

Reason

There are times when life's ends are so raveled that reason and sense cry out that we stop and gather them together again before we can proceed.

—Raymond Lindquist

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Shuddering in the aftermath of the bombings in Boston, we ask unanswerable questions. Some will be answered in time. Some never will—not fully. The question, why? purses our lips and furrows our brows. We may discover a semblance of reasons—perhaps anger, frustration, childhood abuse, disaffection, or untreated mental sickness will be given causal credence. Still, no full answer can be posited. Our capacity for reasoning is swift, but even our oversized brains balk when asked to account for violence.

We pray that the call of violence be anathema to our human sensibility, but too often—with too much precision and far too much intent—violence overtakes human action, obliterates human life, and threatens human accord. “Why?” Job asked the whirlwind that had taken so much of his precious life. “Why?” asks the young Siddhartha Buddha before he discovered the centrality of suffering in life. “Why?” ask the victims of a society like ours that keeps erupting in outbursts of terror. Our whys fall on the deafening silence of our unknowing.

How do we respond? I shared a note just after the attacks in Boston asking us to give

our attention to the *what*, to the reality that humans with inherent worth and dignity have died and that others are mourning, and I invited us to reaffirm our hold on compassion. A few days later, my colleagues at the Unitarian Universalist Minister's Association composed a letter inviting us into a similar embrace. I'd like to share their words with you, as they touched me deeply:

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

What Reason Is There in Violence?



Rev. Anya
Sammler-Michael

On behalf of the UUMA Board of Trustees and staff, our heartfelt thoughts and prayers go to the victim's of Monday's attack at the Boston Marathon. We hold their families and friends in solidarity as, together, we grieve this unconscionable act of violence. May everyone touched by this dreadful, pre-meditated action find compassionate support as we recover our affirmation that within every human is a spark of the divine.

How many killings, how many vigils, how many classes and workshops, how many letters and phone calls does it take to call our nation to non-violence? Our calling is to witness to the power and possibility for transformation even in the depths of despair.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A Heavy Dose of Reason

“Where reason and spirituality converge.” This tagline isn’t used by UUCS so often anymore, but it still adorns the blue coffee mugs that are presented to new members when they join the church. Kind of like the milk and sugar I add to my coffee, I see reason and spirituality as a pair of elements that combine to enrich the flavor my religious experience at UUCS. For me they are best served in relatively equal doses—a touch of reason here and a dash of spirituality there—or even in larger serving sizes, as long as the proportions are balanced. Admittedly, as a congregational leader I sometimes struggle when one of these elements, in my case reason, feels like it far outweighs the other.



*Christopher Houck,
Board President*

Take for instance our very successful stewardship campaign for fiscal year 2014, which closed last month. I got to participate behind the scenes during the campaign as the stewardship committee set the financial target, planned events, tracked incoming pledges, trained stewards, pored over spreadsheets, penned announcements, and changed our financial thermometer level as we inched closer to our goal. And although this next process will be easy, thanks to the generosity of this congregation, I will now play a role in facilitating the budgetary approval discussions as we prepare for the annual meeting on May 19. I really do get so much from these experiences, but sometimes find myself searching for the spirituality amongst all of the rational decision making that is an inherent part of my role in the congregation.

Usually when I’m struggling with this the most, my inner voice will slap me on the backside of the head and say, “Dude, just look around—there is spirituality in all the work that gets done at UUCS.” Among other things, when we raise funds and balance budgets, the doors of our community stay open and our lives are touched by yet another sermon, RE class, covenant group meeting, musical offering, or one of the many other gifts that UUCS has to offer. There is also a sense of personal fulfillment that comes from engaging with the board of trustees and various committees I have had the pleasure to work with over the course of this year. There are certainly many lessons I’ve learned throughout the year, but honing the ability to try and seek a higher purpose for all the work we do, even the most mundane of tasks, is perhaps the most gratifying. I’m so grateful for this opportunity and for this congregation.

RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

Beyond Reason

Over a weekend in mid-April, I spent an afternoon in my favorite park. I enjoyed the sunshine, tulips, and blossoming cherry trees. Then, two days later, bombs took the lives of three people and injured hundreds more at the Boston Marathon. My mind struggles to make sense of this tragedy and the contrast between it and the beauty of spring and the joy and goodness of so many people. Once more it seems that life does not easily conform to reason.

