

The Commons

October 2017

Olympia Unitarian
Universalist Congregation

www.ouuc.org

OUUC: A RIVER OF CHANGE

Let our river run

*"No one ever steps in the same
river twice" by Heraclitus*

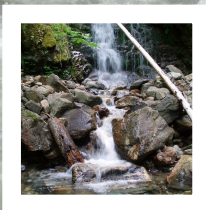
OF GROUT, RIVERS & NEW MINISTERS

*No matter how we experience the transition
of ministers, we all have been challenged by
change once again.*

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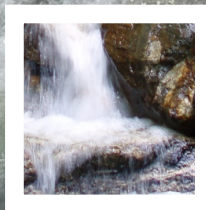
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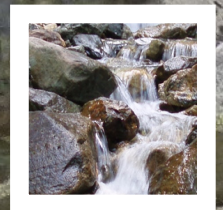
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When you step into the OUUC River, YOU change the river.

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Change, a Constant

There have been significant events of the last three years which impacted our congregation. With changes in ministers and all involved in the process, we need to acknowledge and reflect on the unease such change brings. What does it mean? Are we prepared? Where are we headed?

This issue came about in the hope to inform this time of change and transition as we continue to move through the process of ministerial search. Such a time can feel like “a disruption toward a breakthrough, an innovation, a new way. It can also feel like an intrusion, a break, a betrayal” (from UU World, Summer 2017). Our process has raised questions, particularly among newer members, about the what is happening and what it means.

One of the great joys I have at OUUC is the “Editorial Team”, a group of folks who have a history with OUUC, care deeply about its mission and operation, and are committed to considering and communicating about issues that matter. When events or issues arise, we analyze the topic to identify what angles need to be addressed in order to offer information and inspiration to our readers. We then discern who best to research and write a story and/or who else to involve to cover the subject.

As context, the Editorial Team was impressed by two concepts presented this summer. One of these by Rev. Tandi Rogers of UUA was of the congregation as a “river in time,” continuous but never the same, into which we (and our ministers) dip ourselves.” Most of her message is on page 11.

The other concept was of the congregation as grout, the stuff that holds all the disparate pieces of the mosaic that is the church together. Helen Henry shared the Rev. Marcus Hartlief, co-minister of



North Shore Unitarian Church in West Vancouver, BC piece on “Grout”. See his full message on page 4.

Let me acknowledge the Editorial Team that made this eZine happen: Helen Henry, Sara Lewis, Rev. Carol McKinley, Rev. Eric Posa, Tim Ransom, Darlene Sarkela, and Ginny Taylor. Several more were involved as Tim invited many to help look back at the history of our ministry, ministers stepping in and out of our waters, with an eye at how each one has contributed to our “grout.” Thank you one and all!

Sincerely,

Linda Crabtree
Editor

Dealing with change

“The only thing constant is change”, so says Heraclitus in 500 BC. OUUC is no stranger to change. Change is fluid...a process which takes time and intention to manage successfully.



5 Of Grout, Rivers and New Ministers

As we are faced again with calling a new minister, perhaps it is worthwhile to look back at those who have gone before, those who have stepped in and out of our waters.



11 Meaning of a Free Congregation

In our free religious tradition of congregational polity, the laity are the most powerful people, the flowing river, the ongoing community.



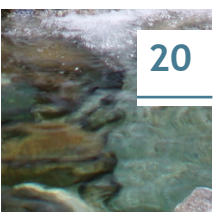
13 The Tao of Surfing

As the Taoists teach, our choice is to discern what actions are likely to carry us forward well given our circumstances.



17 Living in Covenant

Our understanding of covenant sets our UU faith apart from other traditions. Covenant is not about belief, but about relationship.



20 The UUA involvement with OUUC

OUUC has benefitted in many ways over the past few years from UUA. Support staff were assigned to help through the ministerial search process and through the troubled times.

The River of Change

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Hold Us, O Grout

Together, piece by piece, we create a mosaic religion.

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Lyrics: There's a River

There's a river flowing through my soul.

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A Living Tradition

Things have changed, and most of those changes were because the people themselves have changed.

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Poem: Change, Change!

Why do things have to change?
Why can't they just stay the same?

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Poem: Done Leapin'

No more leaps of faith...I'm ditching the dogma...there's awe in the mysteries...but I'm an unbeliever.

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Lyrics: Let the River Run

We're coming to the edge.,
running on the water. Let the river run, let all the dreamers wake the nation.

Hold us, O Grout

BY REV. MARCUS HARTLIEF

The Unitarian Universalist congregation where I served as an intern made a mosaic Tree of Life the summer before I arrived.

Congregants of all ages came together to craft the tree's leaves using bits and pieces of broken ceramics, jewelry, glass, and stone. There are many precious personal items in the tree, including fragments of the Berlin Wall, a father's watch face, pieces of great grandmother's china, and a key to the front door of a loved home. Like the members of the community that brought them together, each part is imbued with memories and meaning; each fragment holds a piece of truth.

Mosaic Makers

Unitarian Universalists are mosaic makers. We are a people who bring together the broken pieces of our histories and the shining pieces of our seeking and, piece by piece,

We help make the grout that holds us together in many ways.

create a mosaic religion. Our Tree of Life is found in the stories of our living tradition. The bead from a transformational moment of worship at a youth conference. The bit of paper stamped with the blazing emblem of the Unitarian Service Committee that saved lives during World War II. The button or patch on a backpack that proudly proclaims the first justice issue that lit our souls on fire.

But our mosaic making tells another story too, one that is often more difficult to see. One that is essential to the purpose of religious community. One that lies not in the beautiful and broken bits and pieces but in the grout.

Grout: the chalky, gritty stuff that is squeezed between the cracks of tiles. In a mosaic, the grout holds the image together, unifying disparate pieces into a whole. The grout of a community takes years to lay and settle. Grout happens in board meetings and committee meetings and endless emails and slow-moving institutions. It is in weekly potlucks shared by neighbors, a ride to church, and coffee in the social hall after worship.

While the folks who show up for church only on Christmas and Easter will hopefully enjoy the beauty of the mosaic they find, they may never know the power of

the grout that holds us through all the seasons of life.

Making the Grout

We help to make the grout when we learn each other's names and when we reach out across generational divides. We help to make the grout when we show up on Sunday morning without having checked first to see if we're interested in the sermon topic. When a newborn arrives to be blessed by the community, it is the grout that enables us to welcome them. And it is in the grout that we rest when we gather to grieve and memorialize a beloved one who has died.

Hold us, O Grout.

