

Faith

You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.

— Thomas Merton

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In September, our congregation will again be an active teaching congregation. Last year, after the Board approved a new half-time, two-year internship position, UUCS accepted applications, formed an interview committee, gathered and reviewed information on the applicants, and eventually offered the position to John Monroe.

John comes to us from the UU Congregation of Fairfax. His personal spiritual journey might resonate with many of us. John was raised in a Protestant home and in adulthood began an exploration of various faith traditions, including a year attending a Quaker meeting. When he became a member of UUCF, he quickly found himself deeply engaged in the life of that congregation, the size of which allowed plentiful opportunities for ministry. In the six years John has been there, he has been active in preaching, pastoral care, and social justice work. While continuing to work as an editor for a technical magazine, John entered Wesley Theological Seminary and expects to graduate this year.

John's personal statement, attached to his application and resume, gave his reasons for wanting to become an intern at UUCS. "I would like to learn how to help a congregation to grow," he wrote. "I know enough to realize that it is a complex task, one that involves questions of congregational identity, governance, and some nuts-and-bolts logistics. I would love the opportunity to accompany the UU Congregation of Sterling on that journey, helping in any way I can while learning lessons that I can take to other congregations and contribute to the growth of Unitarian Universalism as a whole."

As we are all aware, UUCS is indeed growing. John will have many opportunities to assist us in that process. We must reciprocate by offering constructive feedback to help him build his ministerial skills. In addition, during the two years he is with us, all of us—including John—will need to remember that our internship position is only half-time. There will be so much that John might want to do, and that our congregation might want from him, that difficult choices will need to be made on how he focuses his time and efforts.

A MESSAGE FROM THE INTERNSHIP COMMITTEE

By Noel Mariam

While Rev. Anya supervises and assists John in his UUCS activities, the Internship Committee will meet with him on a monthly basis. The primary role of the committee is to be a conduit for feedback both to and from our intern. We will be seeking comments and evaluations from any other committees John might work with as well as from individual members of our congregation. In monthly meetings,

we will discuss and reflect on that feedback and also ask John for his own comments and evaluations—areas of strength, growth, or in need of improvement, and how he thinks our congregation might better help him achieve his goals.

It will be a very eventful two years—for Rev. Anya, for our intern John Monroe, and for our congregation. We will all be teachers and learners. We look forward to making this journey together.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Gaps in the Wall



Paul Roche
Board President

“Something there is that doesn't love a wall. That sends the frozen groundswell under it and spills the upper boulders in the sun, and makes gaps even two can pass abreast... The gaps I mean no one has seen them made or heard them made.”

—Robert Frost, *Mending the Wall*

So I've been thinking about gaps lately. The most obvious gap is the absence of Rev Anya while she enjoys a well-earned sabbatical.

Other gaps are more silent and moving in us. When Robert Frost satirizes his neighbor for saying “good fences make good neighbors,” he is welcoming the gaps that the “elves” have made (“though it's not elves exactly”). The wall Frost describes is an impediment to a true relationship with his neighbor beyond the hill.

“Before I built a wall, I would like to ask what I was walling in or walling out,” he says.

In my opinion we have built a sort of wall here at UUUCS. Not a wall designed to keep people out, but a wall nonetheless. We have built a protected place where we can meet our spiritual and communal needs. It is a great church, with a great minister and fascinating and good people. So what is it are we walling in or walling out?

I think we are walling out a vast number potential UUs who can't meet on Sundays at 10:30. We are walling out people for whom a crowded parking lot is a turn-off. Thankfully you all have voted to proceed with breaking this wall down some by instructing your Board to add an additional Sunday morning service in the Fall. Will this be an easy change? Heck no—but what change is? I am comforted in knowing we are making some gaps in our wall that “even two can pass abreast.”

What other ways can we open up? How about with a yet more robust and exciting social justice council? How about inviting your friends and neighbors to church?

Other avenues Rev Anya and I are exploring include webcasting our services so our growing group of seniors can enjoy UUUCS in their communities.

In what other ways could you help expand our reach?

RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

The Gifts of Faith

Even more than ever, young people need the strength, comfort, and hope that faith can provide. There are children and teens who are suffering from the hectic lives this area requires of many families. There are young people stressed by the high expectations that surround them and that they place on themselves. Therapists have seen a rise in cases of anxiety in elementary school children, and teens are expressing their pain through eating disorders and cutting. A number of teens in Northern Virginia have taken their own lives in recent years, and we are reading too often about violence done by disenfranchised teens and young adults across the country.