Some people may find answers in psychology, philosophy, or quantum physics. However, I have to ask if human cruelty or the death of a young child ever really makes sense. In the face of these tragedies, it seems that reason fails and no matter how much we might normally rely on reason, something else is needed. At these times I find compassion, love, and hope to be most powerful.



*Linda Weaver,
Director of
Religious Exploration*

After a disaster, one positive response is to remember all of the people who helped those who were hurt. More than thirty years ago Fred Rogers, who created the TV show *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*, spoke of his mother telling him to “look for the helpers” and his advice has been repeated often since then. As we talk with children about the explosion at the Boston Marathon or as we speak of similar events in the past, we can remember the firefighters, police officers, medical personnel, and the bystanders who provided assistance. There are many amazing stories from Boston of runners and spectators aiding the injured, helping clear the streets for ambulances, and giving blood. Sharing these stories with children as they ask questions encourages a sense of optimism.

Helping children find ways to directly respond to these events or to other issues that concern them helps them develop a sense that they can affect the present and the future, that they can make a difference. Both our reason and our compassion can help us see that we are all interconnected and that when we treat others kindly and work with them to make their lives better, we also make the world a better place for ourselves. May each of us become helpers, filling our lives with compassion for all of the people with whom we share this amazing earth, acting in love and justice, and modeling an optimistic and caring life for the children around us.

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.

INTERNSHIP COMMITTEE UPDATE

All of us are aware that the UU Congregation of Sterling is growing. We are growing inwardly as more members join our community. And we are growing outwardly as we contribute more to activities that affect the larger community around us. Next September, we are adding another element of growth: we are going to become a teaching congregation, which means we are adding an intern to our ministerial staff.

The Unitarian Universalist Association has an internship manual, which states that “the internship requirement is one of the more critical formative experiences for those who seek to become fellowshiped Unitarian Universalist ministers and for the congregations that are committed to supporting our ministry.” It also states that a good teaching site “is dedicated to excellence in ministry, perceives the formation of ministerial interns as part of its mission, gives an intern the opportunity to make a significant contribution, enables an intern to pursue learning goals in a supportive atmosphere, provides opportunities for a variety of professional experiences, [and] understands the value of Unitarian Universalism in the larger community.” When our board of trustees began considering the possibility of becoming a teaching congregation, it considered all these elements—what we have to offer to an intern and to the greater UU community—as well as what an intern will be able to offer to us.

But when calling ourselves a teaching community, we need to recognize that we are also learning. This is a new venture for all of us. While our intern will be gaining experience on his road to becoming a fellowshiped minister, our congregation will be gaining experience in how to achieve not only our intern’s goals, but our community’s goals as well. To help manage this process, we have an internship committee. The members of the committee are Steve Dick, Francis Ashland, Siobhan O’Hair, Allie Roche, Clarice Douougih, and Noel Mariam. Our job will be to meet on a regular basis with our intern, to advise, support, listen, give and get feedback, and evaluate the intern’s personal and professional development. In this capacity, we will also be able to represent our community’s needs and expectations.

The internship will be starting in September. Until that time, questions and comments can be addressed to members of the internship committee. After September, as members of UUCS get to know our intern better, suggestions and comments can be shared with both our intern and the members of the committee, and we will then discuss and reflect as a group on this wider feedback as we all continue to learn and grow.

Our new intern, Andrew Mertz, will be undertaking a hybrid internship, part time with us in a congregational setting, and part time with the Joseph Priestley District. Andrew is a third generation UU whose religious experience has been mostly

in medium to large congregations. He worked from 2004 to 2009 as Director of Youth Ministry at UU of Arlington, and from 2009 to the present as Director of Youth and Young Adult programs for the Joseph Priestley District. From 1997 to 2003 he was a Medical Specialist in the Virginia Army National Guard, and he has been involved over the years in a variety of volunteer activities, including a medical relief mission in Haiti. He has a BS in Biology from the University of Mary Washington and is currently pursuing a Masters of Divinity at Meadville Lombard Theological School.



Given Andrew’s extensive experience in youth ministry, some of you may be hoping he will be very involved in our RE activities. Remember, there are other important aspects of ministry, including worship, pastoral work, outreach, and practical arts. Andrew already has a strong background in RE-related work. With us, he hopes to gain more competence in other areas of ministry. We can all help him achieve these goals at the same time that we help him contribute to our community’s needs. Certainly, with our growing membership, the areas of worship and pastoral care will profit from his presence—albeit part time—in the life of our congregation.

