Beyond Rights to Right Relationship: A Theology of Interdependence
Reverend Susan Frederick-Gray

At the October 4th statewide gathering of the Unitarian Universalist Justice Arizona Network (UUJAZ), Rev. Deborah Holder gave the keynote presentation on Building Beloved Community. She talked about paradigm shifts happening across the country. One shift she identified is the shift from language of rights to right relationship, and one reason for this shift is that when justice work only focuses on rights, we can get stuck in false choices between my rights and your rights. Right Relationship invites us to reflect on qualities of justice, fairness and respect between peoples. It gets beyond focusing on the individual to paying attention to interdependence.

Relationship Is All There Is
Reverend Linda Lawrence

I have long been fascinated with the idea of interdependence. This subject has become even more interesting over time as quantum physicists discovered amazing interconnections between particles at the subatomic level. Biologists and ecologists now know more than ever about the complex relationships between animals, between plants and animals, and within ecosystems.

When describing family and organizational systems, I like to use the image of a mobile. Imagine a brightly colored mobile hanging above a baby’s crib. Perhaps there are beautiful butterflies hanging at the end of each string. What happens to the red, the yellow, and the blue butterflies when the baby’s parent gently pulls and releases the green one? Of course! They all jiggle!

Process theology tells us that the example of the mobile represents the truth of reality. In other words, relationship is all there is. Relationship is all there is. It’s inescapable! We may try to deny it or pretend that it isn’t so, but the truth is we are all interdependent.

We Unitarian Universalists often prefer to focus on freedom and independence, self-sufficiency and uniqueness. Interdependence? Not so much. In our worst moments, we may secretly believe or act like we UUs – or even we human beings – are the great exception to the processes of interdependence. This, of course, is both arrogant and ignorant. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.” There is no escape, no matter how fervently we pretend otherwise!

Of course no one can be continually aware of everything and everyone inside this interdependent...
Often when I am asked how our worship themes relate to music, my only answer is a metaphor, something that music and life have in common. "Interdependence" in music makes me think of the subtleties of intonation, and what it means for different notes to be "in tune" with each other. To describe these subtleties, let me briefly explain sound from the perspective of physics.

Sound travels in what physicists call longitudinal waves. Pressure forces pockets of air particles to compress and decompress rapidly as the sound moves through them. The rate at which an air pocket cycles between compression and decompression is known as the frequency of the sound, and is measured in Hertz (Hz), which means cycles per second. We perceive this frequency as pitch; higher frequencies (faster cycles) correspond with higher pitches. The standard pitch for tuning, the A above middle C, vibrates at 440 Hz, which means that the air is compressing and decompressing 440 times each second.

When two sounds' frequencies are in a perfect ratio with each other, their force complements each other, and we hear them as being "in tune." To put this in physical terms, imagine that four people are rowing a canoe down a river. The two people in the front are energetic and row once every four seconds, and two in the back, a little less energetic, row once every eight seconds. Every eight seconds, the two groups row together and the canoe flies down the river. This is what happens when two sounds are perfectly in tune – for example, an A at 440 Hz and the A an octave below, which vibrates at 220 Hz. The two forces combine to make the air compress and decompress, and the resulting sounds travel farther together than either would travel on their own. Each sound literally depends on the other for its power, in the way that our rowers depend on each other to get down the river with less effort.

If our two sounds are out of tune and don't vibrate the air in a simple ratio, they begin to cancel each other out. Let's imagine that the energetic rowers in the front of our canoe continue to row once every four seconds. The rowers in the back row as fast as they can, which ends up being once every 4.2 seconds. Even though the back group is working harder, the two groups are now hardly rowing together at all, so the canoe would be moving slower. If they could keep those rates going without getting confused (which would be really hard), the two groups would only row together once every 80 seconds. The pressure waves out of tune sounds interfere with each other like this, only occasionally lining up. Sometimes, when one wave is on target to compress a pocket of air and the other is on target to decompress the same air pocket at the same moment, and their force effectively cancels each other out. This is why singing or playing in tune takes less physical effort than singing or playing out of tune, and why an in-tune musical group can be heard clearly much farther away than an out-of-tune group.

As a metaphor for our lives, intonation reminds us that to make a difference in the world, it's less important what we each do and more important how what we do is coordinated with each other. The isolation many of us experience in our lives leaves us vulnerable to overwork, being ineffective, and sometimes even derailing each other without realizing it. In contrast, living lives of closeness and support with each other can give us the freedom to individually work less while being more effective in whatever we take on. May we all get "in tune" with each other!

