

Mercy

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

—The Bible, Matthew 25:35

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We have an interesting pattern of attendance at UUCS. Our fullest months are September, December, February, and March, and despite our love of originality, we repeat the pattern every year! A full sanctuary and parking lot in September this year jump started two actions. First, our Board considered and pursued more parking options through our landlord. Their work opened our access to Ski Shop, which is just around the corner. You can now park in their lot and walk directly to UUCS, through a substantial walkway carved out of the fence. Second, our Open Doors—Two Service Task Force began the difficult work of imagining a more substantial worship life at UUCS.

The mention of two services can provoke discomfort and disquiet, but the mention of open doors begs a different response. Open doors are an act of mercy. When our doors are open, we are making statements of welcome, hospitality, and generosity of spirit. When our doors are open, we are living into our vision of *building the world we dream about where all souls thrive in a diverse and loving community, acting daily on our commitment to justice.*

We may worry that a change in our worship life will drastically change the nature of our congregation, but nothing would change the nature of our congregation more than closing our doors, and if we do not continue to welcome all who seek, we would most obviously be closing our doors. Perhaps the selection from Matthew, from the Christian scriptures, says it best: "...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

Mercy is not solely a momentary act: it takes planning. It takes open doors.

Bryan George will tell you more about the Open Doors task force in his newsletter article. I'm sure you will have questions, hopes, and concerns. The task force members—Mike Berger, Ben Freidsen, Bryan George, Paul Roche and our board liaison, Rachael Roman—are glad to hear

from you. Please put the Open Doors forum on your calendar (immediately after worship service on November 17). Nothing will be pursued without deep consideration of all our hopes and needs and deep reflection on our religious call to provide a merciful welcome.

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Open Doors



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Mercy



Bob Brown,
Board President

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,

It droppeth as the gentle rain from
heaven

Upon the place beneath. It is twice
blest:

It blesseth him that gives and him
that takes.

—William Shakespeare,
The Merchant of Venice

When I was child, my friends and I would play a game called mercy. The game involved standing face to face, holding out our hands with palms out as if holding up a wall. We

would then interlock fingers and commence the game. The purpose of the game is to gain leverage (or upper hand) by folding your opponent's fingers backwards until they could not take the pain anymore and would cry out for mercy.

This instance and many others are what I think of when hear the word mercy: I think of someone who has the discretionary power to be compassionate and kind.

I believe we at UUCS are in a position to show mercy to many persons who have yet to reach our doors. We can do this by ensuring that our doors are open and our space is available to all whom we can serve in their quests for spiritual growth.

To quote our welcome at the beginning of each service, "Now, let us share worship with reverence and authenticity, welcoming those near us, especially those we have yet to meet."

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Mercy



Linda Weaver,
Director of Religious
Education

When I was a child, my mother told me about Jains and their ethic of non-violence. Jainism is an Indian religion that began 2,000 years ago and still has nearly 4 million followers. Some adhere to the value of non-violence so strongly that they carry brooms to sweep insects away from their paths or wear small veils over their mouths so they won't inadvertently kill an insect

by breathing it in. This is an extreme example of mercy and kindness that most of us would find difficult to follow. In fact, Jains recognize the complexities of the world and may accept insecticides that kill mosquitoes that carry malaria or may serve in the military, feeling that violence for self-defense is justified. Having the model of the Jain ascetic who went to extreme lengths to avoid killing insects and realizing that I must choose for myself how I live my values has been formative in my life. It reminds me to stop and think about how I hope to live and to consider how my values of compassion, justice, and mercy call me to act in the moment.

There are many models we might look to as we strive to be our best selves and offer mercy, or unearned kindness and

forgiveness. I have seen many examples in the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling. Members are applying the caring and respectful style of leadership they learn in the congregation to their own professional work and in their work with other organizations, such as parent teacher organizations and homeowners' associations. They are developing spiritual practices that help them treat others and themselves with a kinder, more forgiving attitude. Some are following vegetarian or vegan diets and sharing support and ideas. Others are advocating and demonstrating for new governmental policies and laws that are more consistent with their values of respecting the dignity of every person and of providing compassion and mercy. Many minister to one another, listening and caring. No one person can do it all and we may fall short of our own expectations from time to time, so we can also find acceptance of the personal choices each person makes and models of self-forgiveness.

