
NUUSLETTER

NORTHWOODS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP

A Beacon of Light in the Northwoods

P.O. Box 253, Minocqua, WI 54548, <http://nuuf.com>

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Volume 6, Number 1

January 27,

2004 Coming Sundays

Taking the Pulpit

Sunday, February 8, 10 AM, Rev. Sydney Morris "Sermon Series - UU Identity - Unitarian Universalist History - Our Range and Scope." Luncheon Workshop on Art History.

Sunday, February 22, 10 AM, Rev. Jane Moore.

Sunday, March 7, 10 AM, Rev. Sydney Morris, "Sermon Series - UU Identity - Our Range and Scope." Luncheon Workshop on Denomination Wide Social Justice Initiatives for 2004.

Sunday, March 21, 10 AM, Dan Rondello, "Thoughts About God."

Sunday, April 4, 10 AM, "Sermon Series - UU Identity - Our Range and Scope."

Luncheon Workshop on Denomination Wide Social Justice Initiative for 2004. **Sunday**, April 18, 10 AM, Jerry Woolpy, "Race ain't what it's cracked up to be."

Adult Religious Education

On alternate Sundays we meet at 10 AM to discuss topics relating religious and ethical issues to current events and considering things that contribute to the spirit and meaning of our group.

We started a new lecture series on Sunday, January 4th. entitled, "The Terror of History: Mystics, Heretics, and Witches in the Western Tradition". This set of twenty-four video lectures examines aspects of elite and popular culture in late medieval and early modern Western Europe, focusing on the way in which men and women--seeking to explain, order, and escape the terrors of their lives--embraced transcendental religious experiences, dreamed of and worked for the coming of the apocalypse, and seized on a widespread belief in witchcraft and Satanism.

Lecture topics and dates: 1-04: "The Terror of History" and "Politics, Economy, and Society"; 1-18: "Religion and Culture" and "Mysticism in the Western Tradition"; 2-1: "Mysticism in the Twelfth Century" and "Mysticism in the Thirteenth Century"; 2-15: "Jewish Mysticism" and "Mysticism in Early Modern Europe"; 2-29: "Heresy and the Millennium" and "The Church under Attack"; 3-14: "The Birth of the Inquisition" and "The Millennium in the Sixteenth Century".

Announcements

Treasurer's Reports (income and expenses compared to budget through December 31) are available. Members can contact Tom Sommerfeld to request a copy. ▪

Mid-year reports on **status of pledge payments** and receipts for contributions during 2003 were mailed on January 17. If you do not receive one, or if you have questions about yours, contact Tom Sommerfeld. ▪

Volunteers Needed: It's our turn to staff the **food pantry**. Volunteers are needed on Saturday, 1/31, at 10 AM for about an hour to prepare the bags for distribution. Volunteers are also needed on Tuesday, February 3, at 9:30 AM for a couple of hours to fill and distribute bags. I need 4 or 5 helpers at each session. Please call me at 385-2407 or email me at esommerf@aol.com to volunteer or ask questions. Thanks. Elinore Sommerfeld ▪

The 10:30 AM, February 1st service at the Universalist Unitarian Church of Wausau will feature Kathy Kelly, co-coordinator of **Voices in the Wilderness**. She is a peace activist that has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in the years 2000, 2001 and 2003. She was present in Iraq immediately prior to and during the first ten days of the current Iraqi war. The title of her presentation is "Courage for Truth: Overcoming Our Fears--Liberating Our Voices". She is planning time during the service for dialogue with the congregation. ▪

"The Second Annual Meeting of the **Asian/Pacific Islander Caucus** of DRUUMM will be held the weekend of Feb 20-22 in Arlington St. Church, Boston. All UUs of A/PI heritage and/or immediate family members of A/PI UUs are invited to attend. Registration form and publicity flyers can be downloaded from **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid..** The Caucus will pay for up to 22 people to stay at Eliot/Pickett House, the UUA's Bed and Breakfast facility in Boston, on a first-come first-served basis. Home hospitality with Boston area UU families will be arranged for all other participants. A few travel grants are also available. For more information, please contact registrar@apiuu.org ▪