Gather us in, through time and space, and make all our broken pieces whole in community. In our multiplicity, make us one. From each of our jagged edges, give us the shape of a communal beauty. ♦



Of Grout, Rivers and New Ministers

BY TIM RANSOM

How are we dealing with change? This year, after only seven months in the OUUC pulpit, the Rev. Thomas Perchlik resigned as our called minister.

The reactions of the members of our congregation were many and varied ranging from shocked disbelief to confusion, anger, embarrassment and even relief. No matter how we felt, or feel, though, we all have been challenged by change once again.

None of us likes change, especially when it comes suddenly and unexpectedly. On page 16 of "The Commons", Jean Phillips begins her poem, "Change", with "Why do things have to change? Why can't they stay the same?"

Just when we were looking forward to starting a new life, a new experience together with our minister, we find we have to start the process all over again, with new searches, new ministers, new processes and procedures—new, new, NEW! It is so tempting just to throw up our hands in despair and shout "Let somebody else fix it!"

But, because we are UUs, we know we must grab the change with both hands and take control. Jean says, "Change is hard... It is not easy to live every moment fully and without attachment, seeking growth and new understanding..." But she also says that change is an "opportunity, not a hardship to be endured, no longer defined as enemy." Rev. Eric Posa reminded us in his first sermon as Interim Minister, "...moving through the changes that prepare a

congregation well for its next minister is the work of the congregation, not of the minister." It is up to us to "fix it."

Soon after Rev. Perchlick's departure, two Sunday speakers, Board member Helen Henry and visiting minister, the Rev. Tandi Rogers, shared with us two concepts that I believe will be especially useful as we move forward to "fix it."

The grout holds us together

One of these—grout—Helen borrowed from the Rev. Marcus Hartlief, co-minister of the North Shore Unitarian Church in West Vancouver, BC. (See page 4.) Like in a mosaic, where grout holds the image together, the grout that holds our community together is in the simple, everyday activities of our congregational lives: the (sometimes endless) meetings, emails, potlucks, coffee between services, the kindnesses, large and small, we do one another. We contribute to our grout when we reach out to one another, when we celebrate the birth of a newborn or the passing of an elder. Hartlief says that grout is "essential to the purpose of religious community," our community. "Hold us, O Grout."

We Are the Ongoing Flow

Rev. Rogers followed this image with that of the river, into which we, and most importantly, our ministers, step, for awhile, and then step out again (see page 11). We, the Congregation, are the river, the ongoing community. "And the river keeps flowing." And, I would add, while constant, the river is also always changing, never

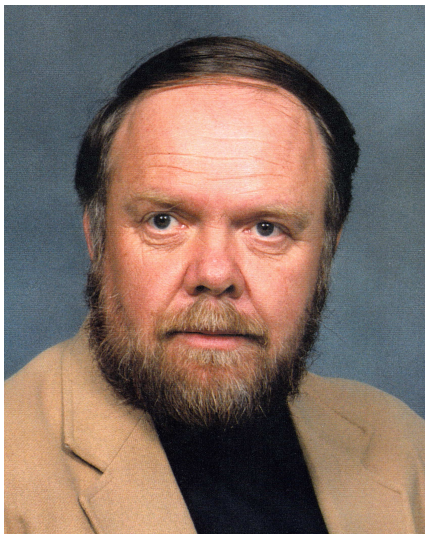


the same from one moment to the next.

As we are faced again with the labors of finding, courting and calling a new minister, perhaps it is worthwhile to look back at those who have gone before, those who have stepped in and out of our waters, to see how they contributed to our "grout." By appreciating their time with us we can gain a better understanding of the changes that may be coming and what we can hope our next "settled" minister will be.

This past August, I got together with some folks who first came to the church 30-50 years ago to hear their memories of our ministers. There have been six of them, all told, who have stepped into our river so far. I asked, "What did they add to our grout?" In what follows, the words in quotation marks are their contributions.

The Rev. Bill Arensmeyer 1978



The Rev. Bill Arensmeyer became the first professional minister of our predecessor, the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia (fondly, the UFO) in 1978. Before joining the Fellowship, which then was housed in the little white church in Tumwater in 1973, Bill had attended seminary at Claremont in California and been ordained as a Methodist minister. He was working as a botanist—his first love—with the state of Washington, and found UFO an exciting place to be. Among the members of the Fellowship, he said, were "the pillars of the community, the movers and shakers in all the social programs" of the area.

After 25 years of a lay-led fellowship, the UFOs were struggling with issues of growth (or lack of it), finances and organization. Some, led by Gladys Burns, shared a vision of growing into a real UU church with professional ministry. Lay-led services, while intimate, were labor intensive, very informal and inconsistently successful. (For more about lay-led services at the UFO in the 1950s to 1970s, see "A Celebration of the 60th Anniversary

of Unitarian Universalism in Olympia, 1952-2012" available on the OUUC website).

Structure was needed, as was someone to honor life events, "marrying, burying and birthing," as one contributor put it, "a spiritual dimension." As UUs, of course, another contingent in the Fellowship wanted less structure, and shied away from things spiritual. Eventually the church group prevailed, however, and when Gladys offered Bill a quarter time job, he gladly accepted.

Bill didn't stay in the pulpit long—a little over a year—but by the time he refused the offer of a regular contract and returned to botany and simple membership in the UFO, he had given the members of the Fellowship a taste of professional help, albeit with a Methodist flavor ("I did what Methodists did!"). His monthly sermons were well received, as was his pastoral care to the ill and hospitalized. He participated in an association of UU ministers, a link that would later lead to our membership in the UUA.

The Rev. Roger Kuhrt 1978-1985

Intrigued by the possibilities, the UFO didn't have to look very far to find its next minister. Roger Kurt was director of and a counselor for the Crisis Line in Olympia and well known to members of the Fellowship. An ordained United Church of Christ minister, Kuhrt had served small churches before, and he had a sense of what they needed. He was also philosophically in tune with UU values, and so a good fit for the UFO. The fact that he brought with him into the UFO a wife and children was also a plus for the family-oriented group.

After Rev. Arensmeyer's self-proclaimed "homespun" sermons ("I

am a Montana boy!"), Kuhrt's intellectualism in the pulpit, combined with an activism that had led him to social work, brought UFO to a new level of social awareness and community involvement. His sermons "had some meat to them," reminding some of lectures in college, and resulted in increased participation in the after-sermon discussions.

Sermon topics and the workshops that Kuhrt developed at UFO and in the larger community often reflected the high interest in self-



awareness and self-actualization of the 70s. At the same time, while the position was still only half-time, Kuhrt continued active pastoral care and, perhaps for the first time, provided the members of the Fellowship with someone to talk to about the crises in their lives.

