

## Forgiveness

*There is real spiritual growth in admitting that one's life is not blameless even as one is dedicated effectively to working for the blameless life.*

—Howard Thurman

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The best adages produce a felt sense of the experience they are built to convey. Whenever I hear, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," I have a fleeting sense of a bird pressing itself out of my weak grip, a sense that instantaneously conjures the emotional counterpoint of loss. The most dramatic of these adage experiences comes to me with the phrase, "Don't throw stones in glass houses." I am suddenly standing (in my mind) in an empty greenhouse-like structure that is violently imploding, spitting falling shards on all sides. I bow (in my mind), gripping my hands over my head for protection.

The first time I heard the stones in glass houses adage, I was a child and I had to ask what it meant. My mother's explanation made immediate sense to my young self, and it hasn't slipped. I've heard other interpretations, but what she shared is that we are all equally vulnerable to insults and character defamations—so check yourself before you offer up your own.

There is something about the felt sense that the adage conjures that no other string of words could as purely and simply accomplish. The felt sense invokes the emotional experience of humility: I bow down, seeking protection, as the glass facade—the assumption of my purity or perfection, the pedestal that I have placed myself upon—disintegrates. Humility is the recognition that even I can't live up to or into the expectations that I have placed on the world.

Without humility, forgiveness is impossible—neither forgiveness of oneself nor of one's friend, family member, or enemy. Forgiveness is a letting go of our expectations of ourselves and others.

There are some acts that we may deem unforgivable—perhaps to protect ourselves or to protect those we love. In these cases, we may rely on anger or righteousness to draw the line between ourselves and those who have done us unspeakable harm, or simply between goodness and evil. Forgiveness of egregious wrongs is a choice we might make. Forgiveness of the everyday human wrongs that, with humility, we realize we can all make—that is required if we wish to maintain the structures that give us life: family, friendships, community, congregation.

### MINISTER'S MESSAGE

#### *Glass Houses, Falling Down*



Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

I have received the gift of such forgiveness when my flaws have surfaced, here in our congregation. I pray we all do. And I pray we all ask for forgiveness when that is what we need to re-covenant with one another. "There is real spiritual growth in admitting that one's life is not blameless even as one is dedicated effectively to working for the blameless life," says the minister and scholar Howard Thurman. It's no use

trying to live in glass houses, as all of us humans are bound to throw stones.

Yours in Apology and Forgiveness,

Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### *Forgiveness*



*Paul Roche*  
*Board President*

First, I want to thank everyone for a splendid celebration of our church's 20th anniversary! What a great evening filled with musical joy. Thanks to Rev. Anya for acting as emcee; Rev. Scott for sound; our music director Kris Adams; the band; the choir; Kaari Baluja, Dorine DiConti,

and Stephanie Roche working behind the scenes; Sonia Lorenz for the great quilt idea and execution; the Endowment committee; and everyone who helped—and all others who were able to enjoy the festivities.

Then three nights later, a large group of UUCS members—under the leadership of Harry and Trish Harris, Clarisa Marcus, and Kristin Harper—gave back by supporting an elegant dinner for food-challenged people at the Cascades Senior Center. Louis Marcus was the maitre d' and our youth carried off their table-waiting tasks with skill and aplomb. A wonderful experience!

I think I can speak for the other founding members when I say we are proud of what the church has become and accomplished in its first 20 years. It is wonderful to see the next generation of leaders rising up to guide us on our mission and into our vision.

Now on to this month's theme: forgiveness.

One of my first recollections of my struggle with Jesus was his insistence on forgiveness. I see turning the other cheek as a radical form of forgiveness, one I have never felt comfortable with. In the Middle East, I see a fringe terror group operating in the name of a great religion beheading people. I try hard to understand the motivations for such behavior, but I cannot. I want to lash out and see them punished accordingly. What would Jesus do?

Closer to home, I see politicians of all stripes leaping to attack each other personally and sleazily. I see no attempt by any of our elected "representatives" to talk to each other, to negotiate, to assume the best intentions in the other. The future of our children and our grandchildren hangs in the balance. Can I forgive this?