We know from science that nothing in the universe exists as an isolated or independent entity.

— Margaret J. Wheatley
And then he lays his right hand on Abbe’s head, a head that has miraculously gone still, and now she just looks up at the minister with the same calm gaze she gave to the young boy, tongue at rest in her mouth, eyes half-closed as if in pleasure. He says to her, in a voice low and kind, “May you live a long life of love and peace,” and some other words I can’t quite catch because just then my eyes begin to fill—I hadn’t expected this—and I’m trying to concentrate, to say the words silently with him, but it’s difficult, because in this moment I know how much I really do love this dog, and how this love breaks me.

It’s as if the minister’s reached in and laid his meaty palm right on the muscle of my own heart—every animal part of me that longs to feel blessed has risen to the surface, like koi in an algae-filled pond.

– Blessing of the Animals, UUA, Author Unknown

Please join us on Saturday, November 8, at 10:00 a.m. for a special Blessing of the Animals service at UUCP. Blessing of the Animals is a tradition started in the Catholic Church and has been adopted by Unitarian Universalists to honor and celebrate our Seventh Principle: “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”

For many children, family pets are one of the most powerful teachers of the interdependent web of life. A beloved family pet provides affection and love in a distinctly non-human way, which helps teach about the diversity of life on this planet. Pets teach responsibility and the sad and joyful lessons of the cycle of life—and, while very different from humans, pets help us understand we are connected to other living things.

The summer of 2013 was the last Pet Blessing service at UUCP. I organized the service as part of our summer programming on animal welfare. I had never been to a Pet Blessing service, but my filing cabinet was a treasure trove of information, as was the UUA. I put together the service plan and Rev. Linda led the service. I sat with the congregation with my dog friend Zoe and when the time came, we walked up front and Rev. Linda laid her hand on Zoe and blessed the old girl. Like the author of the excerpt above, my eyes unexpectedly filled with tears, and I was surprisingly moved by the whole experience.

Rev. Linda’s blessing of Zoe and all the other animals present and with us in spirit reminded me of the powerful role pets play in our lives. There was something different about the congregants with pets that morning. Many entered the sanctuary with a combination of pride in showing off their pets and vulnerability in acknowledging just how much the pets meant to them.

Understanding interdependence requires acknowledgement of our own vulnerabilities and those of other living things. The joyful play of a new puppy and the tragic loss of beloved pet, even if it is at the end of a full life, ground us in this vulnerability.

My friend Zoe left this world a couple of months ago. She is grieved mightily by her human companions but also by her dog friend, Ziggy. His grief was palatable and hard to observe. In the best of circumstances, he is a grump of a dog, but a sad grump was just too much.

There is now a new face in this home—a puppy named Maddie. While Zoe is still sorely missed, this new personality has everyone jumping for joy, mostly because she likes to bite toes. She has brought great pleasure to her humans, but the biggest impact has been on Ziggy who now rolls on the floor, playing with Maddie for hours every day. Quite a change for a grumpy dog.

The truth is that Ziggy and I are not so far apart—we both grieve and we both feel joy. As different as we are, we are connected by all the vulnerability of life. Our interdependence shines brightly in this connection. Both Ziggy and Maddie will be at the Blessing of the Animals and we all hope you will join us. Bless all our animals and the blessings they give to us. □
come together as a covenanted community, not a creedal community. What this means is that we don’t all have to believe the same things about life, God or the afterlife to agree to live together in right relationship seeking the mutual benefit and growth of our lives, children and community.

Covenant is deeply rooted in our history. You can look all the way back to 1648 and the Cambridge Platform, the organizing document of the Congregationalist church, from which Unitarianism would arise about 150 years later. In that document is the principle that it is not through faith and not through the individual heart, but by becoming a part of a covenanted community we live our faith. In other words, it is by being a part of a congregation that we embody and make visible our deepest values. And more than this, it is in community where we learn how to live in right relationship.

More recently in our tradition, we have emphasized our freedoms and rights as religious liberals. We are free to develop our own spiritual practice, free to articulate our own religious beliefs. We affirm the right of conscience, the ability of each person to name what is true in their hearts, and the right to a vote in matters critical to the congregation, for example the calling of a minister. Along with these rights, covenant reminds us we also have responsibilities. We have responsibilities to nurture the health of the congregation, the responsibility to care for our community and nurture the health and growth of one another.