As a growing congregation, we have envisioned ourselves welcoming all souls to our diverse and loving congregational community so that all can experience the precious gifts of caring, commitment, and spiritual development that UUCS has to offer and so that we can learn and grow from the wisdom, compassion, and companionship that each person has to offer. May we join together to welcome, encourage, and comfort each other.

Children's RE topics and a list of programs and events for children and families is on the calendar at www.uusterling.org.

WHY AM I HERE?

Bryan George

Sorry, I don't have an answer to the existential question, "Why am I here?" but I'm certainly in the right place to explore it! What I mean to ask is, "Why am I here at UUCS?" I have an answer to that question: because I choose to be here at UUCS. That may sound flip, but it reflects something profound that I believe many members of our congregation can appreciate: In choosing UUCS to be my congregation I chose the possibilities I saw for the congregation both to make a difference the spiritual lives of its members and to meaningfully contribute to the life and faith conversation of our community and beyond. In making that choice, I knew the congregation would have wonderful, thriving ministry and membership, and that I would have a responsibility to support the congregation's vision and the strategic plan designed to help UUCS grow into that vision.

No choice is truly simple, and all choices have consequences. In choosing UUCS, we have all chosen a congregation that must be viable in Northern Virginia, which continues to be one of the fastest growing and most expensive regions of the United States. A congregation such as UUCS must contend with the consequences of success in that context. UUCS is often full to capacity on Sunday mornings, and one of our biggest problems is finding parking for those who wish to attend our service. This is a testament to the vibrancy of our congregation, its minister, and its message. *It is also an extraordinarily bad situation for UUCS.* That last statement may come as a shock, but it should not. A widely accepted principle in the religious leadership community is that a full parking lot and a sanctuary that is more than 80% full on Sunday are absolute barriers to growth. Because we are still a relatively small congregation, and because facilities and land in Loudoun County are beyond our means until we grow further, we have another choice to consider.

We may choose to stand still, to accept our constraints and make the best of them, knowing that the result will be limits on our growth. Or we may choose to move forward to find creative ways to address those constraints and enable growth consistent with our thriving congregation. Our vision statement begins with, "We are building the world we dream about, where *all souls thrive*" (emphasis mine). Speaking as the first Board President who worked with

Rev. Anya to craft a vision of her ministry at UUCS and as a current member of the Committee on Ministry whose charge is to ensure that the direction of the congregation aligns with that vision, I can state unequivocally that standing still is not an option. Simply put, accepting limits fails to support the vision of all souls thriving.

It is for these reasons that I also support the task force exploring a two-service schedule at UUCS. The task force is working to identify and address the logistical challenges surrounding a two-service schedule and to identify and address the effects such a schedule may have on the life of the congregation. Although we believe that a two-service schedule is the best option and only choice for UUCS to continue growing into its vision, we also recognize that this choice involves consequential change, and we take seriously the responsibility to work with Rev. Anya, UUCS leadership, and the congregation to ensure that those growth opportunities do not come at the expense of the thriving congregational life we all enjoy.

UUCS has always faced challenges and has always risen to those challenges. Implementing a two-service schedule, though it may seem daunting, is simply another challenge. Please attend the forum that will follow the worship service on November 17 to hear from the Open Doors—Two Services Task Force. We will share our plans and listen to the congregation's thoughts. I welcome the opportunity to engage with you all to address this latest challenge with the effectiveness and grace I see in such abundance in our congregation. May it be so.

HELP-PORTRAIT EVENT

Consider volunteering at a Help-Portrait for Immigrant Families event sponsored by the Immigrant Task Force at UUCS on December 7 from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. The Help-Portrait events involve identifying taking portraits of people in need, printing them, and giving the portraits to the subjects. We need photographers, hair stylists, make-up artists, photo software experts and printing experts, and volunteers for various support needs. Please like us on our Facebook page and join our group at the Help-Portrait website.