Perhaps the answer is that I need to concentrate on forgiving, and seeking the forgiveness of, those closest to me. Forgiveness to me is the sweetest of all virtues;

all the sweeter because of how difficult it is. It requires humility, an optimistic outlook on people, and a trust in the other's good intentions. Very difficult things.

So, does forgiveness require some degree of atonement by the one being forgiven? When Jesus hung on the cross, he purportedly said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." That is some serious forgiveness.

So in short, I don't know how to deal with forgiveness. I am still on the path in that area. I look forward to Rev. Anya's thoughts on this during the next month. Also please feel free to send a letter to the newsletter: let's get a discussion going on this topic.

## OCTOBER JUSTICE ALLOCATION

### *Partner Church: New Life School*

In October, half of our offerings will go to the New Life School. New Life School in Kkindu, Uganda is a UU-run primary school offering students an education in reading, writing, math and more. New Life School does not receive any revenue from the Ugandan government; it is considered a private, tuition-funded school, but students are not turned away for lack of funds.

## A WIDER WELCOME:

### *Social Justice Exploration*

On Saturday, October 4, the Accotink UU Church is hosting an interactive program, "A Wider Welcome—A Bolder Justice: Beyond Partisan Division." How wide is our welcome on the political front? Do we really encourage and accept differing political views in our own congregations? We can better we understand own political bias, be more effective in our understanding and conversations, and truly open our doors wide to intentionally extend our love and welcome to all. Come, explore! Rev. Anya, Rev. Scott Sammler-Michael, and Paul Roche will be presenting. (A UUSJ Board meeting will follow this program, open to all who are interested.) For more information, visit <http://uusj.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Beyond-the-Political-Divide-Reaching-In-and-Out-Flier-Sep-14.pdf>

## RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

### *Covenanting and Forgiving*

*We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. [One] who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us.*

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are constantly learning what it means to live together in a community of peace and justice. It can be both a joyful and challenging endeavor, requiring compassion and forgiveness. To help us in this endeavor, we create covenants, or promises of how we will be together.

This year, experienced Master Teachers met with each Religious Education (RE) team to help them create their own covenants. The teams agreed on how they will work together and how they will create a classroom environment that provides our children and teens with consistency and the most positive experience possible.

As they do each year, the RE leaders then guided the children and teens in creating classroom covenants. The children in first grade and above discussed how they want to be treated and agreed on how they will treat each other. These covenants are the foundation for creating a community that allows everyone to build trust and connect with one another openly and honestly.



Linda Weaver,  
Director of  
Religious Exploration

However, these covenants are just the starting point. We recognize that promises are not always easy to keep, so groups discuss ways to help members return to the covenant when they stray. When the covenant is not followed, the adult leaders and assistants guide individuals and the group in responding with both clarity and forgiveness. The boundaries stated in the covenant help create a place where everyone knows what to expect of others. It also makes it easier to give forgiveness, because processes for helping someone return to the covenant are already in place. Together, through covenants and forgiveness, we strive to create communities where everyone feels safe and welcome.

We hope you will join us this month as we explore forgiveness and live our covenant.

*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).*

## UUCS AUCTION IS NIGH!

Save the date and prepare your donations: the 18th Annual UUCS Auction will be held on Saturday, November 22.

Not only is the UUCS auction the largest social event of the year, it is also a huge fundraiser which supports our church operations. So please save the date and make plans to join the fun! Stay tuned for more info about the event itself.

But first things first: we need auction items! Please consider making a donation. Some of our most popular offerings have been group dinners hosted at congregants' homes, hiking events, stays at vacation homes, and crafting classes. Share your passion, skills, or creativity with us!

Donations will be accepted at church and also via email ([ddiconti@verizon.net](mailto:ddiconti@verizon.net)). For more information, please see an auction committee member (Dorine DiConti, Jackie Mills, or Stephanie Roche) or visit our table during fellowship hour.

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

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the November liturgical theme, *death*
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in November and the first two weeks of December)
- ✓ 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](mailto:newsletter@uusterling.org) by October 15.