To register for the UUA General Assembly Meeting at Long Beach, CA, 6/24-28, goto www.uua.org/registration ▪

Sixteen UU congregations have grown by 200 members or more over the past ten years. Collectively these contributed 24% of **UUA membership growth** in that period according to Angela Merkert, Director of the Central Midwest District. ▪

Joys & Concerns

Excerpted from the Beloit Daily News: It is said nonfiction feeds the mind and fiction feeds the heart, but **poetry feeds the soul**. If this is true, then the Fortnightly Club, were well served when Alan VanRaalte shared his poetry as keynote speaker during their December luncheon meeting at the Country Club of Beloit... VanRaalte's poetry is sensitive and self-aware, diverse in its subjects while steadfastly demonstrating strong

feelings for the natural world in general and the Northwoods in particular... ▪

Gifts of Love

The defining characteristic of the Northwoods UU Fellowship is, of course, love. But if UUs really act out of belief in our seven principles, this should come as no great surprise. Love is, or at least ought to be, the primary attribute of every UU fellowship, church or temple. Our fellowship however, has another quality that I believe sets us apart from many other UU congregations. It is a trait spawned from love made manifest. It is the spirit of volunteerism and selfless giving that pervades our midst.

Whenever the lawn needs mowing, trees that pose a threat to traffic – auto and foot – need to be felled, the building needs to be cleaned, snacks prepared, coffee made, a community wide program coordinated, indeed, even sermons delivered, someone is always there to contribute their talents for the benefit of the whole.

Nor is volunteerism the exclusive purview of any particular age group. Children help with spring and fall cleaning and work right along side adults, sometimes at their own peril – just ask Kayla Norris, on whose head I dropped a ceiling light cover when she was helping me clean it. During our seasonal cleanups we have volunteers donating their services who represent at least eight decades worth of birthdays.

The fellowship building was constructed before my time here, but a brief review of the history of the fellowship shows that many people donated their time, talent and money to the process. And that spirit continues.

We all enjoy, and occasionally are distracted by, the birds that gather around the feeder that hangs outside the south window. Guest speakers often make good-natured comments about the competition for attention to which they are subjected. The feeder was built and donated by George Adams who just recently replaced it with another when he noted the original's deteriorating condition.

I'm sure by now most of you have noticed the bookshelves and chair rail which add a sense of organization to our collection of literature, hymnals and bookstore, and provide protection for the west wall when the chairs are stacked there after service. They are not just items of utility, they are works of art: the products of Richard Thieret's skilled hands and fertile imagination.

There is also another addition to the aesthetics of the building to which I would like to draw your attention. Eliot Frost created and donated a flaming chalice that now hangs on the north wall above one of the bookcases. It seems appropriate that it should hang there: the gift of one generation juxtaposed with the gift of another. What better reminder than this: that the light of truth, the warmth of love and the energy of action belong to us all, and how reassuring to know that, as the torch is passed from generation to generation, our fellowship will continue to be a beacon of light in the Northwoods.

Alan VanRaalte, Chair,

Building and Grounds Committee ▪

NUUF Board Meeting Notes January 9, 2004

Present: Terry Hoyt, Tom Sommerfeld, Joan Hauer, Alan VanRaalte and Mark Bruhy

Old Business

Meeting Notes: The December meeting notes were approved.

Treasurer's Report: Tom presented the Treasurer's report, i.e., report of deposits and expenditures, which has been filed with the monthly meeting notes. Terry asked if the report should be included in the "NUUsletter," and the Board agreed that while many may be interested, the newsletter is already quite long. As such, rather than including it, the Board agreed that the report will be distributed to interested parties upon request. Alan moved that the notes be approved, Joan seconded and the motion carried.

