer. What kind of prayer do you think is most agreeable? Is it quiet or loud? Still or full of movement? What is its purpose?

Would you like to begin a spiritual practice, perhaps one that includes movement or sound? See the RE article in this newsletter for ideas.

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## SOCIAL JUSTICE PRESENTATION

The Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice in the National Capital Region is hosting a forum called *Inequalities Matter: The Poisonous Effects of Dark Money in Politics* presented by Bob Edgar, President of Common Cause. It will be held on Saturday, February 9, from 10 am to noon at All Souls Church Unitarian in Washington, D.C. The event is free. To register or find more information, visit [www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org).

## WE'RE GONNA BE READY!

*Bob Brown*

**THE 2013 STEWARDSHIP DRIVE** will kick off with a fun-filled bingo night including food, prizes, and a children's auction and activity. A few minutes will also be set aside for some meaningful conversation about how this drive will help to shape the future of this congregation. Mark your calendars for the evening of **Saturday, March 16th** so you don't miss this wonderful night!

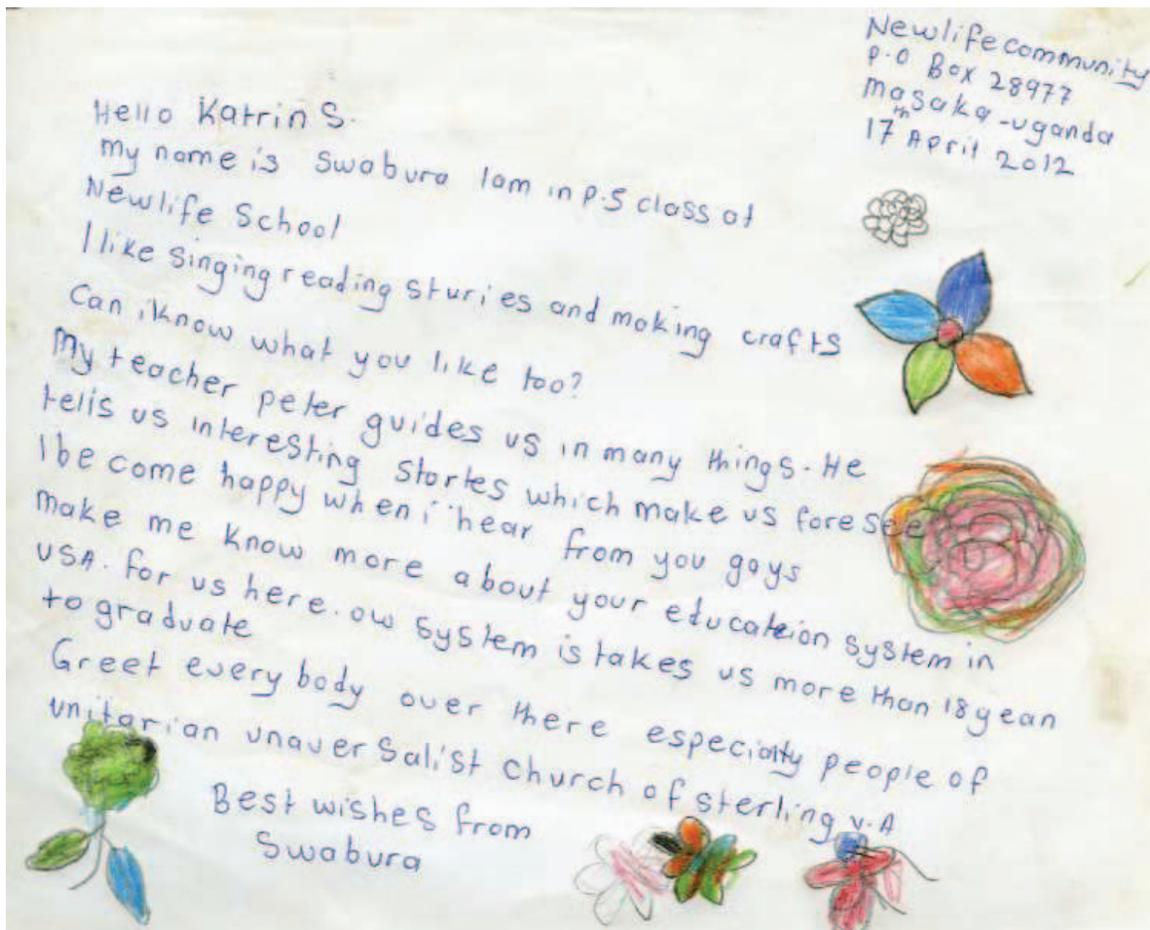
## CALENDAR

### Stay Up to Date with UUCS Events

FEBRUARY	////////////////////////////////////
<p><b>Sunday, 2/3</b></p>	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship Service: “Prayer in Spite of Ourselves”</b>                      Whether we are enjoying a fireworks display or bungling a plumbing repair, prayers and curses slip out of us like our most common language. Rev. Anya will explore our tendency to trust this spiritual language. Special guest musician Roya Baharami will perform on the Persian dulcimer and Jonathan Hammer and Scott Zeiter will play the piano.</p> <p><b>Noon — Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</b></p> <p><b>12:15pm — Immigration Task Force meeting in the mezzanine. All are welcome.</b></p>
<p><b>Friday, 2/8</b></p>	<p><b>7:00 pm — Coexist Service: An Evening of Taize</b>                      The Taizé Community in France is an ecumenical monastic order that uses music, prayers, and chants from around the world in its worship experiences. Members of our UUCS choir will lead chants in this contemplative foray into the deep of winter. Bring cans of food for interfaith relief that begin with T, A, I, Z, or E and the youngest among us will help us begin the evening by spelling Taize with our generous donations! (For example, T could be tomatoes or turnips. Good luck finding Z!)</p>
<p><b>Sunday, 2/10</b></p>	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship Service: “Soma—A Home for the Soul”</b>                      With theology and neuroscience, Rev. Anya attempts to overthrow the dualism that splits body from soul, elevating one over the other, by addressing their necessary and even partnership. Our choir will sing and we will share in a new member recognition.</p>
<p><b>Sunday, 2/17</b></p>	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship Service: “One Wild and Precious Life”</b>                      In this annual favorite, members of our congregation in diverse stages of maturity share how they intend to live their one wild and precious life. Special music provided on the flute and guitar by Scott Findley and Sonya Conners.</p>
<p><b>Sunday, 2/24</b></p>	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship Service: “I Wanna Be Ready”</b>                      Rev. Anya leads this lively and interactive service that focuses directly on our awesome present and future as a congregation. Our choir will sing and our band will play.</p>

**CALENDAR** CONTINUED

<b>M A R C H</b>	////////////////////////////////////
<b>Sunday, 3/6</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>12:15pm — Immigration Task Force meeting in the mezzanine. All are welcome.</b></p>
<b>Friday, 3/8</b>	<p><b>7:00 pm — Coexist Concert</b></p> <p>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>
<b>Sunday, 3/10</b>	<b>10:30 am — Worship Service</b>
<b>Saturday, 3/16</b>	<b>Evening — Bingo Night and Stewardship Drive Kickoff</b>



Pen pal letter from New Life School student to UUCS youth