By the time Rev. Kuhrt left the Fellowship in 1985 after seven years in the pulpit, the leadership of UFO was firmly committed to expanding its pastoral presence. After years of a more casual approach to finances, the members were now pledging their annual support and dreaming of continued growth. For the first time, they conducted a formal search for the next minister.

The Rev. Donna DiSciullo 1986-1989

The result was the Rev. Donna DiSciullo, wife of a minister and new to UU ministry herself, after years of experience in religious



education. Self-confident, thoughtful, warm, and smart, Donna left a strong and lasting impression on members of the Fellowship. She was a "beautiful blend of being spiritual and compassionate, and yet intellectual," and her frequent inclusion of the religious traditions that are the roots of Unitarianism, as well as classical and current poetry and philosophy in readings and sermons meant that her services were "very stimulating of our thinking" for everyone.

Donna's compassion was extended both to parishioners (She was "very good at counseling, really approachable") and to causes. While Rev. Kuhrt had followed up Gladys Burns' work to link UFO with other UU organizations and churches by leading the Fellowship in increased contact with the Pacific Northwest District, DiSciullo did the same nationally by expanding

awareness of the UUA. Donna left after three years, when her husband obtained a position as Chaplin at Princeton University. She left behind a small but stable church whose members, more and more, looked to expansion and growth and, perhaps someday, a new building or church home.

The Rev. Sandra Lee 1989-1999

Our next minister, the Rev. Sandra Lee, arguably was the most complex and controversial of all before or, so far, after her. Amazing things happened during her 10-year tenure, first as a part-time and then as a full-time minister: the Congregation created a chapter of the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS) and became a Welcoming Congregation to the LGBT community; the Fellowship built and moved into a new building, our present home, and then transformed into a formal church, OUUC; the first support staff were hired; a formal choir began under the direction of Troy Fisher; and with Sandra's support and Bill Arensmeyer's leadership, the B&G Annex became the home of Out of the Woods, a shelter that served houseless women with children for over 20 years.

And yet Sandra inspired the Congregation to the complete gamut of emotions from active disapproval of her leadership and methods to fierce and loyal support for them. In the end, her forced departure from OUUC followed fierce dissension and led to a splintering of the congregation.

After a long career as a microbiologist, Sandra Lee was inspired by her membership in a UU fellowship near Poulsbo to seek the ministry. By the time

UFO was again looking to call a part-time minister, she was looking for her first posting, and



was nearby. She accepted the call in 1989, bringing with her a partner, Don Bell, who notably was the first minister's spouse to play an active part in the affairs of the organization.

Sandra's long and deep commitment to science, combined with a leaning towards spiritualism, produced sermons that were fascinating to some, confusing and perhaps incomprehensible to others, and in sharp contrast to those of Rev. DiSciullo. "I can remember her saying well before it was popular that we are stardust. And she explained why, and how, we were stardust."

Her sermons were earth-centered, creative, often developed at the last moment in response to current events, and inconsistently successful. Sandra was "an idea person," and her extensive repertoire drew on science, personal experience and an encyclopedic knowledge. She introduced a topic of great interest at the time, the "nature-nurture" controversy, for example, by citing difficulties in her own family and Mozart's unique

existence. "You, as a parent, cannot take responsibility for failure, or the opposite. 'Because the kid is born with its own code,' is the way she put it. That made a huge impression on me."

Sandra's other gift to the congregation was her facility at community building. It was that skill, combined with her idea-oriented creativity, that led to an expansion of new programs, like the CUUPs, becoming a Welcoming Congregation, and the choir. "I think it was a lot of Sandra's impetus that started the music building, and kept it building, until now we've got Troy [Fisher]."

And together with her lawyer husband and financial specialist, Don, Rev. Lee led the members of the fellowship through the process of organizational and financial expansion that was necessary to be able to build and pay for a new church building.

Sandra Lee, who passed away recently, was a conundrum, perhaps a contradiction. "She wore flowing gowns, she had lots of jewelry and crystals [in her house]. She had the incense approach and flowing things." She was a career scientist. She both alienated some ("Some of the talks were a bit more 'woo-woo' than we were comfortable with...") and "really spoke to newcomers, and made our religion accessible to brand new people."

And for all her inconsistencies, she could make people feel good about themselves. "She was the only one that I never went home after one of her sermons feeling guilty.... She was able to make a sermon that contributed that positive aspect to what you were going to think about during the week."

Perhaps it is best to conclude that she was a diamond in the rough.

The Rev. Shirley Ranck 1999-2001

After Sandra's departure in 1999, the OUUC for the first time followed UUA procedure and hired the Rev. Shirley Ranck full time as its Interim Minister. According to the UUA, "The purpose of interim ministry is to enable a congregation to call a successor minister based not reflexively but on the basis of its own independent identity, strength, and direction—in sum, based on its health."



Very experienced in her interim role, Shirley was conscious of what OUUC had just been through and became our "caretaker," "a calming bridge between ministers." "She was not emotionally expressive, but very thoughtful, logical, attentive to healing and not creating fuss and rifts."

A Ph. D. and author, years ago, of *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven*, a woman-honoring adult Religious Education curriculum still in use today, Shirley brought a renewed intellectualism to the congregation in her earth-centered sermons. Like others before her, Ranck enjoyed a collegial relationship with Bill Arensmeyer. During her tenure the Congregation invited other ministers in Associated Ministries of Thurston County (now

Interfaith Works) to the church to join in honoring his presence as an important part of our community. Most importantly, during her tenure the congregation was able to regain its equilibrium and devote itself to the arduous task of acquiring another settled minister.

In some ways the least needs to be said about the next three ministers: Arthur Vaeni (2001-14), Emily Melcher (2014-16) and Thomas Perchlick (2016-17). The majority of current OUUC members and friends experienced their ministries themselves and have their own opinions of them. Nevertheless, for those newer to our community, and for those of us who perhaps still "cannot see the forest for the trees," a review of their contributions is called for.

The Rev. Arthur Vaeni 2001-2014

With his air of East Coast reserve and a reputation of being a graduate of West Point, the Rev. Arthur Vaeni brought a certain exoticism to OUUC. He assumed his duties as settled minister just days before the terrible events of 9/11. Arthur's response, a special service scheduled for the next evening, reflected his close attentiveness both to the impacts of events outside our church and to the emotional and spiritual needs of the congregation. He came to OUUC with a vision of what we could be, one that he seemed pretty sure we would share, and from Day One he labored to bring it about.

In the pulpit Arthur introduced us to a new dimension of spirituality, reflecting his personal involvement with Buddhism, meditation and the mysteries of the Universe—remember string theory? Though in some ways personally shy and self-contained, he frequently brought personal experience to his

sermons, as well as considerable humor, in the form of weekly New Yorker cartoons and the occasional outlandish costume, prop or skit.