I often tell new members to UUCP that part of the responsibility of membership is a commitment to your own spiritual growth because being in community challenges us to grow. It is far easier to have your own personal, individual spiritual path to follow. Becoming a member of a religious community is much more difficult. You will meet people who challenge you. There will be times when we step on each other’s toes. We will disagree. Through our covenant, we agree to stay engaged, to listen thoughtfully, to create room for diversity of perspectives and the capacity and willingness to learn from each other. It’s not easy, but the opportunity is the chance to build a community of justice and diversity that we would hope to see in the larger world. To do this means a willingness to grow in every one of us.

This month is an invitation to reflect on the web of connections on which your life depends, the web of creation and connections that inform our world and see the possibility that comes when we move from looking at our independence to our interdependence. □

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**SANCTUARY 2014**

UUCP has signed a declaration letter to President Obama and Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson requesting immediate relief and humanitarian protection for undocumented community members who are currently in sanctuary with faith communities. As part of this movement, the UUCP Board of Trustees has also signed on as a supporting congregation, which supports the work of other churches and synagogues providing sanctuary to individuals who are facing deportation. To learn more about this movement and read the declaration letter, visit [www.Sanctuary2014.org](http://www.Sanctuary2014.org).
What would it mean if we, as religious people, took interdependence seriously? If we took the fact of interdependence seriously, I believe we would soon develop a deep understanding of these two things: (1) To change the world, we must change ourselves, and (2) everything matters. What we do, what we say, how we do what we do, how we say what we say, how we treat each other, how we treat strangers, how we care or don’t care for plants, animals, and the earth...all of it matters! Pretty mind-boggling, isn’t it?

To live life with a growing awareness of our profound interdependence is really the highest of spiritual quests. Putting this growing awareness into practice in our daily lives promotes radical, transformational change. When and how will you begin to live with a greater awareness of your connection to everyone and everything? What steps will you take to be in right relationship with other people – those known and unknown, those like and unlike you? What can you do to foster the well-being of plants, animals, the earth itself? How will you live with greater accountability to the interdependent web of which you are a part? □

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Process theologian Bernie Loomer said we must “bloom where we are planted” because what we do in our individual lives and locations has ripple effects. We will never know what most of those ripple effects are. Still, to nurture our awareness of the interdependent state of our lives, to increase the odds that our ripple effects are positive ones, there are some things we can do: We can practice mindfulness, humility, empathy and compassion. Revere the preciousness of life in its many forms. Make a commitment to nonviolent communication and action. Strive to understand the consequences of our words and actions. Take note of and learn from unintended consequences.

Unicare News

In remembrance:
- Harold Arthur Skillings, father of Connie Jahrmarkt, passed away on September 27th
- Joyce Laws, cousin of Benny Butt, passed away on September 19th

Serious illness/hospitalization:
- Margaret Herrick was hospitalized at Mayo Clinic and has now been moved to Sante Rehab Center for continued care
- Tish Gauntt continues to get stronger at Phoenix Mountain Nursing Center

Milestone celebrations:
- Anne Lackey’s daughter Jennifer was married on September 27th

Other news:
- Sam Kirkland and Michele Morgan’s daughter Daryl was recently married and has relocated to Syracuse, NY where she is starting a new job
- Glenda Henman started a new job at Headstart

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.

Maureen Jeffries,
Unicare Coordinator
Where does the time go? The Halloween decorations have been put away (they have, right?), Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and we’re fast approaching those final weeks of the year when everyone and everything is in a constant frenzy. The Halloween-to-New Year time every year races by like a blur. It seems like the kids had just started school, and now we’re scheduling appointments in our calendars for 2015. 2015? Really?

Before being drawn into the hectic-ness of the upcoming season, there’s still a little time now to take a figurative (or literal) deep breath, to lean back and reflect on our lives and our relationships, the people we care about, the people who care about us, and the communities of which we are a part.

As UUs, we readily embrace the idea that we are part of the interdependent web of all existence; it’s something so fundamentally obvious that it often goes without saying. To be interdependent is to be in a symbiotic relationship with others; to engage each other in mutual reciprocity; to trust that we can and will meet each other’s needs; to give to each other and get from each other those things we need for a full and rich and happy life. We are interdependent and so we build community with each other to create and reinforce and actualize our interconnectedness.