Shortly before the start of Andrew’s internship in September, we plan to introduce him in person at a Sunday service, where he can give you deeper insight into not only what he has done, but also his passions and vision for the future—in his words, “This internship is more about who I want to become than who I already am.” Until then, be assured that the internship committee, Rev. Anya, and the UUCS board of trustees are very much looking forward to welcoming Andrew into our community.

Want to share something in the summer (June/July/August) newsletter?

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the summer liturgical theme, *Community*.
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place over the summer and the first two weeks of September)
- ✓ Group or committee updates (what you accomplished, what’s planned coming up, etc.)
- ✓ Recent photos taken at UUCS or during UUCS events

Please send anything you’d like to include to newsletter@uusterling.org by May 15th.

A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

May: Reason

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.

May 1—5

From the poet Kahlil Gibran

Your reason and your passion are the rudder and the sails of your seafaring soul.

If either your sails or your rudder be broken, you can but toss and drift, or else be held at a standstill in mid-seas.

For reason, ruling alone, is a force confining; and passion, unattended, is a flame that burns to its own destruction.

Therefore let your soul exalt your reason to the height of passion; that it may sing;

And let it direct your passion with reason, that your passion may live through its own daily resurrection, and like the phoenix rise above its own ashes.

May 6—12

From Katherine Butler Hathaway

Instead of wanting to curl my mind up and tuck it away in some cozy little place where it could never think those terrifying thoughts of death and birth and time, my mind suddenly wanted to reach out and embrace fearlessly those mysteries and become a conscious, proud part of them.

May 13—19

From a folktale

The devil once went for a walk with a friend. They saw a man ahead of them stoop down and pick up something from

the ground.

“What did that man find?” asked the friend.

“A piece of the truth,” said the Devil.

“Doesn’t that disturb you?” asked the friend.

“No,” said the Devil. “I shall let him make a belief out of it.”

May 20—26

From Margaret Fuller

It is astonishing what force, purity and wisdom it requires for a human being to keep clear of falsehoods.

May 27—31

From Gene Reves

Far from having nothing to say, religious liberals have to proclaim, over and over again, against both religious and secular authorities, the good news that the future remains open and the Fates are not in control.



CHURCH PICNIC

Save the Date: Sunday, June 9

The UUCS annual picnic at Claude Moore Park is coming up. Burgers, veggie burgers, hotdogs and cold drinks will be provided. All are asked to bring a side dish or dessert to share. The fun gets under way immediately after our regular service, from noon to whenever. Head over to the park with your lawn chairs, bug spray, sunscreen, hula hoops, and Frisbees. The park is nearby, off of Cascades Parkway, on your way to Costco. Let's kick off summer together.

SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

The Worker Bees and the Drone (From Aesop's Fables)

One day some worker bees made a honeycomb in the hollow trunk of an oak. They settled nearby to rest. Then the drones from their hive flew by. The drones said, "We made that honeycomb. It belongs to us."

"You did not make that honeycomb," replied the worker bees. "You know very well that you did not. We made it."

The drones insisted, "That honeycomb belongs to us and we are going to have it."

So the worker bees said, "Let us go together and see what the wasp has to say about whose honeycomb it is."

The worker bees and the drones flew in a big swarm to the wasp's nest. When the wasp came outside to see what the buzz was all about, the bees all talked at once about their dispute.

"You worker bees and drones," said the wasp, "are so much alike in shape, color, and sound that I cannot easily tell you apart. Surely I cannot tell which of you I have seen building the honeycomb in the oak tree. But I think the matter can be justly decided. Each group of you, the workers and the drones, must go to a hive in which there is no honey, and build up a new honeycomb. The group that makes a honeycomb and honey like that found in the oak tree is the owner of the tree comb."

"All right," said the worker bees, "we will do it! Let's go!" But the drones said, "We will have nothing to do with such a plan."

So the wasp said, "I see the worker bees are ready to make another honeycomb. But the drones don't want to do it. That must be because the drones do not know how! Surely, they did not make the honeycomb in the oak tree. It belongs to the worker bees."

The drones buzzed away very angry for they knew the wasp was right. They didn't know how to make a honeycomb at all. And the worker bees happily flew back to the oak tree.