Children and teens need a place where they are accepted. They need help to recognize themselves as sacred and to experience themselves as part of the holy mystery of the universe. They need a place where they know their gifts are valued and where they are loved no matter how little or how much they achieve. Experts have found that the larger the number of adults who care about and are in community with a teen, the less likely the teen is to engage in risky behavior. This is an important role the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling (UUUCS) plays for children and teens in the congregation and for those who are seeking this kind of community.

Because faith is so important, you might wonder what it is and how we help develop it. Faith is a combination of ones beliefs, loves, and actions. It is both absorbed and learned. At UUUCS, beliefs, values, priorities, and ways of living can be picked up from the caring environment we create and from the examples people provide as they live lives guided by kindness, fairness, and justice. Our youngest children experience the wonder of themselves, other people, the world, and the divine, and they learn important relationship skills as they play in the nursery and engage in games and other activities in their classes. As children grow, we teach such values as respecting all people, caring for the Earth, giving everyone a voice in the things that concern them, and encouraging a responsible search for truth. Older children and teens further build their faith by engaging in activities and pondering questions that encourage them to draw their own conclusions and to create meaning from their experiences and all the information they have. By the time they are in middle school, they are deeply considering their own beliefs and actions. High school youth group members continue to grow as they gather to share the joys and concerns of their lives and to delve even more deeply into the questions of life and faith that concern them.



Linda Weaver,
Director of
Religious Exploration

Children's Religious Education topics and a list of programs and events for children and families is on the calendar at the UUUCS website, www.uusterling.org.

THE CHILDREN OF UUCS NEED YOU!

If you have signed up to help with Religious Education in 2015–16, thank you. If you haven't, please think about teaching or volunteering in some way from September 2015 to June 2016. Sign up in the lobby at UUCS, [online](#), or contact [Linda Weaver](#). Now that we will have two services, you can help with RE and still participate in worship—Serve 1, Attend 1!

There are openings for caregivers in the Nursery and for PK–6th grade leaders and assistants at the 9:30 am service. We also need assistants for the PK–K and 1st–3rd grade groups at the 11:15 am service. Find out more about these and other opportunities at the RE table in the lobby or contact [Linda Weaver](#).



RE: ENROLL ALL CHILDREN AND TEENS, INFANT THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

Enroll your children NOW to help us better serve your family and all families at UUCS next year. [Register online](#) and contact [Linda Weaver](#) to let us know whether your children will be attending RE during the 9:30 am or 11:15 am service. The current plan is to offer RE activities related to the UUCS monthly themes for PK–6th graders during the early service and to hold classes with a smaller age range and a focus on UU curriculum, similar to the current RE classes, at the later service.

THE BASICS OF POSITIVE PARENTING

Sunday, May 31, 12:15–1:15 pm

Participants will learn how to motivate positive behavior—not by relying on yelling, nagging, and

punishment, but by focusing on their relationship with their child. We will also discuss what's truly beneath children's negative behavior and how to use those instances as an opportunity for connection and learning.

The meeting will be led by Rachel Bailey, who has a Master's Degree in Clinical Psychology and is a Certified Positive Discipline Parent Educator. A trained coach and therapist, she currently teaches parents how to raise children who believe in themselves, make healthy choices, and meet their full potential. She also helps parents redefine "perfect parenting" to reduce the worry, guilt, helplessness, and desire for perfection that are so often a part of parenting. [Sign up](#) to register and request childcare.

UU JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN ROCKVILLE

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Rockville, Maryland, is seeking candidates for three staff positions. The Youth Coordinator (15 hours per week) has overall responsibility for managing creative and supportive programs for youth in grades 7–12, including accompanying them on weekend conferences and retreats. The Religious Education Assistant (15 hours per week) provides administrative and operational support for our many religious education programs. The Child Care Coordinator (6 hours per week) serves in the nursery on Sunday mornings and coordinates volunteer child care providers on Sundays and for some special evening and weekend events. You may find more information, including position descriptions and application instructions, at <http://uucr.org/employment-opportunities>.

Want to share something in the Summer (June–August) newsletter?

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the summer liturgical theme, *unity*
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place over the summer and the first two weeks in 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 20.

A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

May: Faith

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.

All passages this month were taken from *Guiding Principles for a Free Faith* by James Luther Adams

May 1—6

We gather as Unitarian Universalists to understand, articulate, and live our liberal religion. David brought down the giant Goliath with five smooth stones, but we use our five smooth stones to build a more just, loving, and free world.