Arthur also came to us knowing that OUUC was on the cusp of becoming a medium-sized church, no longer small, and as such, would need new skills to be able to adapt. He introduced us to the concept of the shift from being a "pastoral" to a "program" church, and he started the leadership of the congregation down the long road to improved governance that recently culminated in the adoption of Policy Governance. He knew that we needed more staff presence, and fought long and hard to ensure that staff received remuneration that was up to national standards.

He brought our Director of Religious Education position up to fulltime and made it possible for our current DRE, Sara Lewis, to advance her training. At the same time, he understood our roots in fellowship, and so introduced us to Small Group Ministry (now Covenant Circles), where small groups gather together to discuss

monthly themes much like after sermons in the Fellowship.

Arthur also came with a vision of our role in the greater community, the likes of which we last experienced in the days of activist and member, Gladys Burns. Understanding that our presence in the capital city gave us both a special opportunity and a responsibility to have an impact on events in our community, he personally represented OUUC in a wide variety of community activities, groups and gatherings there, ranging from giving the opening prayer at the beginning of the legislative session to establishing a recurring competition on the softball field with the membership of Temple Beth Hatfiloh.

Arthur's strong ethical sense and his belief in social justice prepared us, when the time came, to vote unanimously to invite Camp Quixote, a camp of homeless people, to our church with only the barest understanding of what we were taking on. It was his hard work and leadership in Interfaith Works that prepared the ground for other churches being willing to accept Camp Quixote when it came time for the encampment to move on from our grounds.

The list goes on: strong pastoral care; a special relationship to our music program and music director that gave the choir its own role in ministry; extensive facility planning and the wherewithal to add a new RE wing and the expanded fellowship hall named The Commons; "The best memorial services, ever!" Altogether it added up to what one contributor called "a quietness" for the church, another "a certain kind of maturity... We took on some of

that because he came here. He affirmed that we were a healthy, strong, potent congregation. We took on a mantle of that." A hard act to follow!

The Rev. Emily Melcher 2014-2016

The Rev. Emily Melcher, our next two-year interim minister, rightly chose not to "follow" him. Instead, she changed the rules. Unlike Rev. Ranck who had inherited a damaged congregation, one that needed rest and time to rebuild, Rev. Melcher came to a church that Rev. Vaeni had left strong, self-confident and expanding in programs and membership.



Her role, as she understood it from her training with the UUA, was to shake things up, to loosen us from some long-standing rituals and lead us through assessments of our past and future, "picking off the scabs so that we can self-discover and envision..." as one contributor described it. To some, this approach, and Emily herself, seemed insensitive. Others saw her efforts as helping us to move on to the next step, to "get past"

Arthur and be prepared for a new, settled minister.

Familiar with policy governance, Emily brought support to our efforts there, brought focus and expertise, and supported staff in ways not seen before. "She really lifted up the staff, supported us, spent time working with us." She brought more music by sharing her own and by supporting the choir's ministry. "She had a lot of energy, she was smart. I thought it was stimulating, having her in the room."

The Rev. Thomas Perchlik 2016-2017



It is hard to know what to make of the coming and going of Rev. Thomas Perchlick. The qualities that he brought to the ministry were really just beginning to emerge when he resigned: relaxed likeability; occasional eloquence in the pulpit, extensive experience with social justice actions; ready pastoral care; support for the music program; strong family presence, including his wife, Amy Genova, who began engaging with the Congregation's young adults.

The Rev. Eric Posa 2017+

Rev. Posa's four stints as an interim minister at UU churches in Texas, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Tennessee have given him experience with a broad array of congregational situations and needs, including development of governance, staffing and conflict management, as well as successful transition to new ministerial leadership after the departure of a long-time settled minister.

As our two-year Interim, he hopes to guide us in ways that foster increased health and vitality for the congregation, including focusing on our mission of opening minds, filling hearts and transforming lives.

May it be so.

As we move into search for a new settled minister, it is important to examine the impact of our history



on our expectations of a minister. What are our dreams for the future? What qualities and abilities do we require in a minister to help guide us toward those dreams?"

Hopefully, with the help of our own grout, our current interim, Rev. Eric Posa, the UUA and others we will find someone ready, willing and able to join us in our travels down the river. ♦



Meaning of a Free Congregation

BY TANDI ROGERS

Last time I was in your pulpit, I preached a sermon in preparation of Rev. Thomas Perchlik's arrival and your new relationship together.

This was a hard, cold winter. It's so hard not to conflate all those layers of grief. That grief can stunt our imagination, make our hearts close in protection, and poke at sleeping instances of other grief laying low in our psyche. Oh, it's mean!

It's Not About the Minister

It hurts when relationships don't work out. Here's the thing—Olympia UU Congregation is not about the minister at its core. In our tradition, in our free religious tradition of congregational polity, the laity are the most powerful people in the room. YOU are the congregation. Ministers come

- and walk with us
- and coach us
- and build our capacity for shared leadership
- and inspire us to transform lives...
- and then, at some point ,they will go.

You, the congregation, the laity, YOU are a flowing river, the ongoing community. Ministers step into your waters and back out of your waters. And the river keeps flowing.

I like to image all the other siblings in faith gathering at their rivers in this very moment to clear their mind, clear their soul, wash their sins, and set their spirits free. All those rivers returning to the sea that is Unitarian Universalism... or

maybe even bigger than this thing we call Unitarian Universalism.

In our tradition, we invite everyone to gather at the river. Everyone. No one left behind.

Another minister is coming to splash in your river,

- And walk with you,
- And coach you,
- And inspire you
- And love you into being even more of who you authentically are as a congregation.

As your UUA primary contact in our region, I know—I mean really KNOW—you are going to be okay. More than okay.

I've been supporting your leadership behind the scenes all along. I wish I could bottle up their goodness and spread it around the region. The spiritual and the organizational maturity of your leaders is exceptional! Please trust and affirm them.

Free Range UUs

About five years ago I conducted a study of Free Range UUs. I'm talking about the over 400,000 people who identify as Unitarian Universalists in the United States census. We have 100,000 members counted in our congregations.

I conducted the study because there was an assumption brewing that perhaps four out of five UUs just haven't found our congregation. Maybe it's poor signage. Maybe if we put up more billboards. Or radio spots on NPR...

It turns out that of the 1000 people whom I surveyed via progressive

social media, about 75% have been through our doors before. They know where we are...they just don't want to be here.

The primary reason people don't come back (but still claim the faith) is that they came looking for a religious community (a mosaic where their broken piece is welcome) and found a social club or political group.

The secondary reason people don't come back was because of conflict. All too often an internal conflict goes unmanaged until it becomes the unspoken mission of the congregation. Conflict is normal and can be healthy. I honestly think that conflict has the potential to be rich in faith formation and religious education!