## A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

### November: Forgiveness

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.

#### October 1—8

*True forgiveness is when you can say, "Thank you for that experience."*

—Oprah Winfrey

#### October 9—15

*Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.*

—Aberjhani, *The River of Winged Dreams*

#### October 16—22

*Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.*

— Nelson Mandela

#### October 23—29

*As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.*

—William Lloyd Garrison

#### October 30—31

*Even after all this time,  
The sun never says to the earth,  
"You owe me."  
Look what happens with  
A love like that.  
It lights the whole sky.*

—Hafiz of Persia

## SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

### *The Prodigal Son* (Adapted from Luke 15:11–32)

There was a man who had two sons. The oldest was obedient and content to live with his father. The younger couldn't wait to get away from the family to live life on his own terms. When he was able, he went to his father to ask for his portion of the inheritance. When he got his money, he ran off to a faraway land. There the young man wasted his money in wild living. A short time later, the man ran out of luck—he had no money, no job, and no friends. He was willing to take whatever job he could get and ended up taking care of pigs for a farmer and was so destitute that he was willing to eat the pig feed to stay alive.

The young man realized that he had a loving father who treated his servants better than the young man himself was currently living. He decided to return home as a servant to the father. At least he would have food to eat.

When he returned home, the son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

Though the boy returned with hopes of just being a servant, the father accepted him as the son he always was.

### Questions for Discussion

What do you do when you make a mistake or break a rule?

How do you feel when someone forgives you?

How do you feel when someone does not forgive you?

What do you need before you can forgive someone else?

How do you act and feel when you have not forgiven someone? When you have?

## ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Sign up for Adult Education! Exciting opportunities abound, including book studies and Building Your Own Theology. More information is available at <http://uusterling.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2014-15-RE-Catalog.pdf>. The adult opportunities begin on page six and there is a registration link at the top of each page.

## UUCS HOSTING RACIAL JUSTICE

### CONFERENCE AND JAZZ POETRY SLAM

Our congregation has the honor and privilege of hosting the Joseph Priestly District's 10th Annual Racial Justice Conference. The title is "Inclusivity Through Joy and Creativity." Don't miss this amazing opportunity! Justice advocates, artists, musicians, and everyone who loves our congregation is encouraged to register and attend. Worship, music, poetry, art, fellowship, learning, and joy-filled experiences will begin on Friday, November 7, and continue on Saturday, November 8. At the end of the day on Saturday, participants will be invited to attend the fourth-ever Jazz Poetry Slam at UUCS. The cost of the event includes meals. Find a link to the full schedule and register at <http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07e9e1n21c8b11b94ae&llr=f8rafhcab>

#### *Jazz Poetry Slam: "Come Alive"*

Bring your poems or your love of poetry and justice. We will host the fourth-ever Jazz Poetry Slam at 7:00 pm on Saturday, November 8, 2014. The theme, "Come Alive," is based on the lesson from Howard Thurman: "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Poets will be offered five minutes to recite one poem over light jazz. Prizes will be awarded to the winning poets in both the youth and adult categories. A cash wine bar and decadent snacks will be provided.

Spoken word artists, muses, rappers, students, student groups, actors, toastmasters, and activists are encouraged to participate. Doors open at 6:15 pm for registration. A registration donation of \$15 will be requested from all speakers, and an admission donation of \$10 will be requested from all attendees. Please visit [www.uucsjazzpoetryslam.net](http://www.uucsjazzpoetryslam.net) to register and for more information.



*Dave Lum and Paul Roche rocking out to Hair*



*Bob Barwis singing "Some Enchanted Evening" from South Pacific*

## THE GREATER WASHINGTON IMMIGRATION FILM FESTIVAL

If you haven't heard about the Greater Washington Immigration Film Festival (GWIFF), you'll want to know what's happening so you carve out some time in late October. The film festival aims to put a face on immigration and motivate viewers to call for changes in immigration reform. The GWIFF screenings will take place over four days, October 23–26. All of the films (other than *Who is Dayani Cristal?*) are free but tickets must be selected in advance at [IMFilmFest.Eventbrite.com](http://IMFilmFest.Eventbrite.com). On Saturday night, a party and the Washington premiere of *Who Is Dayani Cristal?* will take place; tickets are \$25 and include refreshments. Three subject matter experts will speak and take questions following the showing of *Who is Dayani Cristal?* For more information, visit GWIFF's Facebook and home pages at [www.facebook.com/immigrationfilmfestival](http://www.facebook.com/immigrationfilmfestival) and [www.immigrationfilmfest.org](http://www.immigrationfilmfest.org).

