



Horizons Journal

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix
September 2013



Living a Life of Connection

Reverend Susan Frederick-Gray

The Rev. Scott Tayler, who served as co-Senior Minister of the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, New York describes the mission of Unitarian Universalism as the work of creating connection. He says, “we are a religion that sees people struggling, not against our own sinful souls, but against a shallow, frantic and materialistic world that all-too-often leaves us disconnected from our deepest selves, life’s gifts and needs greater than our own.” He describes this state as being “spiritually disconnected,” in other words disconnected from our deeper understandings of being and meaning, and increasingly from our humanity and our compassion. The work of this congregation, indeed our mission, is to help all of us heal this disconnect by inviting us into lives of connection.

One of the first steps toward spiritual connection begins with making authentic connections with others. About three years ago, at a Small Group Ministry facilitators’ session, the topic was friendship. Ruth Braunstein, one of UUCP’s Small Group Leaders, talked about a friend she has had for over 60 years. They met when they were 12 and 13 years old and have nurtured a lifelong friendship. She talked about what a gift it is to have a longtime friend—someone who has known you through all the many stages of your life. As she shared, I thought of my own friend—someone I have known for more than 25 years. All these years, we have seen each other through difficulty and joy; watched each other grow from crazy teens to the complexity of young adulthood, and now into marriage, profession and even motherhood.

Continued page 7



Maintaining Connections Through Life’s (Techno) Challenges

Reverend Linda Lawrence

I remember that good feeling I had years ago when I knew that all the kids were home safely, presumably tucked in bed and fast asleep. When that was the case, I felt a strong sense of connection to family, an assurance that all was well. I heaved a happy sigh knowing that everybody was under one roof, safe and sound at the end of the day.

Those days are gone, of course. We all know that children grow up and leave home (most of the time), that we have a very mobile society, and that our families are often flung far and wide—across the continent and even across the world. However, I still have a very strong “Mom-Sense” that wants to know that all the “chicks” are accounted for and doing alright. Knowing this about me, you might

imagine my dismay when I had to replace my phone and my computer around the same time this summer. I needed to figure out how to use the new-fangled things in order to stay connected to my family! To add insult to injury, three of our five young adult children were in transition from one home or state to another, and there were times I was unable to reach them. I know that not being able to immediately reach one of our kids by phone, text or email, is not abnormal—they are, after all, busy adults—and I try not to be a worrywart when I feel that temporary loss of connection, but I still don’t like it.

I, too, to the surprise of friends and family members, moved across the country nearly four years ago. After a short stint as snowbirds,

Continued page 7



The Commitments That Bind Us

Linda Bellantoni

President, Board of Trustees

I read an interesting article recently on CNN's Belief Blog by Rachel Held Evans entitled "Why Millennials Are Leaving the Church." In it, she examines some of the reasons behind the trend of young people abandoning Christian churches, and it has created quite a maelstrom in the blogosphere. She opines that hostility towards LGBT people, a lack of concern with social justice, the conflict between intellectualism and faith (specifically, science and Christianity), and an obsession with sex are factors that make membership in a "traditional" Christian community untenable for many millennials, as well as an increasing number of people in other generational demographics.

Evans says that what millennials want is "an end to the culture wars. We want a truce between science and faith. We want to be known for what we stand for, not what we are against. We want to ask questions that don't have predetermined answers."

It sounds like what they're looking for is Unitarian Universalism! There is a growing need in our society for faith communities like ours, communities built upon broad principles, built upon caring for others, built upon social justice—in short, built upon acceptance and love. But they need to know we're here and what we stand for.

One of the challenges in reaching out to engage others and share our message is that it's sometimes easier for UUs to say what we're not, rather than what we are—what we don't believe, rather than what we do. While we don't subscribe to any particular creed or dogma, we do have a shared belief system, one that's very powerful and that unites us into a strong and loving community.

It's easy enough, although not very succinct, to recite our seven principles. We also have our UUCP Mission—our *raison d'être*. These are certainly useful in conveying what we stand for, but my personal favorite is our Covenant. We recite it at the start of each service, but it's deserving of more reflection: Love is the doctrine of this congregation . . .

the quest for truth is our sacrament . . . service is our prayer . . . to dwell together in peace . . . to seek knowledge in freedom . . . to share our strength in fellowship. These are the commitments that bind us to one another and make us a community. They demonstrate our respect for and acceptance of one another. And they show our love. These are the things that we have in common—this is what we stand for—and it's so much more powerful than our differences or any of those things which we are "against."