The third reason was that the congregation seemed to be living in another era, like the twilight zone. In times of disequilibrium we usually go to our comfort mindset—a time from the past that we romanticize as greener, more civil, more clear. We do it all the time in our own lives just as we do in congregations. Why can't we go back to the way it was 30 years ago?

We can't go back in the time of this church either. You were different. The context was different. Opportunities were different. And here's a truth—the complexities and challenges of our past inspired us to evolve into what we are now.

Back to my Free Range Study...of the people who know exactly where we are and choose not to join, more than half have been in leadership, e.g. Worship Associates, treasurers, Search Committees,

OUUC River 12



Board members, Presidents. They left feeling nit-picked and misunderstood. They left after faithfully keeping confidential information, normal for a board or Committee on Ministry leader, and then being accused of not being transparent. They left feeling ill equipped and not good enough. These stories break my heart. I see it over and over.

Do not to let that happen here. Conjure in your mind what the mosaic that is Olympia UU Congregation might look like. Creating this mosaic is precious, holy work. ♦

Lyrics: **There's A River** BY ROSE SANDERS*



*There's a river flowin' through my soul
There's a river flowin' through my soul
And it's telling me that I'm somebody
There's are river flowin' through my soul*

*There's a river flowin' in my heart
There's a river flowin' in my heart
And it's telling me that I'm somebody
There's are river flowing through my heart*

*There's a river flowin' in my mind
There's a river flowin' through my mind
And it's telling me that I'm somebody
There's are river flowin' through my mind*

*There's a river flowin' through my soul
There's a river flowin' through my soul
And it's telling me that I'm somebody
There's are river flowin' through my soul*

*There's a river flowin' There's a river flowin'
There's a river flowin' in my soul*

**Rose Sanders was the first woman of African descent to become a judge in Alabama.*

The Tao of Surfing

BY REV. ERIC POSA

The Tao of Surfing

*The highest good is like water;
Water is good at benefiting the
10,000 things and yet it does
not compete with them.*

*It dwells in places the masses of
people detest,*

Therefore it is close to the Way.

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 8

I was on the phone early one morning. My friend Catherine was calling from Australia where it was late at night. I'd known Catherine for many years, and was glad to hear from her more often, even to talk with her through a difficult time.

The divorce had taken Catherine completely by surprise. She and her husband had their problems, but she'd had no clue he was ready to call things off. Yet suddenly she faced huge changes in all her hopes and expectations.

It's Easy to Overwhelm

When we lose people we love, through death or separation, it's easy to become overwhelmed. We find ourselves longing for some stability in our lives, a patch of solid ground to stand on, to ease the anxiety from these drastic shifts. But how do we get this stability when life seems so unstable? Do we have to build or find some stability ourselves? Or can we trust that it will come in due time? That was the dilemma Catherine was facing.

How much we can change the course of an uncertain future—or, how much we should wait out the rough times until they calm down

—are questions that date far back. When troubles befall us, we're often torn between the urge to fix the problem versus the hope that things will work themselves out. I've seen both perspectives among UUs. We tend toward the view that we are to deal ourselves with the large and small decisions we face, that our own actions are key. As Rev. Jean Rowe wrote: "Power is yours to act or not to act; power is ours if we but realize it."

Why Do Things Happen?

Yet I've known other UUs who affirm the idea that "all things happen for a reason" whether or not they see that reason coming from a Supreme Being. They tend to accept difficult events and circumstances (or at least try to accept them), setbacks that others might try unsuccessfully to stop. Wendell Berry, that wonderful contemporary nature writer, beautifully expressed the attitude of one who has come to accept his environment and let go of his anxiety in his poem "The Peace of Wild Things": "When

despair for the world grows in me...I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief.... For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free."

How much we can change the course of an uncertain future?

The problem with this accepting approach is that one can naively take this idea too far. At its most extreme, this can be a recipe for passivity, for refusing any responsibility for our actions. Our universe responds to our actions, in ways small and large. The work we do has both value and consequences, and we disregard the consequences at our peril.

Nevertheless, when we are convinced we can do everything for ourselves, we often set ourselves up for failure. Many dilemmas are beyond the powers of individuals to solve. If we don't recognize this and take on a project beyond our capacities, not only do we fail to achieve our goals, but also we can fall into



self-criticism and shame. Knowing those limits is an important part of knowing and accepting ourselves, and I've seen people lose their sense of self-esteem and self-worth by failing to acknowledge when they've bitten off more than they can chew.

Knowing Our Limits

So if there's a danger of taking either option too far, by dealing with a tough situation either too passively or too aggressively, is there a good way to navigate the middle ground? Did my friend, Catherine, have a third option available?

She hinted at one during that phone call when she shared with me something that at first seemed completely unrelated. She had found a new hobby: surfing. She took advantage of her new home just two blocks from Australia's famous Bondi Beach, and spent a few hours each weekend at the beach practicing and enjoying the sport.

I was really impressed by the insight she found in this new pastime. Catherine talked during that phone call about what she'd learned from watching other surfers. There was a gracefulness, an elegance, she observed in the best surfers, and she noted that this elegance came from how they surfed with the waves.

Others tried too hard to force their boards in a particular direction. Their rides were choppy, and they were more likely to "wipe out," or fall off their surfboards. The trick to a smooth and clean surfing experience, Catherine explained, was to watch the flow of the wave and surf with it, let the wave carry you along in its path. Those surfers who were best at doing this were the ones with the most poise.

Catherine drew a life lesson from this observation, not just a sports tip. She wanted to find her way through the currents of her life, much as these athletes found their way along the waves of the incoming tide.

It's tempting to fight against the flow, trying to force an outcome to

It's tempting to try to force an outcome to life's circumstances.

life's circumstances that defy the odds. Yet the universe is constantly in motion. It will carry us in a certain direction, towards some life options and away from others. Catherine hoped to see the direction the waves of circumstance would push her, find the current that would carry her in a good direction, and ride it both with skill and with elegance.

This was no passive, resigned acceptance of hardship. A surfer who takes no action will merely float in place...or drown. She could use her skill and effort to stay afloat, moving in a positive direction whether or not it's the exact direction she had planned to go. If she could do that, she felt she could count on life to help her move forward. Thus she was opening herself to a kind of grace, to a benevolent guidance that seems to come from beyond ourselves, but one that does not deny the importance of your own efforts as well.