Our first stone reminds us that we are part of a living tradition in which revelation is continuous. Together we engage in a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

May 7—13

We gather as Unitarian Universalists to understand, articulate, and live our liberal religion. David brought down the giant Goliath with five smooth stones, but we use our five smooth stones to build a more just, loving, and free world.

Our second stone reminds us that we freely choose to enter into relationship and community with one another.

May 14—20

We gather as Unitarian Universalists to understand, articulate, and live our liberal religion. David brought down the giant Goliath with five smooth stones, but we use our five smooth stones to build a more just, loving, and free world.

Together as people of conscience, we build relationships of justice, equity, and compassion that further the wholeness of

the interdependent web of all existence.

Our third stone reminds us that we have a moral obligation to work toward establishing a just and loving community.

May 21—27

We gather as Unitarian Universalists to understand, articulate, and live our liberal religion. David brought down the giant Goliath with five smooth stones, but we use our five smooth stones to build a more just, loving, and free world.

Together we speak and act prophetically with the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

Our fourth stone reminds us that good things happen as a result of human effort.

May 28—31

We gather as Unitarian Universalists to understand, articulate, and live our liberal religion. David brought down the giant Goliath with five smooth stones, but we use our five smooth stones to build a more just, loving, and free world. Together, as beings with inherent worth and dignity, we create goodness and virtue.

Our fifth stone reminds us that the divine and human capacities for achieving meaningful change are reason for optimism. Together we may be hopeful that change will occur toward a more just, loving, and free world. The roots of our living tradition have been developed over centuries, but new ideas and understandings are still being revealed. Some stones are smooth and polished, while others are newly found and rough. We are part of this living tradition. Through it, we become whole, and through us, our tradition becomes whole.

MAY JUSTICE ALLOCATION

In May, half of our Sunday morning offerings will go to 4Paws Rescue Team, which adopts cats and kittens in northern Virginia. Please visit www.fourpaws.org for more information.



SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

The Fox and the Lion: A Retelling of a Sufi Wisdom Tale

Once there was a woman who prayed to understand what path she should take in life. One night after praying, she dreamed of walking in the woods. The next day she journeyed to the woods searching for the answer to her prayers. It was quiet and peaceful. Then she saw a patch of red fur. It was an injured fox lying in the shade of a large tree. Before she could reach the fox, she heard the nearby bushes rustle and out came a lion with a fish in its mouth. Frightened, the woman hid herself and watched as the lion laid the fish near the fox, turned around, and left the way it came. As she watched the weakened fox eat the fish, she said to herself, "There is my answer! The Great Provider—who takes care of the fox—will also take care of me. I do not have to do anything. I will be taken care of if I just have faith."

The woman went back home happy to have her answer. She did not do anything. She did not go to work. She did not feed herself. She did not even bathe. She became hungry sitting in her house, so she went to town to see if she would be provided for there. Yet no provisions came. People avoided her. She grew weak from hunger. She fell into a restless sleep and dreamed that she was back in the woods.

"Oh, Great Provider!" she implored in her dream. "You took care of the little fox, but you will not provide for me?"

The Great Provider replied, "You are mistaken. I do not want you to be the fox. I want you to be the lion."

Questions for Discussion

- When have you been cared for like the fox?
- When have you been like the lion?
- What do you think this story says about faith?
- What step can you take to be more like the lion? Do you need to take better care of yourself? How can you reach out and help someone else? One small act can make a big difference.



Harry Harris packing up for the CTL dinner (October 2014)



CTL Planning Committee making last minute preparations

COMMUNITY TABLE OF LOUDOUN UPDATE

UUCS Members and Friends:

It is time for an update on the Community Table of Loudoun (CTL) efforts that have been ongoing since our successful dinner event last September. Kurt Aschermann, the driving force behind this interfaith effort, recently sent a note to the CTL coordinators in which he highlighted the status of the CTL after its first year of existence. Here are the highlights from his note.

Dear Community Table of Loudoun Family:

Last night [March 21st] we served 103 people at Cascades Senior Center, thanks to the Baha'i and Sikh communities and two weeks before that Loudoun County High School students and faculty served 120...these numbers have gotten us very close to reaching a goal of serving 1000 guests in our first year of existence. When we remember that we are not a traditional soup kitchen and that the quality of the experience is what we are looking for, I think we can be proud of what we have done in our first year.