For more information, contact David Hearne at dohearne@mac.com.

A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

November: Mercy

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.

November 1–3

We all need the waters of the Mercy River. Though they don't run deep, there's usually enough, just enough, for the extravagance of our lives. — Jonis Agee

November 4–10

Do not stand on a high pedestal and take 5 cents in your hand and say, "Here, my poor man," but be grateful that the poor man is there, so by making a gift to him you are able to help yourself. It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. Be thankful that you are allowed to exercise your power of benevolence and mercy in the world. — Swami Vivekananda

November 11–17

I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice. — Abraham Lincoln

November 18–24

Mercy stood in the cloud, with eyes that wept Essential love. — Robert Pollok

November 25–30

How can we speak of right and justice if we take an innocent creature and shed its blood? How can we pray to God for mercy if we ourselves have no mercy? — Isaac Bashevis Singer

CHILDREN'S CHOIR

Our celebrated music director, Kris Adams, is glad to work with all ages. If your children like the idea of making music and being involved in worship, enroll them in the children's choir. Children and youth ages 4 through 18 are welcome. The next performance will be on Sunday, December 22. Practices will be held on Sundays, November 10, December 1, and December 15 at 11:30 am (immediately after worship service) in the Emerson room. Parents are encouraged to stay for at least one class to assist. There is a requested donation of \$10.00 per child or \$20.00 per family. For more information, contact Kris at music-director@uusterling.org.

HOLIDAY PAGEANT

Find out how you can help celebrate the possibilities of welcome as we reenact Mary and Joseph's search for an inn during the December 22 service. We are looking for people for speaking and nonspeaking roles, and we need people to share a few words about their own or their family's experience as pilgrims, refugees, or spiritual seekers coming to the United States, Northern Virginia, or our church community. Rehearsals will be held after services on Sundays, November 3, November 17, December 1, and December 8 and immediately preceding the worship service performance on 12/22. Contact Linda Weaver at re-director@uusterling.org.

SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

Right and Might: Reconsidering a Story From Ancient India

While a deer was eating wild fruit, he heard an owl call, “Haak, haak,” and a cricket cry, “Wat,” and, frightened, he fled. In his flight, he ran through the trees up into the mountains and into streams. In one of the streams, the deer stepped upon a small fish and crushed it almost to death. Then the fish complained to the court, and the deer, owl, cricket, and fish had a lawsuit. In the trial came out this evidence:

As the deer fled, he ran into some dry grass, and the grass seed fell into the eye of a wild chicken, and the pain of the seed in the eye of the chicken caused it to fly up against a nest of red ants. Alarmed, the red ants flew out to do battle, and in their haste, they bit a mongoose. The mongoose ran into a vine of wild fruit and shook several pieces of it onto the head of a hermit who sat thinking under a tree.

“Why did you, O fruit, fall on my head?” cried the hermit. The fruit answered: “We did not wish to fall; a mongoose ran against our vine and threw us down.”

And the hermit asked, “O mongoose, why did you throw the fruit?” The mongoose answered: “I did not wish to throw down the fruit, but the red ants bit me, and I ran against the vine.”

The hermit asked, “O ants, why did you bite the mongoose?” The red ants replied: “The hen flew against our nest and angered us.”

The hermit asked: “O hen, why did you fly against the red ants’ nest?” And the hen replied: “The seed fell into my eyes and hurt me.”

And the hermit asked, “O seed, why did you fall into the hen’s eyes?” And the seed replied: “The deer shook me down.”

The hermit said unto the deer, “O deer, why did you shake down the seed?” The deer answered: “I did not wish to do it, but the owl called, frightening me, and I ran.”

“O owl,” asked the hermit, “why did you frighten the deer?” The owl replied: “I called, but as I am accustomed to call—the cricket, too, called.”

Questions for Discussion

If you were the judge, what would you decide? Who should be punished? Should any be forgiven? Why or why not?

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines mercy as “kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly” or “kindness or help given to people who are in a very bad situation.” How might the judge show mercy in this story?

How has someone given you mercy?

How have you given mercy to another person or creature?