But being dependent on each other opens us to vulnerability. And for many people, being vulnerable can be a scary thing. I recently saw a video of a 2010 TED talk by Brene Brown which explores the idea of vulnerability in the context of living a connected life of love and belonging, what she calls living “wholeheartedly.” She says that “In order for people to connect with us we have to let ourselves be seen,” to be vulnerable. For some of us, allowing ourselves to be seen, and vulnerable, is a truly difficult thing.

We are all worthy of love and belonging.

Brown, who is a social researcher, says that the common trait in people who feel love and belonging is that they believe they are worthy of love and belonging. We are all worthy of love and belonging. As we enter into this hectic holiday season, when we feel stressed, or separate, or frustrated with our relatives, let’s try to remind ourselves of that. And as you go about your day, if you encounter someone who needs some human connection, try to remind them of that too. □
On Friday, October 17th, Susan Frederick-Gray joined United Church of Christ and Jewish religious leaders gathered at the downtown Phoenix Court to officiate more than 70 marriages. Rev. Susan performed at least 13 of those while Benjie Messer, Anne Byrne, Sarah Montgomery, Sandy Weir, Lori Williamson, Igor Glenn, and Eric Muehlstedt sang for the couples after the ceremonies. It was a beautiful, joyful day!

Rev. Susan and Rev. Linda are thrilled that the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and Judge Sedwick’s ruling has made marriage equality for same-sex couples the law of Arizona. Four years ago, our ministers decided to stop signing marriage licenses until the state of Arizona recognized equally all committed couples seeking to be married. In making that decision, Rev. Susan said:

“I can no longer in good conscience act as an agent of the state when the state law defining marriage is discriminatory....These laws infringe on my and your religious freedom by denying full and legal recognition to the same sex couples in our lives and in our congregation. We recognize, bless and affirm these couples and we want to welcome them into the sacred rite of marriage.”

The ministers of UUCP are celebrating marriage equality and gladly picking up their pens to once again provide both the religious blessing and the legal binding aspects of marriage to both same-sex and opposite-sex couples.

“It is with tears in my eyes, that I once again can in good conscience fulfill the full sacred task of joining two people in the sacred covenant of marriage, legally and spiritually, regardless of their genders,” said Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray.

Rev. Linda adds, “We are proud to resume the honored role of legal marriage officiants and look forward to uniting all committed couples in love.”

For more than 40 years, Unitarian Universalism has welcomed Straight, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people and families into our congregations and has honored all families as part of the beautiful whole of the human community. Today we are one further step toward full and equal recognition in society. □
Most discussions about interdependence focus on how we need each other in the present. But interdependence is neither new nor transitory; it has always been with us and always will be. We have always needed and relied on each other and we always will. In fact, interdependence may be the one universal constant (at least, during the existence of human beings).

We stand and sit and move about in the three dimensions of space, but our being and movement stretches across the fourth dimension of time. Space expands and contracts; bends and stretches. Matter becomes energy and vice versa. Light is sometimes a wave and sometimes a particle. Time itself turns out to be flexible, and in this quantum universe everything is uncertain (except when it’s not). But we have always needed and relied on each other and we always will; yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

The UU Foundation of Phoenix also exists yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The UUFP helps UUCP and its members and is helped by them; has done so for many years and – with your help – will continue to do so far into the future. Because we have always needed and relied on each other and we always will.

Although interdependence is our universal (human) constant across time, it is not unchanged by time. Nor is the Foundation always one thing. Just as light is sometimes a wave and sometimes a particle, the Foundation is sometimes an Endowment and sometimes Collateral for the Congregation’s mortgage and sometimes a Rainy Day Fund. And the Foundation Board takes responsibility for time in multiple ways. One way is to ensure the Foundation’s existence through time; to bring in donations and to manage them wisely for growth. Another way is to make decisions about how and when to spend assets to benefit the Congregation in this or that here-and-now. And so we maintain a dynamic and positive balance between long-term and short-term benefits. Which ain’t as easy as it sounds. Kenny Rogers as the Gambler knew when to hold ‘em and when to fold ‘em; the rest of us just have to do the best we can.

The Foundation Board is holding a Board Chat with UUCP members on October 30 at 6:30pm in Annex C for the specific purpose of engaging in dialogue about how to determine the appropriate long-term versus short-term balance; how to define a philosophy of when to save and when to spend (and what to spend for). Please join us. No expertise in the physics of space-time is required. Join us, because we have always needed and relied on each other and we always will.