- We have 20 or so faith communities and now a high school as sponsors of a CTL dinner.
- We have conducted nine dinners so far and have served about 950 guests.
- Every single dinner has been different; exactly the way CTL is supposed to work.
- Because there is no hierarchy, and no central authority, each sponsoring CTL committee has made the dinner their own and made it unique.

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Tables are all set up for the CTL/UUCS dinner at Loudoun Senior Center (October 2014)

•CTL, as you know, is not a 501c3 competing for funds or support. Nobody gets a tax write-off for supporting us. There is no board, no executive director, no staff. This is an unorthodox model but it works. Thanks to you.

We've learned a lot in our first year:

•We got traction very, very quickly. CTL has become part of the Loudoun County fabric quicker than anyone expected or envisioned. People know we exist and people continue to ask how they can help.

•We have learned to manage expectations. Where we used to cook and plan for 250–300 people, we now plan for 100–150 or so thus managing the expectations for our volunteers and reducing the amount of food we have left over.

•We have learned that kids work. Watching young people serve and clean up, converse with guests, and work together has been a wonderful extra benefit to CTL. And having them entertain? Our guests love that part of CTL.

•The dinners are as important to the faith communities/school as they are to the guests who are served. These dinners have brought faith communities closer together and have put different faith communities working together. And the joy our volunteers get from serving is palpable.

•There is no stigma attached to attending a CTL dinner. I've been thrilled with the fact that our strategy of never using the words "serving the poor" in our materials has worked.

•We learned that because we are so decentralized it is essential for success that someone, and maybe a couple of someone's take the lead for each committee and that the spiritual leader or principal of the school has to be behind the dinner to make it really work. People want to see their leaders buying into CTL which makes them work harder and thankfully, our faith community leaders and one principal have been strong supporters and volunteers in the CTL program. Their presence really matters.

•As with real estate, it might be that location matters. Our guests seem to trust the school. And they seem comfortable at senior centers...we're not positive they feel the same way about attending a dinner at a specific faith community building. We intend to explore this more thoroughly in the next year by asking people how they feel about it.

•We know the key to attracting guests is communications and awareness. We finally got some fabulous press from our friends at Leesburg/Ashburn Today and we heard from so many people as a result.

Whew...it's been quite a year. But we're only just beginning. The next dinner for UUCS to host is in September 2015. It will most likely be again held at the Senior Center. Your help is needed to make this next dinner an even bigger success than the last one. The CTL committee is forming now, so please contact Kristin Harper or Harry Harris to volunteer your service.

In gratitude,
CTL



The Serving volunteers are ready for the CTL guests

Photos by Trish Harris

CALENDAR

Stay Up to Date With UUCS Events

M A Y	
Sunday, 5/10	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship service: Flower Communion</i> Flower Communion is an intergenerational service in the spring which commemorates the first “Flower Festival” conceived by Rev. Dr. Norbert Capek in Czechoslovakia in 1923—almost a hundred years ago. Please bring a flower for each person and one to share. The choir will provide flower music.</p>
Sunday, 5/17	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship service: “The Arc of the Universe is Long”</i> Worship service: “The Arc of the Universe is Long” Guest minister Rev. John T. Crestwell wonders where we are and where we are going as a species—are we headed toward a Jetsons or a StarTrek kind of existence centuries from now? His findings may shock or excite you! Lisa Fiorilli will provide music.</p> <p>Noon <i>UUCS Annual Congregational Meeting</i></p>
Wednesday, 5/20	<p>6:45 pm — <i>Evening Worship service: “Faith”</i> Gather for a single-session covenant group service led by Deb Rose.</p>
Sunday, 5/24	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship service: “America’s New Arrivals”</i> In the preface to <i>Leaves of Grass</i>, Walt Whitman said, “Here is not merely a nation, but a teeming nation of nations.” Guest Minister Rev. Archene Turner will reflect on immigration then and now.</p>
Sunday 5/31	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship service: “Resilience and the Power of Community”</i> Kayla Williams met fellow soldier Brian McGough in Iraq shortly before he sustained a penetrating traumatic brain injury and subsequently developed post-traumatic stress disorder. Despite these tremendous challenges, they were able to form a strong marriage and even experience post-traumatic growth. She will describe the important role advocacy and community played in their journey from trauma to healing. The choir will sing.</p> <p>12:15 — 1:15 pm <i>The Basics of Positive Parenting</i> Please see article for details.</p>
J U N E	
Sunday, 6/7	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship service</i></p> <p>Noon — <i>Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</i></p>
Sunday, 6/14	<p>10:30 am — <i>Worship service</i></p>