New Business

Martin Luther King Day Observance: There was brief discussion of the Martin Luther King Day observance, noting that it is scheduled for January 19th at 7:00 PM. Terry reported that the planned speaker, Zoltan Grossman, will not attend because of his wife's illness. An arrangement has been made for another speaker to replace Mr. Grossman. Alan reported that he has distributed press releases to a number of media contacts, inviting the public to participate.

Committee On The Ministry (CM): The Board discussed the proposed retreat, which was agreed upon by the CM and the Board at the November 21st Board meeting. The retreat, which will address the future of a ministry of our size, is scheduled for Saturday February 21st, and will probably take place at the Fellowship. Reverend Jane Moore has agreed to facilitate the retreat, and will present the service the following day. The Board discussed the possibility of including breakfast and/or lunch as part of the retreat, along with an outdoor activity. Retreat planning will continue.

Finance Committee (FC) and the Budget Process: The Fellowship's budget process was discussed at the November Board meeting, with FC membership present. At that time, it was agreed that the budget process will be moved up a bit. That is, the FC will request committee proposals by late February, prepare a preliminary budget that will be submitted to the Board for review. The FC will then participate in the March Board meeting for discussion. Tom, as both Board member and FC member, will advise the FC of this process and request for participation.

Review of the Ministry: Terry noted that under the terms of the Fellowship's two-year agreement with Reverend Sydney Morris, her position is to be reviewed at the end of each year. That is, there are performance items that are stipulated in that agreement. Since the second year of this agreement ends in February of this year, the Board has agreed to review and comment on her performance, and due so by March (a time will be scheduled for this review in the near future). Terry said that he will distribute the agreement to the Board, and Congregation, so it is clear what is presented in the agreement.

Building Use: Terry noted that the Drumming Group, which has used the Fellowship in the past, has again requested to use the facility on Wednesday January 21st. The Board approved this request.

Other Business: It was noted that Dick Fields would like to set a date for the next Fellowship auction, and the Board agreed that Friday evening, June 4th, the first Friday, will be tentatively scheduled for this event.

Next Board Meeting: The next Board meeting is scheduled for Friday, February 13th, to begin at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Bruhy ▪

Happy New Year from Unitarian Universalists for Drug Policy Reform!

Thank you for your efforts in 2003 to advocate more compassionate, less punitive drug policies.

During the past year, public opinion has grown rapidly in favor of reasonable reforms that will: - repeal the policy that denied tens of thousands of students their federal financial aid last year because of drug convictions; - stop the arrest of patients who use marijuana with the support of their doctors; - divert non-violent drug offenders to treatment instead of prison; - allow injection drug users access to clean needles to stop the spread of AIDS and other blood-borne diseases; and - end the racially unjust policy of mandatory minimum prison sentencing which has resulted in the largest prison boom in world history.

Now it is time to turn public opinion into legislative victories in 2004. The next few months represent an historic window of opportunity to create change at the state and national level. To do this, we need help from you and your congregation.

* *UUDPR has spent the past few months planning, reorganizing, and securing funding for a new and improved operation specifically designed to support your grassroots activities.

We have established a "sister" organization called the Interfaith Drug Policy Initiative (IDPI). The tax status of IDPI allows us to spend an unlimited amount of time lobbying for legislation. It also broadens our scope. We can now reach out to all religious denominations.

We also brought on a new full-time member of our team: Troy Dayton will serve as IDPI's and UUDPR's field coordinator. Troy is a whiz at grassroots organizing and has spent the better part of his adult life working to end the drug war. Troy is excited to get to know you and start helping you to plan activities especially for your congregation. Please use him as a resource. You can reach him at troydayton@idpi.us or 301-933-7681.

We are working with a host of policy analysts at various organizations to identify the bills on which we will focus this legislative season. Keep an eye out for action alerts about specific bills in your state legislature and/or congress that need your action. Depending on the specifics of any given project, you may receive e-mails from an address at either uudpr.org or idpi.us (unless you prefer otherwise). Please adjust your spam filter!

As the UU Association's 2002 Statement of Conscience recognizes, "Our current drug policy has consumed tens of billions of dollars and wrecked countless lives. The costs of this policy include the increasing breakdown of families and neighborhoods, endangerment

of children, widespread violation of civil liberties, escalating rates of incarceration, political corruption, and the imposition of United States policy abroad."