## CALENDAR

### Stay Up to Date With UUCS Events

OCTOBER	
Saturday, 10/4	<p><b>3:00—5:30 pm “A Wider Welcome”</b> presentation/discussion at Accotink UU Church; see article for details</p>
Sunday, 10/5	<p><b>10:30 am—Worship service: “Is Forgiveness Divine”</b> Rev. Anya considers the very human act of forgiveness as well as its sacred implications. Our service touches on the Jewish practice of Yom Kippor, and our choir will sing.</p> <p><b>Noon—Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</b></p> <p><b>Noon—RE orientation lunch for 4th–8th grade families</b> Get together with other families, meet the adult leaders and assistants, and hear about what the 4th–6th and 7th–8th grade groups have planned for this year. We will meet in the RE Program Suite.</p>
Friday, 10/10	<p><b>6:00 pm—9:00 pm — Potluck and Game Night</b> Come one, come all! Bring your favorite game to play and a dish to share for the potluck. All ages are encouraged to participate. A sign-up sheet for helping can be found on a table in the Hospitality Room.</p>
Saturday, 10/11	<p><b>11:00 am — Sterling Fest</b> UUCS will have a booth at Sterling Fest on Commerce Street in Sterling, VA. Volunteer to meet and greet at the booth, or visit us at the festival! Contact Elaine Hackett at <a href="mailto:elainehackett1220@hotmail.com">elainehackett1220@hotmail.com</a> for details.</p>
Sunday 10/12	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship service: “My Brother the Burro”</b> Engagement will be encouraged at this annual intergenerational annual Animal Blessing service. Rev. Anya will lead and our youth choir will sing. Bring a memento from a pet to have your pet blessed. Bring a photo or memento from a departed pet to honor the passage of your friend.</p>
Wednesday 10/15	<p><b>6:45 pm — Evening worship service: “Forgiveness”</b> Rev. Anya leads the second of our monthly evening worship services, during which we will seek rest and find beloved community.</p>
Sunday 10/19	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship service: “Navigating Your Ocean of Emotion”</b> Local therapist, Quaker, and leader of Loudoun Interfaith BRIDGES Debra Dalby will share our worship service. Our choir will offer the gift of its music. Stay afterwards for a one-hour class that will allow participants to go deeper with the theme of the service.</p>
Sunday 10/26	<p><b>10:30 am — Worship service: “One Side and the Other Side”</b> Rev. Anya serves the call to move our conversations and our congregation away from the seemingly uncrossable partisan divide, and Joe Jencks bring the gift of his profound and deeply moving music. Jencks is an international touring performer, songwriter, entertainer, and educator. He is noted for his unique merging of musical beauty, social consciousness, and spiritual exploration.</p>

NOVEMBER	
Sunday, 11/2	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship service : “Death, Being, and Nothingness”</i></p> <p>Noon — <i>Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</i></p>
Friday, 11/7	<p>6:00 pm — <i>Opening events for JPD Racial Justice Conference at UUCS</i> see article for details</p>
Saturday, 11/8	<p><i>JPD Racial Justice Conference continues</i></p> <p>7:00 pm <i>Jazz Poetry Slam—see article for details</i></p>
Saturday, 11/22	<p><i>UUCS Auction</i> see article for details</p>



*CTL Planning Committee making last minute preparations*



*Rev. Anya, UUCS, Rev. Hart of Blessed Assurance Temple, and Rev. Jackie from AME Church in the CTL kitchen*



*The very first CTL plate is ready to be sent out of the kitchen!*