As she shared this reflection with me, I was reminded of a quote that spoke a similar truth, and also used water as a metaphor. It's the quote that began this article. The Taoist philosophy attributed to Lao Tzu teaches that our world is dynamic, but that its changes and movements follow certain patterns

and pathways. The proper moral course is to follow these paths while at the same time acting in concert with nature. We must act according to the good, but remember that the greatest pattern of goodness follows right along with the more general patterns of life and existence. The Taoist takes decisive and effective action but only if that action follows the Way of the Universe.

The Way of the Universe

Seeing the path of least resistance and moving forward decisively is not inaction or some overly simplified version of "letting go and letting God." But it's also not a full-steam-ahead approach to working aggressively without regard for the context or consequences our actions might have. As the Taoists teach, our choice is to discern of what actions are likely to carry us forward well given our circumstances.

Catherine called this "the effort of effortlessness," and she was right to see it that way. We need always to study and stay aware of our context, be mindful of the larger flow of our world, and act in ways that can accomplish what we need by taking the course of action that will keep us afloat and keep us as poised as possible.

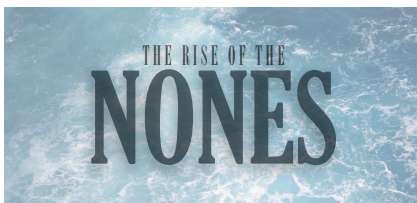
In this time of ongoing transition here at OUUC, it is my hope that we can discern together a way forward that will embody this wisdom. However much or little we chose the circumstances before us, we know that only some of those here and still to come are now within our sphere of influence. May we ride these waves of change as they come, with both skill and grace. And following this Greater Way, may we move forward well into the future that approaches. ♦

A Living Tradition

BY SARA LEWIS

Unitarian Universalism is called a Living Tradition, recognizing that this is a faith tradition that evolves, that leaves room for new thoughts, new ideas, new ways of being.

The Unitarian Universalism of today does not look or sound like the Unitarian Universalism of 1961, or of the Unitarianism or the Universalism of 1900, and certainly it is different than either tradition was in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.



I recently had a chance to chat with someone who had been raised Unitarian Universalist, even taught Sunday School as a late teen, and then had had a break of 30+ years. The aspects of Religious Education she remembered are no longer the way we do religious education in this tradition, although I still have some of those out-of-print books in my office.

The Doxology Revisited

Another recent look into the past for me was at a gathering of religious educators from the UU Pacific Western Region as I, for some reason, remembered the Doxology (see *Singing the Living Tradition* #373-378) that was sung every single Sunday at University Unitarian in Seattle when I was a teen. Others at this gathering who were long-time UU's joined me

randomly in song (confusing many!), *but they remembered different words!* We sat down and dug into the hymnal and found all the word options, and realized that some of our congregations had used other words not even in the hymnal.

I loved that Doxology...as a young UU, it summed up what Unitarian

Things have changed, and most of those changes were because the people themselves have changed.

Universalism was for me. And I was sad when I moved to Olympia as a college student and found that OUUC did not sing the Doxology. I still miss that Doxology, as well as other aspects of my first UU congregation and first UU minister, The Reverend Peter Raible. On the other hand, I can honestly say I don't miss the interpretive dancing of the movement choir...that always seemed odd to me.

When I ask my own kids what they miss, they say they miss the Buddhism that the Reverend Arthur Vaeni brought to OUUC. From others at OUUC, I will hear nostalgia for some things (the birthday song for instance), and sometimes laughter over changes that were welcome (most seem happy that we no longer sing "Enter Rejoice and Come In" as the first hymn of every Sunday).

The Culture is Changing

Things have changed, and most of those changes were because the people themselves changed. We can't educate the children of today as though they were the children of

30 years ago...the culture has changed, and it continues to change. The words, songs, rituals, and activities of 30 years ago may no longer seem relevant to the lives we are living today.

Two years ago, I was invited to be part of a gathering at UUA headquarters of "Innovators in Religious Education". They brought together 20 or so folks—some ministers, many Religious Educators—to present on our own innovative projects and to discuss how change happens in congregations and in the larger movement.

What struck me at the gathering was how different everyone's innovation was. One presenter had a fully developed and comprehensive Wednesday evening religious education program and light programming on Sunday mornings. Another presenter was part of an intentional co-housing community with daily UU spiritual practices. Another had created justice intensives that families committed to attending and working on together.

What Innovation is Brewing?

I grew excited by all these amazing possibilities. Could I return to OUUC and implement them all? (This is a common pattern for me attending conferences as well ... I want to do All The Good Ideas.) But the answer is, of course, *No!* We cannot do all those innovative ideas. Each innovation is an organic and genuine response to the place and the people where it happens. What innovation is already brewing here?

History Flows to the Future

This issue of *The Commons* is focused on the history and “flow” of OUUC’s congregational legacy, and I relish history and work hard to pass the history and stories of Unitarian Universalism and OUUC on through our religious education programs for both children and adults. However, I think we must also face forward into our future.

The way that people “do church” is changing. The fastest growing religious identity in the United States is “none”, and increasingly I see visitors and newcomers to

The way people “do church” is changing.

OUUC who are not coming here from another faith tradition...they are the “unchurched” who are trying this out for the first time.

With changes in culture, demographics, technology, and family structures, religious institutions are having to change as well. Change is inevitable, although some things will be missed and we can always look back with nostalgia as I do with the Doxology. But while change is inevitable, the prescriptions for *what kind of change* are unclear. How best to remain relevant to the lives of younger and newer members?

I believe the answer lies in moving forward with flexibility and with a sense of organic growth. OUUC is fertile ground, well nourished by the commitment and love of so many who have come before. What may yet take root here? I, for one, look forward to watching it unfold. ♦

Change, Change!

BY JEAN PHILLIPS

Why do things have to change?
 Why can't they just stay the same?
 The way things are at this moment—
 this is a good time, a good day—it suits me.
 Please, let it stay the same.

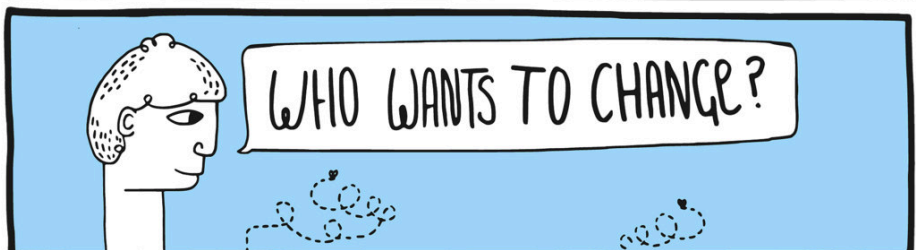
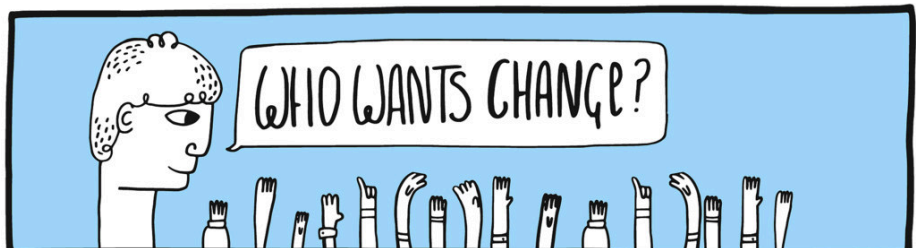
Sometimes I wish I could freeze moments in time,
 Say “halt, don't move, let me savor you some more.”
 Ever since I was a child, I've wanted to hold on
 To moments, things, people, dazzling light on trees,
 A glimmer of a doe with fawn flitting through a clearing.