Family Discussion

Was it fair for the drones to claim the honeycomb? What would happen to a hive without drones? What would happen to drones without worker bees? What do you think of the wasp's decision? Reason is defined as "the mental power to form conclusions by systematically comparing facts." When have you used reason to solve a problem or make a decision? Are there times that reason alone is not enough? If so, what else helps you solve problems, make decisions, or understand the world and other people?

UUA R.E. CREDENTIALING PROGRAM

Linda Weaver Accepted as a Candidate

Linda Weaver, our Director of Religious Education, has recently been accepted as a candidate in the UUA Religious Education Credentialing Program. She is seeking status as a Credentialed Religious Educator—Credentialed Level, with a target completion date of May 2014. The Religious Education Credentialing Program is intended to nurture the call to religious education as a profession, to uphold standards and guidelines in religious education leadership, and to provide an intentional and comprehensive path for professional development.

In order to achieve Credentialed Level status, Linda will create a portfolio demonstrating her knowledge and skills in 12 competency areas deemed essential for effective religious education leadership. Additional completion components involve substantial reading, writing, and reflection, and the process will culminate with an evaluative interview before the Religious Education Credentialing Committee. Linda will be accompanied on her credentialing journey by a *Liberal Religious Educators Association* mentor. You can learn more about the benefits and requirements of the program at www.uua.org/careers/re.

May our congregation be further enriched by Linda's leadership as she takes on this challenge.

ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday May 19th at 12:00pm

This is a once in a year opportunity to help direct the life of our congregation. At the meeting we will be voting on our Strategic Plan, new board members, and our budget for 2013-14. Information on the ballot items will be provided for review prior to the meeting. Members and friends are encouraged to attend, but only members will be able to vote. If you wish to become a member before the Annual Meeting, there will be time to do so between the service and the meeting. Child care will be available. Absentee ballots will be mailed and emailed to members before the meeting.

RACIAL INJUSTICE DISCUSSIONS

The Journey Toward Wholeness Team and Rev Anya will begin a discussion of the topics in the book many of you are reading: *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander. Two years ago at the General Assembly, UUA suggested a nationwide reading of this book, and members of UUCS have undertaken that task. We will meet after Sunday service on the third Sundays of May, June, and July to discuss the social, economic, and political ramifications of racial injustice. Whether you have read the book or not, join us in the sanctuary at 11:45 am to share your views and hear others'.

A LETTER FROM BRYAN GEORGE TO THE WASHINGTON POST

Dear Mr. Feaver,

Greetings—my name is Bryan George, and I am a member and lay leader of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling, Virginia. As with all Unitarian Universalists, my religious beliefs and moral standards are grounded in the freedom to appreciate and hold in reverence the profound truths expressed in many faith languages. It is in this spirit that I enjoy reading articles in the *Post's* "On Faith" section, which inform readers on a variety of religious views and their role in our culture, and do so in a way that is both respectful and insightful. With this in mind, you can imagine my dismay at Lisa Miller's March 22, 2013, article "Many Unitarians would prefer that their polyamory activists keep quiet," which displayed a stunning ignorance of and prejudice against Unitarian Universalism.

Rather than examine the religious and social philosophies that enable our congregations to hear diverse and yes, sometimes disagreeable voices, she instead stereotyped Unitarian Universalism as an "anything goes" religion that fails to provide moral leadership to its members. Rather than enquire as to why Unitarian Universalism is increasingly popular among those seeking a spiritual foundation that is consistent with modernity, she instead dismissed us as a "religion of last resort" appealing to those wishing nothing more spiritually profound than avoiding "too many rules."

Rev. Chris Buice, the minister of Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church in Knoxville, is a member of my family—I am painfully aware of how the slur against Unitarian Universalists as "flat headed" liberals, reinforced in Ms. Miller's article, gave Jim David Adkisson comfort as he killed two and wounded seven members of Rev. Chris' congregation in 2008. I have no intention of standing by while such misinformation about Unitarian Universalism is presented as well-considered opinion in a high-profile news outlet such as the *Washington Post*.

In the interest of the *Post's* best practice of fairness, I request that you consider having a Unitarian Universalist leader write a "Guest Voices" piece in the On Faith section to respond to Ms. Miller's ill-informed opinions of our faith tradition.