We have an energy and vibrancy and warmth in our UUCP community that is a direct result of our shared values: *what we stand for*. We have a desire and commitment to grow and learn and love and build a better world. We have something here that people want, and that society needs. We are a beacon in the desert. Let's let our light shine! □

— CONNECTION —

To touch the soul of another human being is to walk on holy ground.

— Stephen R. Covey

...the most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention... especially if it's given from the heart.

— Rachel Naomi Remen

Ye cannot live for yourselves; a thousand fibres connect you with your fellow-men, and along those fibres, as along sympathetic threads, run your actions as causes, and return to you as effects.

— Rev. Henry Melvill



Connecting through Ritual

Anne Byrne

Director, Children's Ministries

The spiritual and faith formation of children and youth have been studied and documented, and a lot is known about what young people need from religious education, both at home and within a congregation at different ages. Preschool aged children are naturally spiritual and believe in magic and wonder and mirror what their parents believe. Elementary aged children want to know exactly what and why their parents and other influential adults believe as they do and what distinguishes one faith tradition from another and makes their own special. Middle school youth are at the pivotal age where they either buy in or reject religion and are self-absorbed with their own body changes. High school aged youth want to explore themselves as religious individuals and create connections and relationships within a religious context.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are sometimes challenged by a conflict between the abstract nature of our own beliefs and children's concrete needs for answers. Fortunately, our faith tradition has well developed tools and practices to support children and youth at their appropriate stage of development. Our Coming of Age and Our Whole Lives programs are just the right fit for middle school age youth and the high school ministry's well developed youth-led culture builds the powerful connections necessary for impact.

Across all ages, the use of ritual grounds and deepens youths' connection and understanding of our faith tradition, which is why we start every Sunday School class with lighting the chalice and reciting the children's covenant. If you are looking for ways to extend some ritual to the home front, I have a few suggestions.

But first, let us acknowledge that for many of us one of the essential characteristics of Unitarian Universalism is the ability to form our own beliefs within a religion without dogma or doctrine. If you are like me, you want your children to explore and develop their own views on religion, God and spirituality. The reality, however, is that children, especially young ones, have not yet developed the ab-

stract thinking skills to discern their own beliefs and very much need to mirror the beliefs of their parents or other influential adults. Children's needs for concrete answers and opinions are likely in opposition to parents' very abstract and nonspecific beliefs.

Engaging in the regular practice of simple rituals will help bridge the divide between Unitarian Universalist adults' and children's needs. Personally, I find strength in the Seven Principles, so I love to sing this song:

Seven Principles Song

(To the tune of Do Re Mi)

One, each person is important

Two, be kind in all you do

Three, we're free to learn together

Four, and search for what is true

Five, all people need a voice

Six, create a peaceful world

Seven, we care for earth's lifeboat

And that will bring us back to me and UU...

Before meals and bedtime are great times to connect and share some ritual words. Here are a few of my favorites:

May we have eyes that see, hearts that love, and hands that are ready to serve.

(Jackie Creuser, adapted).

May I become at all times, both now and forever

A protector for those without protection

A guide for those who have lost their way

A ship for those with oceans to cross

A sanctuary for those in danger

A lamp for those without light

A place of refuge for those who lack shelter

And a servant to all in need

(Buddhist prayer)

O God, whom we know as Love,

Help us to recognize the love that surrounds us

And in which we have our being

Continued page 5

Communicating Our Mission

How many of us feel like we are drowning in a sea of papers, emails, catalogs, books, magazines, etc? Our nightstands and desks become inadequate boats to buoy these communications while we struggle to keep our minds floating through a vast sea of ideas and opportunities. Our need to put our fingers and ears on information quickly is driven by this pressure to empty our boats and save ourselves from sinking. The staff at UUCP believes that our communications should not weigh down your boats, but rather, help you in navigating your way to sharing, to growing, and to advancing justice through our community.