There will be other good times, my mother says
 to me, her unconsolable child in tears.
 “I don't want it to be over,” I weep.
 Why do things have to change?
 Please, make it stay the same.

Everywhere I turn now, my topsy-turvy world
 Confronts me with changes I can't ignore.
 Things are shifting everywhere I look—
 world, denomination, church, home, health, friends, even my beliefs!
 Please stay the same, a little while, at least.

Buddhism teaches that all things are impermanent;
 we are impermanent; change is expected,
 live each moment fully as it comes and goes;
 that is the cycle of life.
 That is how it's meant to be.

Change is hard. I'm still learning how to do it.
 It is not easy to live every moment,
 fully and without attachment, seeking growth and new understanding,
 knowing change as opportunity not hardship to be endured,
 no longer defined as enemy; opening; letting go with grace. ♦





Living In Covenant

BY CAROL MCKINLEY

For the past eight years I have served as a member of the PNWD's Healthy Congregations Team—the group that works with congregations experiencing conflict. I have seen conflicts arising from such issues as a dispute with the minister or the minister's dispute with the congregation; conflicts with church leadership; poor communication.

One congregation with which I consulted was an old one that had found itself periodically embroiled in conflict. During those times some people left the church while others took leaves of absence until things settled down.

Conflict Leads to Absence

I had a conversation with a longtime member of that church, a woman I'll call Margaret. Margaret was approaching her 90th birthday, an avowed liberal agnostic proud of Unitarian Universalism's theological diversity and social activism. She was no stranger to church discord; she had experienced much of it during her time there. She was particularly unhappy with the way the church board was responding to the current conflict.

But in the face of old and new conflicts, Margaret maintained a fierce loyalty to her church. No matter what, she paid her pledge despite what she judged to be wrong-headed board decisions and, in her not-so-humble opinion, insufferable sermons.

Yes, she felt free to voice her disagreement with some board

decisions at congregational meetings. But she kept her covenant with her church and with the free faith tradition that bound its members together. She held onto her faith in the promise of

She had faith in the promise of her liberal church to keep building Beloved Community.

her liberal church to keep working to build Beloved Community at home and in the world. Yes, she occasionally disagreed or faced disappointment, but she remained committed to the church and to the covenant she made with it decades earlier. She had learned to move beyond her own opinions and needs, choosing to stick with her sometimes clumsy and definitely imperfect congregation and with her liberal Unitarian Universalist tradition. It was her home.

Declaration of Interdependence

For me, Margaret's fierce loyalty to her faith was an extraordinary declaration of interdependence—recognition of her need for and commitment to her church, and the congregation's need for and commitment to her. In Margaret I saw an embodiment of our Puritan ancestors of 1630 who recognized that if they were to survive and thrive in this new, unknown land, they would need to let go of their private interests for a greater, communal good.

Before they set foot on these shores, their leader, John Winthrop

spoke to the anxious yet hopeful band on the deck of the good ship Arabella:

“Now the only way to avoid . . . shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God...[W]e must be willing to... make others' conditions our own... always having before our eyes...our community as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. In order to realize their greater vision of realizing “the city on a hill”, to avoid figurative and literal shipwreck, Winthrop's band knew interdependence was critical. Together they created a sacred promise—a covenant with each other.

Why am I here in this community?

Like her Puritan ancestors, Margaret asked herself, “Why am I here?” Not in the existential sense, but why am I here in this community? Years earlier she arrived at her answer: she joined her religious community to help transform the world through relationship to others, to herself, to that larger purpose that some call God, others call Love. To do this, she promised to keep the unity of the spirit and stick with her congregation, through good times and challenging times.

Covenant is a Promise

The Reverend Victoria Safford writes: “Covenant is a promise I keep to myself about the kind of person I want to be, the kind of life I mean to have, together with other people, and with all other living things. Covenant means we travel together toward the lives we mean to lead, toward the world of compassion, equity, gratitude.”

Covenant is Not About Belief

This understanding of covenant sets our UU faith apart from other traditions. Covenant is not about belief, but about relationship—how we move together toward Beloved Community. And relationships are not always easy: We are asked to be with people who we may not

Our understanding of covenant sets our UU faith apart from other traditions.

like—for their politics, their ideas, their lifestyle. We—and they—hold prejudices and unpleasant memories of disagreeable interactions as closely as we hold good memories of times together. Margaret certainly had her share of church members with whom she had difficulty, and who no doubt had difficulty with her.

How Do We Create Community?

How do we create community when we have conflicted feelings about others and some decisions? Perhaps the first step is to look inside ourselves, honestly acknowledging our own feelings and prejudices. Imagine the person sitting next to you may be having the same experience.

By recognizing our own prejudices and fears, we can begin to imagine how we might let go of them to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace despite—or even because of—our many differences. And that’s not easy; we bring our good intentions, open hearts and minds, and still slip up. Have you ever promised yourself you would speak directly—with kindness—to the person who took over that meeting you were chairing last week, but instead had a parking-lot conversation with another member who you knew liked you? No doubt most of us have; we slip up.

The philosopher Martin Buber tells us, “The human being is the promise-making, promise-keeping, promise-breaking, promise-renewing creature.”

It’s About Right Relationship

Here at OUUC, the process to create our covenant began about 15 years ago. First, we spent some time naming the values we hold in common, values we want reflected in our actions in this congregation and in the larger world. Values like respect, honesty, openness. Then we named ways for us to live into those values by making respectful behavior the norm—about right relationship. Our covenant showed why and how we want to be in religious community.

For a year, members met to talk about how that could be done. After much editing, the final covenant was adopted by the congregation, and remains our relational guideline today.

Living into our values.