I commend you for your courage to take a stand and get active on this cutting-edge issue. I look forward to working with you and your congregation to proclaim the good news that there is a better way.

All the best,

Charles Thomas, executive director

Unitarian Universalists for Drug Policy Reform and Interfaith Drug

Policy Initiative <http://www.uudpr.org>

301-938-1577 ▪

NUU Views

Question: Christmas is certainly a national holiday and an important religious holiday for many Christians. Does Christmas have a special significance in a UU congregation? And if so what is it and if not why not?

Answer from Elinore Sommerfeld: I use the term "Christmas" as a generic, cultural term, convenient by common usage. What I celebrate is much closer to the old winter solstice. It is a very old tradition to pause at this time of year, to rest, to celebrate and to reflect with family and friends on the passing of the old year and the coming of the new. It remains a struggle for me, and probably other UUs, to tease meaning out of the Christian sensory overload we face. Our fellowship's winter solstice service and New Year's Eve party (which is certainly far more than just a party) are important and meaningful ways for our community to participate in this age-old tradition. ▪

Answer from Rev Glenda Walker: "The Solstice celebrates the natural order of the universe: the seasonal, unending and renewing order of energy in time. From my perspective, it celebrates what I call God - the infinite energy of the universe from which and by which we are created and sustained, into which we are redeemed by death.

Christmas is the celebration of the incarnation of that cosmic energy in the unique and particular person of the religious leader, Jesus. Despite the structures of Christianity (to which we take exception) that have arisen in response to the man Jesus, the message of Jesus and the life of Jesus is worth celebrating. The incarnation of the life giving, sustaining and redeeming energy of the cosmos in a human person, be that Jesus or Moses or Buddha or your son, Bill, or my daughter, Holly, is worthy of a special celebration. We celebrate, in our tradition, not so much the man Jesus, but the truth that lies in Christmas: the truth that a child is born of that creating, sustaining and redeeming energy of the universe and that child is, or can be, reflective of that energy in his or her life. That child can profoundly affect the world through his or her creative, sustaining and redeeming life.

So I continue, at Christmas, to celebrate the birth of Jesus, but also the birth of Moses and Mohammed and the Buddha and my daughter Holly. We are all incarnations of the energy of the universe that I call God and "every night a child is born is a holy night" (Sophia Lyons Fahs) and "every child born is a holy child." ▪

Answer from Wenda Sheard: Over the past twenty years I've noticed a distinct downturn in the importance of Christmas in UU congregations. Why? Because...

We've begun to take seriously the fact that UU members come from diverse religious heritages. Some UUs want to share and celebrate their Jewish heritage. Some UUs want to share and celebrate their earth-centered spirituality. We're accommodating holiday diversity in our worship services more than we did in the past.

We've expanded in earnest our dedication to teaching our children about diverse religious beliefs. Thus, we've expanded our religious education holiday repertoire to include non-Christmas December holidays.

Perhaps most importantly, we've taken more seriously our commitment to environmental issues and social justice issues. Hence, we've reduced our use of "Christmas-stuff" in our places of worship and in our family celebrations. We would rather see money go to a food pantry than to a sweater tossed into the back of a relative's closet.

Unfortunately, not all UUs are happy with the de-emphasis on Christmas. My own children, for instance, feel downright deprived.

When, as preschoolers, they asked us about Santa Claus, we traumatized them with the truth, saying that Santa is a myth currently perpetrated primarily by environmentally-destructive commercialism. When, as older children, they asked for Christmas wrapping paper, we gave them nothing but newspaper comics. Today, our annual Christmas celebration consists of almost nothing except family togetherness and caring for others.

I wonder how the next generation of UUs will celebrate Christmas with their children. ▪

Answer from Jerry Buerer: Well, it must have a special significance since every single UU congregation I've seen operate celebrates it. The last few years I've attended Christmas Eve services in Wausau at both the UU church and with relatives at their Trinitarian institution.