“The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.”
—Hans Hofmann

We have re-imagined and simplified our publicity to allow our mission to shine through. *Compass*, *Sunday Announcements*, *Program Catalog* and *Horizons Journal* have all been given a fresh look, new layouts, and new content guidelines. The staff members have worked together to streamline our communications so that they are easier to read. Here are the changes that you have already started to see:

Compass and *Sunday Announcements* are now shorter in length, giving focus to Sunday wor-

ship and ways for people to connect through our ministry programming. There is a prominent link in our weekly e-newsletter, *Compass*, to the complete Calendar of Events on our website. Since *Sunday Announcements* is a printed publication, it includes a complete listing of events on the back page. People are directed to our lobby to pick up a copy of the *Program Catalog* or to visit our website for more information regarding a particular activity. *Horizons Journal* is intended to be an inspirational publication providing a deeper reflection of the worship theme each month. *Horizons* is also considerably shorter (between 4-8 pages) and mailed to all member and friends' households monthly.

The *Program Catalog* is also shorter, focusing on our programming for the year, and includes many of your smiling faces.

As you start to notice these changes we would appreciate your feedback. In particular, we want to know if you are finding yourself reading our weekly communications more often in light of the recent changes. Do our publications make you feel welcomed and encouraged to connect? And above all, are we making it easier for you to connect?



Heidi Parmenter,
Business Administrator



Jill Story,
Office Assistant

Memorial Garden



Warren Herbert Amster
William Blauvelt Bishop
Phillip Kevin Bliklen
Betty Halsema Foley
Julia Michelle Fritts
Sarah Patterson Ingersoll

Betty K. Irvine
Thomas Stephan Kole
Erika Michaud
Mary Ellen Mussman
Arthur Wilfred Olsen
William Eugene Swineford

*friends whose ashes were interred in the Memorial Garden this month
in past years are still remembered*

Unicare News

In remembrance:

Dr. J. Eugene Grigsby, June 9

Tom Parker, July 13

Rocco “Bob” Rusconi, August 15

Serious Illness/Hospitalization:

Barbara DeWitt was hospitalized for two months with pancreatitis

Regina Nelms received emergency surgery in June

Mike Petersen had foot surgery in July

Significant birthdays/anniversaries:

Charlotte and Smoot Carl-Mitchell's 40th wedding anniversary was August 4th

Significant news:

Celeste Allen's last Sunday as our summer intern was August 18th

Catherine Desberg and family moved to Sacramento in August

For more information on significant events in the life of UUCP members / friends, sign up to be on our Unicare email list at unicare@phoenixuu.org.

Ceyshe' Napa, Unicare Coordinator



Continued from “...Ritual” page 3

Help us to see ourselves as the loving people we are and can be

(Wayne B. Arnason, adapted)

There is love

Holding me.

There is love

Holding you.

There is love

Holding all.

I rest

In this love.

(Rebecca Parker)

May all beings in the world be happy.

May all the beings in the world be at peace.

May all beings in the world be free from suffering.

May all the beings in the world be well.

(Buddhist Loving Kindness Meditation)

Dear God,

May I be kind,

Strong and brave,

Joyful, useful, loving,

Honest and healthy.

(Meg Barnhouse)

Oh, the earth is good to me.

And so I thank the earth.

For giving me the things I need.

The birds and the bees and the apple trees.

Oh, the earth is good to me.

(Traditional)

Some of us are more comfortable with rituals than are others. Whichever the case is for you, remember that ritual is a powerful connecting tool for children—connection within a family, connection to our congregation, our values and beliefs and our overall faith tradition. □

September Worship Theme: **Living a Life of Connection**

September 1: Mundane Beauty

Service Leader: David Weaver

Wouldn't it be great to jump out of bed every morning anticipating what joy the day will hold? Though a few folks might say "no" many of us would love to have a richer sense of purpose in our lives.

September 8: Multigenerational Ingathering Water Service: Life Connections

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Celebrate the beginning of our congregation year by bringing water from a place that is sacred or special to you and your family, perhaps from travels this summer, or from your own home. Just as water is essential for life, so is community, connection and covenant.