— INTERDEPENDENCE —

We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.

— Thich Nhat Hanh

We can either emphasize those aspects of our traditions, religious or secular, that speak of hatred, exclusion, and suspicion or work with those that stress the interdependence and equality of all human beings. The choice is yours.

— Karen Armstrong

The center of the universe which is everywhere, not the least place in the human heart.

— Barbara Pescan

The only real nation is humanity.

— Dr. Paul Farmer
In 2002, the members of this congregation went through an intentional process to create a covenant that would lift up the responsibilities that come with being a part of a covenanted community. As I reflect on the themes for this fall – Commitment, Forgiveness, Interdependence – I realize how these are all woven into the meaning of covenant. Whenever new members join, we share with them this covenant, a Covenant of Commitment to our Congregation. It is a reminder to us of how we hope to be in community, of the responsibilities we hold to make this community a healthy place where we might all be encouraged to grow. And it also is a guide for how we navigate times of challenge and disagreement and how to remain in right relationship even when we disagree and have conflict. It seemed fitting to highlight it during this month of reflecting on Interdependence.

Yours, Rev. Susan
November Worship Theme:  
**Interdependence**

*Services bring our community together at 9:30 AM and 11:15 AM*

**November 2:**  *The Larger Circle: A Multigenerational Dia de Los Muertos Celebration*  
**Service Leader:** Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray  
This all-ages service will invite us all to remember our loved ones who have died and to share in a ritual of remembrance, honoring the ways that we are connected in a larger circle to those who came before us and those who come after us. *Everyone is invited to bring a photograph or memento of loved ones to place on our altars of remembrance.* Dia de Los Muertos is a wise reminder that we do not need to be afraid of death, but we do need to find ways to remember and celebrate our loved ones.

— *Saturday Service* —

**Saturday, November 8, 10:30 AM:** *Pet Blessing Service!*  
**Service Leaders:** Revs. Susan Frederick-Gray and Linda Lawrence  
This special Saturday all-ages service is an opportunity to bring your pets to your spiritual home for a blessing! You can bring photographs if that is easier and there will be a time to introduce your pet to the congregation. We’ll have music and fun and celebrate the meaningful place our pets hold in our lives and as part of our families.

**November 9:** *A Theology of Interdependence*  
**Service Leader:** Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray  
So much of American culture, even our own Unitarian Universalist culture, is focused on independence and self-reliance. And yet, there is a growing shift as we see the how this reliance on independence fails to speak to the greater isolation of people in our society and a growing sense of disconnection. How can a paradigm shift to interdependence provide a better way to address some of these areas of breakdown?

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**UUCP Thanksgiving Potluck**  
Thursday, November 27th, 4:00 PM  
Johnson Room

Register by Monday, 11/24, at [http://doodle.com/zkn8raimyvxbpdb2](http://doodle.com/zkn8raimyvxbpdb2) or leave a message at 602-840-8400, Ext. 204. If you are registering your family or group, indicate the number of people attending.
November 16: Global Interdependence
Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray
Interdependence is easy to see within our families and communities, the way we rely on and support each other. However, interdependence is also a reality for humanity globally, for nations, and especially for our planet. Are we putting enough emphasis on interdependence as we think globally? Where could the values of interdependence lead a new way?

November 23: Multigenerational Thanksgiving Service: Strong is What We Make Each Other
Service Leaders: Revs. Susan Frederick-Gray and Linda Lawrence, and Anne Byrne
Gathering around a welcome table to share a meal is one of the most powerful ways we see our interdependence to each other and to the earth. In this service, everyone is invited to bring a grain-based staple (tortillas, challah, brown bread, muffins, idlis, injera, naan, fry bread, for example) to share with the community. As we bring gifts reflective of our family traditions, we nurture a greater awareness of the beauty and diverse texture of our own community.

November 30: Guest Minister, Rev. Neal Anderson
Rev. Anderson is the Minister of the UU Fellowship of Northern Nevada in Reno. Neal is on sabbatical and he and his wife Ruth and two sons have made Phoenix their home for his sabbatical. We are grateful to have this opportunity to have Neal in the pulpit.

Make UUCP your Thursday Night Destination this Fall

COMMUNITY NIGHTS

外交部 Dinner at 6:00pm ($5/adult, $2/child under 10, $10/family)
外交部 Classes and Small Groups at 6:30pm
外交部 Chalice Kids for children

Every Thursday night in October and November!
All are welcome!