In of those odd twists of life, the service at the UU place is much more meaningful. For one thing, the church is a nicer edifice. For another, people tend to view the Christmas story for what it is: a meaningful, beautiful, significant myth, whereas the Trinitarian ministers are recounting the story as fact and I'm not sure that deep down many of the congregants really don't have misgivings about this and would actually feel better a half a block away with the UUs.

The UUs tend to take Jesus the way I think he would have wanted: as "the Prince of Peace," whereas the Trinitarians focus on him as being "the Savior."

Regardless of the religious backgrounds of various UUs, this "peace" aspect of Jesus' ministry is easy for most to accept and to celebrate, and I believe this is one major reasons Christmas has a special significance in so many UU congregations. ▪

Answer from Alan VanRaaltes: This is not going to be the easy answer I thought I was going to sit down and knock out in five minutes. The question certainly calls to mind the tensions Sharon and I experienced trying to fit Christmas Eve and Christmas Day into our schedule and the schedules of our ex-spouses. And I imagine, like me, most UUs are

refugees from oppressive versions of Christianity who found it hard to reconcile the message of “Peace on Earth” we heard during the Christmas Season with the racism, anti-Semitism and the “we’re going to heaven ‘cause we got it right and everybody else is going to hell ‘cause they don’t” attitude that prevailed the rest of the year.

Christmas does bring with it bittersweet memories though. The sweet memories from childhood when aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents and we would gather for dinner and exchange gifts, play cards and other games, throw wrapping paper at each other until someone got a little carried away, usually we kids or my one uncle, and nearly knock over a lamp or a vase. These memories are good. And usually didn’t have anything to do with the “real” meaning of Christmas – or maybe they did. Maybe that was only time we got it right. The bitter memories have already been alluded to.

I think the solstice season is a good time for UUs to reflect on Christmas and Chanukah and acknowledge our Judeo-Christian roots, and perhaps assess how far removed we are from the fundamentalists. I also believe we promote the “Christmas Message” of “peace on earth, good will to all” all year long and not just at Christmas. And during the season we can enjoy some of the really beautiful music that was written by our more orthodox brethren. I especially like to listen to orchestral arrangements, sans lyrics.

Christmas is a time to remember that its position on the calendar has less to do with the timing of the birth of Jesus than it has with the fact that the pagans (a pagan as defined as someone who doesn’t believe what Christians believe) steadfastly refused to give up their solstice celebrations and so allowed them to be co-opted by the Christians who tried to put their own spin on those celebrations of light. But as I look at some of the symbols of Christmas and see in them vestiges of the pagan (there’s that term again) earth-centered religions, such as the Christmas tree, candles, the giving of gifts, holly, I am left wondering, who co-opted whom? There are other holidays, of course, during the solstice and I don’t mean to slight them, but it is time to wrap up this answer.

Is Christmas important to us here at the Northwoods UU Fellowship? Well, it does give us an excuse to have a potluck. But, then, if we didn’t have Christmas or any of the other holidays of the season, I’m sure we’d be able to find some excuse to get together and eat and drink and enjoy the love and the pleasure of one another’s company. ▪

The **question for the next NUUSLETTER** is “What is the appropriate role to the UUA in our congregational life?” Send answers by January 25th to jerryw@earlham.edu. ▪

Getting the NUUsletter

In addition to the usual Microsoft Word format, the NUUsletter is now available in Adobe PDF format that is readable by any computer, Mac or PC.

If you do not have an Adobe Reader you can download one free at

<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>.

With this software the NUUsletter will be formatted as it is in Microsoft Word, but the

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Word program will not be required. Let me know if you want it sent to you in PDF format, jerryw@earlham.edu.

Previous NUUsletters and the congregation directory are available at nuuf.com. Click on "Members Only." The user name is NUUF. But you need to remember the secret password. If you have forgotten it, contact me.

Next NUUsletter Deadline, Sunday, March 7, 2004

NUUsletter
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