Want to share something in the December newsletter?

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

CALENDAR

Stay Up to Date with UUCS Events

NOVEMBER	////////////////////////////////////
Saturday, 11/2	<p>9:30 am–1:30 pm — <i>New to UU Class</i> All newcomers to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling are encouraged to attend. Lunch and childcare will be provided. Please RSVP to terrydick147@comcast.net.</p>
Sunday, 11/3	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship Service: “Judge Not?”</i> We form lasting judgements of one another's character in the first fraction of a second of an encounter. Once we believe we know someone or something, we can dismiss them or it. Mercy asks that we see one another as strangers whose fullness may remain always beyond our comprehension. The choir will lend their voices to the exploration of this theme.</p> <p>Noon — <i>Inquirer's Class in Rev. Anya's office. All newcomers are welcome.</i></p> <p>11:30 am–12:30 pm — <i>Holiday Pageant meeting in the Jordan Room.</i></p>
Sunday, 11/10	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship Service: “Reaching Across the Aisle”</i> The last few months in American politics have been filled with conflict and unparalleled repercussions on personal and professional certainty. As UUs who strive for justice and building community, how can we respond spiritually? Rev. Rebekah, a Unitarian Universalist Army Chaplain, will grace us on this Veteran's day by exploring how we can balance and find meaning in the outer social and political realities while nurturing our spiritual journey.</p> <p>11:30 am–noon — <i>Children's Choir practice in the Emerson room</i></p>
Sunday, 11/17	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship Service: “An Unchosen Faith”</i> Last year's winning auction sermon will consider the faith that we do not and cannot choose—the faith that is with us when we are most in need. Space for contemplation will be carved into the service by Lisa Fiorili's jazz trio.</p> <p>11:30 am — <i>Open Doors—Two Services Task Force presentation and forum</i> Mike Berger, Ben Freidsen, Bryan George, Paul Roche, and Rachael Roman will present the task force's plan for keeping the doors at UUCS open to all who are seeking a faith home. Their findings include a plan for instituting two services at UUCS. Come to listen; come to share..</p> <p>11:45 am–1:00 pm — <i>Holiday Pageant rehearsal in the Jordan room</i></p>
Saturday, 11/23	<p>6:00 pm — <i>The 17th Annual UUCS Auction</i> A joy-filled gala that supports our congregation's operations. All are invited to attend and to encourage friends and family to attend. Tickets are on sale now for a donation of \$15.00 which includes an Italian feast, beer, wine, and nonalcoholic beverages. Contact Paul Roche at proche195@gmail.com.</p>

CALENDAR CONTINUED

NOVEMBER	////////////////////////////////////
Sunday, 11/24	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship Service: "We Don't Need No Stinkin' Gratitude"</i> Gratitude is for sissies! Only the grateful die young! Our intergenerational service turns the tables on Thanksgiving with humor and hopefully a bit of reverse psychology.</p>
DECEMBER	////////////////////////////////////
Sunday, 12/1	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship Service</i> 11:45 am — <i>Holiday Pageant rehearsal in the Jordan room</i> 11:30 am — <i>Children's Choir practice in the Emerson room</i></p>
Friday, 12/6	<p>6:30 pm — <i>Holiday Decorating Party</i> Decorate UUCS for the holidays and make your own ornaments or gifts to take home.</p>
Saturday, 12/7	<p>9:00 am—3:00 pm — <i>Help-Portrait event</i> Come help immigrant families through portraiture! Please see the article for details.</p>
Sunday, 12/8	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship Service</i> 11:45 am–1:00 pm — <i>Holiday Pageant rehearsal in the sanctuary</i></p>
Sunday, 12/15	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship Service</i> 11:30 am–noon — <i>Children's Choir practice in the sanctuary</i> 11:45 am–1:00 pm — <i>Holiday Pageant rehearsal</i></p>
Sunday 12/22	<p>9:00 am — <i>Children's Choir practice</i> 9:00 am — <i>Holiday Pageant rehearsal</i> 10:30 am — <i>Worship Service</i> The service will include the holiday pageant and music performed by the children's choir.</p>