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Bryan George
Ashburn, VA

CALENDAR

Stay Up to Date With UUCS Events

M A Y	
Sunday, 5/5	10:30 am — Worship Service: "Reasonable Doubt" Doubting is not anathema to faith, but necessary. Rev. Anya will reflect on some of the roles that reason plays in religion. Michelle Badwar will play the violin and our Religious Education teachers will be honored. Noon — Inquirer's Class in Rev. Anya's office
Friday, 5/10	7:00 pm — COEXIST Concert: Gay Men's Chorus The Gay Men's Chorus of Washington D.C., featuring the Rock Creek Singers and Potomac Fever, will perform this benefit concert at UUCS for People of Faith for Equality in Virginia (POFEV). The event begins with a cash bar and decadent snacks, followed by a short program highlighting the present struggle, challenges, and victories for equality in Northern Virginia. The Gay Men's chorus performance begins at 8 pm and the evening concludes with a reception as the chorus members mingle with the crowd. (POFEV is an interfaith collaboration that seeks equal rights for all citizens through prayer, education, organization, and advocacy while challenging those who equate religious faith and intolerance.)
Sunday, 5/12	10:30 am — Worship Service: "Flower Communion" In this annual service on Mother's Day, Rev. Anya will reflect on the exercise of compassion. Each person is invited to bring a flower to contribute to the flower communion. If you have extra flowers, they will be gratefully received. This intergenerational service will include music from our UUCS choir and a new member recognition.

<p>Friday, 5/17</p>	<p>6:00 pm — Jazz Poetry Slam: “We the People” In our second annual Jazz Poetry Slam, poets will be offered 3–5 minutes to recite their poems on the topic of “We the People...” over light jazz. The event is cohosted by Regie Cabico and Sarah D. Lawson. Jazz will be provided by students in the George Mason University School of Music. Cash wine bar, decadent snacks, and childcare will be available. An admission donation of \$5 will be requested from all attendees.</p> <p>Spoken word artists, muses, rappers, students, student groups, actors, toastmasters, and activists are encouraged to participate. A registration donation of \$15 will be requested from all speakers. Doors open at 6:15 for registration. Please visit www.uucsjazzpoetryslam.net for more information.</p>
<p>Sunday, 5/19</p>	<p>10:30 am — Worship Service: “Love and Our Imperfection” Lisa Fiorilli returns to play jazz and Rev. Anya shares on this year’s theme topic, <i>imperfection</i>. Are there limits to love or is it, by its nature, boundless? We will also hear from our youth who have participated in the Our Whole Lives class, which teaches comprehensive sexuality education.</p> <p>11:45 am — Racial Injustice Discussion The Journey Toward Wholeness Team and Rev Anya will begin a discussion of the social, economic, and political ramifications of racial injustice. We will meet after Sunday service on the third Sundays of May, June, and July. Whether you have read <i>The New Jim Crow</i> by Michelle Alexander or not, join us in the sanctuary at 11:45 am to share your views and hear others’.</p>
<p>Sunday, 5/26</p>	<p>10:30 am — Worship service: “New Life, through Partnership” Our service will invite the whole congregation into the relationship that our students have enjoyed with our partner school in Uganda. Led by Lindy Reeder and Rosalie Clavez, this service will also engage the impetus that drove our partnership—the struggle for equal rights in Uganda and the justice work of Unitarian Ugandan minister Rev. Mark Kiyimba.</p>
<p>J U N E</p>	
<p>Sunday, 6/2</p>	<p>10:30 am — Worship Service Noon — Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</p>
<p>Friday, 6/7</p>	<p>7:00 pm — COEXIST Concert</p>
<p>Sunday, 6/9</p>	<p>10:30 am — Worship Service Noon — Church Picnic Our annual picnic will be held at Claude Moore Park at noon, right after worship service. Burgers, veggie burgers, hot dogs, and cold drinks will be provided. Please bring a side dish or dessert.</p>
<p>Sunday, 6/16</p>	<p>10:30 am — Worship Service 11:45 am — Racial Injustice Discussion The Journey Toward Wholeness Team and Rev Anya will begin a discussion of the social, economic, and political ramifications of racial injustice. We will meet after Sunday service on the third Sundays of May, June, and July. Whether you have read <i>The New Jim Crow</i> by Michelle Alexander or not, join us in the sanctuary at 11:45 am to share your views and hear others’.</p>