September 15: The Love That Forgives

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Is forgiveness a sign of weakness, a way of condoning wrong? Ancient religious teaching, exemplified in the lives of the greatest men and women, shows us that forgiveness is the only path to freedom, to health and to positive change—whether in our lives or our world. The title of my sermon comes from the Sunday School lesson at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, 50 years ago this day, the day it was bombed by the Ku Klux Klan. The statues by John Waddell in our garden memorialize this tragic day in our nation's history.

September 22: Daring Connections

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Nurturing relationships of family and friends is key to sustaining joy and meaning. But daring to build connections and relationships across difference, daring to have conversations that often feel forbidden—or too fraught with fear—is a path to wisdom and a richness of understanding that only comes from daring to dive deep.

September 29: Spiritually Connected, Spiritually Alive

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

The Rev. Scott Tayler says the mission of Unitarian Universalism is to help heal spiritual disconnect. The context of our contemporary lives pulls us away from what is most important, from one another, and our own inner sources of joy and meaning. How do we live lives of connection—to each other, to our deepest selves and to life's most precious gifts?



Continued from "Living..." Rev. Susan, page 1

But honestly, there were times I took our friendship for granted. Until that small group meeting, I never thought about how rare a long friendship is—or how precious. Ever since that small group, I have given more care and attention to this relationship, being mindful to stay in touch and nurture it—for true friendship is a beautiful gift. It's also helped me be more mindful of the gift of my other friendships and significant relationships.

How easy it is to take the people we love—our partners, friends, parents—for granted. How easy it is to put more of our attention and energy into material concerns or into our work. Sometimes we just expect that the people we love know we love them and that at some later time we will devote more attention to those relationships. But if we are honest with ourselves, it is the relationships of love and care, trust and friendship, that make life precious and worthwhile. If we are honest, which is

more important, what is our true treasure? Is it our work, or is our friends and loved ones?

This month, in worship and small groups, we'll be looking at what it means to live lives of connection. At UUCP, Small Groups are one of the most profound ways we have to get connected to others—and, as with the wisdom that Ruth imparted to me, hearing another's story helps us understand and tend to our own better.

This is a community looking to help you get connected, share and grow—and Small Group Ministry is one of the best ways to do this. New small groups will be forming in September and October. Check out our website and program catalog to sign up and get connected! My own story is just one of dozens of how small groups have had made a positive difference in the lives of our community.

As my sabbatical winds down, I am looking forward to re-connecting with all of you at UUCP! □

Continued from "Maintaining..." Rev. Linda, page 1

my partner Gary and I moved from Illinois to Arizona as full-time residents in December, 2009. My loss of connection to the familiar was intense for quite a long time. UUCP was one of the first places we went after settling into our home, and I remember crying a lot at choir rehearsals and holiday services. I really missed my *old* choir, my *old* congregation, my *old* friends!

All of us have had a lot of experience at being "new"—new to first grade, new to a job, new to a sports team or club, new to a town, state, community or country and even new to a congregation. Do you remember how that felt? Of course we all handle change differently, but even if you are the most outgoing and gregarious person in the world, starting over can feel risky—even scary—and it can certainly be lonely.

People new to UUCP come to our services every single Sunday, hungering for connection, wanting to belong. What do you have to offer to help them through their transition so that they can feel at home, feel connected to our congregation? We have many programs available to help people along their journey to connection within UUCP.

Still, it's the personal efforts we make to reach out and get to know people that make all the difference.

I'd like to especially thank Connie Jahrmarkt and Charlotte Carl-Mitchell for going the extra mile for me when I was a "newbie" here. They went so far as to invite me and Gary to Christmas dinner! That was a lovely gesture, and we enjoyed a wonderful meal and good company. It took a while after that to really feel at home, but in time, I finally felt like I belonged here with all of you.

There are others among us (or yet to come) who are looking for a place to belong, a people to call their own. How will you welcome them in? What will you do this congregational year, this month, this Sunday to help someone else form a satisfying connection at UUCP?

By the way, I still haven't fully mastered my smart phone (boy, does it make me feel dumb sometimes) or Windows 8, but I'm much more connected with my family and friends and with you than I was pre-new-techno devices. So feel free to call or email if you are new to UUCP and looking for ways to engage in this community. I'd be happy to help you get connected! □



**Unitarian Universalist Congregation
of Phoenix**

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