

Community

*When people turn from the table where bread is broken and candles glow,
be sure you have invited them not to your house but to their own,
and offered not your wisdom but your love.*

—Anonymous

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**DON'T MISS
THE
CHURCH
PICNIC!**

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Loneliness has been described as a disease, a plague, and a sentence. Our technology has brought profound and expansive development in our capacity to communicate across vast reaches, but has inversely deteriorated our experience of meaningful connection. We are connected to a wide world, but we are not freed from our sense of isolation. As we devote increasing amounts of time to the influx of idea and data, we become increasingly less connected, on a meaningful level, to friends, family, and dear ones. Community is not the surefire means to establish connection, strong enough to defeat this disease, but it makes the cure for loneliness possible.

Loneliness is experienced when you are isolated, lack social support, feel invisible, or feel that no one around understands your truth. Loneliness increases when you are abused or rejected by others, when you struggle to adjust to the social mores of your society, or when you have lost dear ones to death or departure. Loneliness can overtake us even when we are around others who recognize and acknowledge our presence.

Community is a social fabric that can heal loneliness, but only with intention. When I say we have a community, I might simply mean that we have a place to gather and a people to call our own. Intentional community is born when we direct our energy to securing the bonds that bind each to all. Intentional community is born when we recognize that loneliness is a

disease, one to which we are all susceptible, and that part of our purpose as a religious institution is curing this social disease, beginning with its roost in our own souls.

Scientists report that lonely people are less likely to reach out and invite conversation and community than those who are not lonely. In addition, people who have experienced loneliness are often wary of testing the bonds of friendship—indeed, they shy from inviting newcomers in, and prefer instead to hold tightly to old or secure relationships.

Each person who opens our door and dares test the resiliency of our community has been affected by our society's tendency toward isolation and loneliness. Each is yearning to heal from this disease and each brings needs and offers gifts. Intentionally reaching out to help a newcomer find a home with us cures a bit of the loneliness that affects us all. Believe me, we need the cure as much as anyone who dares trust our welcome.

There's an anonymous poem (above) that speaks to the necessary intentionality of our cause. Welcoming guests into "their" home acknowledges that

they belong here as much as we do, and that we need them as much as they need us. Offering our love rather than our wisdom means intentionally striving to cure the disease of loneliness, a disease that does not play favorites and does not choose sides.

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Community: An Intentioned Cure for Loneliness



Rev. Anya
Sammler-Michael

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Core of Community



*Chris Houck,
Board President*

Stock images of paper cut-out figures standing in a circle holding hands... around nothing. Colorful and nice, yes, but not quite the inspiration I was looking for when I performed an image search on the web for the word community. What the paper figures were standing there for certainly wasn't apparent, nor could I really tell what bonded them together. Were they joyous

or sad? Perhaps they were rallying against injustice while standing in the rain—or the sun? Were they singing Kumbaya or Rage Against the Machine? No way to tell.

Admittedly my own image of community probably wouldn't answer those kinds of questions directly either, but the one thing I would try to convey is that there is love at the core of community. In my image, there are distinct rings that radiate outward from the center, rings which represent the various levels of community we all experience—from close family and friends on the center ring growing all the way out to the wider global community on the far reaches of

the outer ring. I imagine standing on my own inner ring, looking outward into a massive community, and becoming astounded and perhaps overwhelmed by all that we are connected to. But when that view becomes too much to bear, I'd turn around, face the center, feel the immediate bonds of my inner ring, and become grounded in the love that holds it all together.

I know my vision of community is definitely inspired by our community at UUCS. As I performed my final review of the annual report for this year, I found myself asking how in the world such a relatively small group of people can do so many wonderful things. There were numerous activities and events written in the report that had so much impact that I wasn't even fully aware of—and that is actually a good thing! We all support UUCS in our own ways. What force other than love could possibly bond this diverse community together and keep it moving so rapidly forward in a unified fashion all at the same time? As we say every Sunday, it is the ties of love which bind us together, giving dignity, meaning, worth, and joy to all of our days.

Because this is my last article, I did also want to also express my sincere gratitude to this community for allowing me the opportunity to serve as your board president. In fulfilling this role, I have become fulfilled. Have a wonderful summer.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Celebrating Community



*Linda Weaver,
Director of Religious
Education*

I recently spent several days with three generations of my family. While we were together, we shared many family stories, reflected on how parents had cared for children and then grandchildren, and planned for a time when the oldest generation would need more support. We also each talked about our current lives. As we talked, people mentioned what they have done or plan to do with friends,

neighbors, coworkers, classmates, and other acquaintances. Clearly, each of us depends on other people and our lives are enriched by our many communities. These connections

make it possible for us to do far more than we could ever do individually.

At the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling we witness the significance of community over and over. Members work together to make UUCS a welcoming place for everyone on Sunday mornings and during special events. They provide meals, rides, or childcare for others facing challenges. They gather to mourn and to celebrate important experiences in their lives, and they learn and grow by sharing ideas with each other. They bring in donations for organizations that serve the local community. They support each other in speaking out on issues, and they connect with the global community through such projects as our partnership with New Life School in Uganda. Our lives are so much fuller because of UUCS and the congregation's connections to many other communities.

RE Message, continued on page 3

REDISCOVERING FAITH AND INSPIRATION IN YOUTH

Christie Circle

In August of 2011, following the death of my father, I came to UUCS seeking a spiritual home and looking for a place to help my daughters find their spiritual selves. After only one of Rev. Anya's powerful sermons, I knew I had come to the right place and at the right time. As my girls have come through two seasons of Religious Education, I have seen in them the sprouting of the thoughtful, empathetic, and compassionate children I am hoping for them to be. Being new to UUism myself when we arrived, I sat in many of the RE classes with them as they got used to new teachers and made new friends. I was so inspired by the teaching there that when I became a member of UUCS, the first thing I wanted to do was be more a part of it, so I joined the Religious Education Council so I could learn and contribute more. I have volunteered in my daughters' classes and even led a few. It has been a fantastic experience for all three of us.

There are many in the congregation who feel the same passion I do for participating in our children's programs, but we could always use more help to spread and lighten the load, to help the kids become familiar with more members of the congregation, and to expose our kids to all the latent talents all of us have to offer. The RE Council invites members and friends to consider assisting or leading in a class once a month or even one time. If you have a background in education or are interested in lifelong learning, consider participating in the RE Council and helping us continue to plan and implement our RE programs. Summer is a great time to test the waters either by assisting or leading a class just one Sunday. We're looking for volunteers for the summer and for the next school year.

Several members of the RE Council are reaching out to families in the congregation at this time. They would be happy to hear about how you would like to be involved or to talk about what it's like to be an assistant or leader or about what we do on the RE Council. If you are interested in helping out, even just once, please contact Linda Weaver, the Director of Religious Education, at re-director@uusterling.org or talk to any RE Council member: Kathy Ashland, Arin Beals, myself, Ben Freidson, Karen Houck, Mark Lupisella, and Stephanie Roche.

CHURCH PICNIC

SAVE THE DATE: SUNDAY, JUNE 9

Terry Dick

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.

RE Message, continued from page 2

This summer's children's Religious Education program, "All My Friends and Neighbors," also recognizes the importance of community and encourages the development of skills



April 21, David Lum and Christie Circle lead a children's RE class in which children collected food for LIR and learned about what it takes to feed a family.

necessary to create and to live in communities that support meaningful and joyful lives. Created for children in preschool through sixth grade, the program focuses on cooperation, peace, justice, and tolerance with stories from Rhinos and Raspberries, developed by the Teaching Tolerance project of the Southern

Poverty Law Center. The stories from around the world help children develop compassion and encourage them to work with others to create more welcoming communities. Games and other activities designed for a wide range of ages and interests will help children get to know one another better and will encourage them to develop skills that they will need to live in peace and justice in an increasingly diverse world.

We hope you will join us this summer to experience the joys of community and to learn and grow by sharing your own ideas and hearing from others.

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.

A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

June: Community

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.

June 1–2 From the Dali Lama

Peace... starts within each one of us. When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us. When our community is in a state of peace, it can share that peace with neighboring communities, and so on. When we feel love and kindness towards others, it not only makes others feel loved and cared for, but it helps us also to develop inner happiness and peace. And there are ways in which we can consciously work to develop feelings of love and kindness. For some of us, the most effective way to do so is through religious practice. For others it may be non-religious practices. What is important is that we each make a sincere effort to take our responsibility for each other and for the natural environment we live in seriously.

June 3–9 From Tara Brach

The spiritual path is not a solo endeavor. In fact, the very notion of a self who is trying to free her/himself is a delusion. We are in it together and the company of spiritual friends helps us realize our interconnectedness.

June 10–16 From Dan Wakefield

Simply being with other people who are also seekers, and who are involved in the same quest you are, is very meaningful.

June 17–23 From Antoine de Saite Exupery

One man may hit the mark, another blunder; but heed not these distinctions. Only from the alliance of the one, working with and through the other, are great things born.

June 24–30 From Mary Parker Follett

I do not go to a meeting merely to give my own ideas. If that were all, I might write my fellow members a letter. But neither do I go simply to learn other people's ideas. If that were all, I might ask each to write me a letter. I go to a meeting in order that all together we may create a group idea, an idea which will be better than all of our ideas added together. For this group idea will not be produced by any process of addition, but by the interpenetration of us all.

July–August An exercise

As a family or an individual, each morning or each evening at dinner or bedtime, write down the name of one person whom you consider to be part of your community (however you define community). Keep going every day, adding new names. Watch as the list grows. If you name someone who is on the periphery of your community (perhaps an acquaintance you rarely see or acknowledge), consider ways to show that person respect or acknowledgement.

SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

The Belly and the Members (from Aesop's Fables, retold by Joseph Jacobs)



One fine day it occurred to the Members of the Body that they were doing all the work and the Belly was having all the food. So they held a meeting and after a long discussion, decided to strike work until the Belly consented to take its proper share of the work. So for a day or two, the Hands refused to take the food, the Mouth refused to receive it, and the Teeth had no work to do. But after a day or two, the Members began to find that they themselves were not in a very active condition: the Hands could hardly move, the Mouth was all parched and dry, and the Legs were unable to support the rest. So thus they found that even the Belly in its dull, quiet way was doing necessary work for the Body, and that all must work together or the Body will go to pieces.

Family Discussion

How does each member of your family contribute to the family?

What do you receive from the communities to which you belong?

How do you serve these communities?

What skills or interests do you currently use to serve your communities?

Is there a new way you would like to share a talent or passion? The staff and leaders at UUCS would love to hear your hopes and dreams for participating in community.



May 11, The Rock Creek Singers, Gay Men's Chorus of Washington D.C., and the UUCS Choir perform at a concert to work towards equality for LGBT Virginians.



Several UUCS members participated in the Immigrants Rights March in Herndon on May 1.



A sign of the times!

Want to share something in the September newsletter?

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

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