In my experience, effective covenants include the following five elements:

1. **A statement of how congregants agree** to be in relationship with each other. By living in covenant, we model our Unitarian Universalist values for each other and the wider community.
2. **It holds our promises**—intentions for how we wish to be together as a faith community. Unlike rules, promises are discussed, lived, broken, and renewed. A covenant is not static; over time, we may choose to rewrite them.
3. **It provides a framework** for being together. As we come together to create Beloved Community, clear expectations are vital.
4. **It’s about behavior**, not personality. Behavior that encourages and supports everyone’s “free and responsible search for truth and meaning” nurtures the faith community’s life.
5. **It is an opportunity** to deepen our spirituality. The promises we make to each other and the relationships that form strengthen commitment in intentional ways.

A Ground for Identity

The Rev. Robert Latham, in his book, *Moving on from Church Folly Lane*, suggests that churches developing a covenant include an educational phase that stresses the importance of covenant as a ground for identity in our creed-less tradition. And this will take time, and shouldn’t be done all at once.

A first step might be for leadership, including board and staff, to develop their covenant by naming common values and coming to agreement on mutual expectations, such as arriving on time for meetings; returning phone

calls or emails; respecting each person's contributions to the whole. By reading their covenant together regularly, it becomes a living document, not one more piece of paper in the filing cabinet. Leadership serves as a model for the congregation.

When it is time to begin creating a congregational covenant that articulates relationship aspirations and expectations, everyone might be reminded to hold before them the words of James Luther Adams: "the purpose of church is to practice being human." Our congregations should be a place where our humanity is held in the safety of the community. By listening carefully to each other, then naming clearly this

Leadership serves as a model for the congregation.

congregation's expectations for right relationship, we help each other keep sight of our unity. It is here, amidst the relationships we build and honor, that we are strengthened to move from Sunday to Monday, and into the rest of the week.

Allow time to practice the covenant by keeping open hearts and minds. Listen to each other. Always assume the good intentions of everyone. Be open to failure, and to beginning again. Singing the Journey's hymn 1037 says it well: "For each time that our fears have made us rigid and inaccessible, for the selfishness that set us apart and alone, for losing sight of our unity, we forgive ourselves and each other. We begin again in love."

Clarity of expectations. Openness to each other's wonderful uniqueness. Forgiveness. Beginning again. Love.

Covenants, of course, do not ensure a future without disagreements or without conflict. They are a statement of our intentions, our aspirations for being together in harmony, if not unanimous agreement. Think about your marriage vows - did those promises you made at your wedding or commitment ceremony mean that years of wedded bliss lay before you? Probably not; it doesn't seem to work that way in real life. Remember—we are always practicing being human. No, those promises made in love do not resolve every conflict. But love helps us recognize conflict as the arena in which the work of love is to be done.

Our covenant guides us in how we do the work of love. It is a sacred document that emerged from the shared values and common aspirations of this congregation, reflecting the commitment, the compassion, the forgiveness, the love that lives between and among us. ♦

Done Leapin'

BY MAUREEN CANNY

*No more leaps of faith.
The emperor is naked.
I'm ditching the dogma.
My mind gropes for proof as she keeps
screaming
Just the facts ma'am!*

*Yep, a doubter and a skeptic, that's
me.*

*Convoluted ancient stories, each to
support the next,
All bunk in my book.*

*I'll grant you that the mythology is
comforting, but that doesn't make it
true.*

*What elaborate legacies we are left to
untangle!*

*I'll save my states of suspended
disbelief for TV shows I watch.*

I know, I know...

*There are other ways of
understanding, apart from hard
data.*

*Like the transcendentalists' quest for
beauty, truth, and goodness,
I'll keep trying to embrace the woo-woo.*

*I love a provocative parable or an
illuminating metaphor.*

But let's not spin tales for now.

*Let's just have a latte together,
and discuss how to ferment
cucumbers, and what you're making
for dinner.*

I'm not anti-social.

I'm just an unbeliever.

*Now don't think I am all dour and
somber.*

*There's joy and wonder in my
worldview too.*

*The kindness of people, and the
probing of science sustain me.*

*We may never know the details of the
universe's beginnings,*

*Or the intricate specifics of how geese
know to fly south,*

*Or the mechanics of why we feel
empathy.*

That's okay.

*Quanta to quibble over and riddles to
unravel.*

*A gazillion things happen and we
don't know why.*

There's awe in those mysteries.

*Yet, for all my haughty hubris,
I often whisper reflexively,
Thank you...God.*

Lyrics: Let the River Run

BY CARLY SIMON

*We're coming to the edge,
running on the water,
coming through the fog,
your sons and daughters.*

*Let the river run,
let all the dreamers
wake the nation.
Come, the New Jerusalem.*

*Silver cities rise,
the morning lights
the streets that meet them,
and sirens call them on
with a song.*

*It's asking for the taking.
Trembling, shaking.
Oh, my heart is aching.*

*We're coming to the edge,
running on the water,
coming through the fog,
your sons and daughters.*

*We the great and small
stand on a star
and blaze a trail of desire
through the dark'ning dawn.*

*It's asking for the taking.
Come run with me now,
the sky is the color of blue
you've never even seen
in the eyes of your lover.*

*Oh, my heart is aching.
We're coming to the edge,
running on the water,
coming through the fog,
your sons and daughters.*

*It's asking for the taking.
Trembling, shaking.
Oh, my heart is aching.
We're coming to the edge,
running on the water,
coming through the fog,
your sons and daughters.*

*Let the river run,
let all the dreamers
wake the nation.
Come, the New Jerusalem.*

UUA: How It Works

BY HELEN HENRY

The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) describes itself as “the central organization for the Unitarian Universalist (UU) religious movement in the United States.”

The UUA is led by the elected President, Moderator and Board of Trustees. These leaders are elected by congregational delegates at the annual General Assembly gathering. The President is the chief executive of the UUA and its public spokesperson. The Moderator chairs the business meetings of the General Assembly and meetings of the Board of Trustees. Specialized boards, committees and advisors also help lead the UUA.

Every congregation is part of a region. OUUC is part of the 12 western states that make up the Pacific Western Region (see map page 23).

According to the website these are the services that OUUC can access from our Region:

Consultation: Pacific Western Regional staff offer consultation to congregational leaders (including ministers, staff, and lay leaders) regarding all aspects of congregational life by email, phone, video conference, and in person.

Workshops, webinars, and trainings: They offer in-person workshops and online webinars on a variety of topics. They coordinate Renaissance Modules (training for religious educators) as well as training for OWL (Our Whole Lives) facilitators.

Transitions: They help congregations in search for a new minister, whether settled, contract, interim, or developmental.

Conflict Mediation: They mediate conflict when it is beyond the ability of a congregation to resolve by itself.

Congregational partnerships: They facilitate congregations working together. They help congregations learn from each other, share resources, and work together for social justice. They assist congregations in developing covenant partnerships.

Emerging Groups: They support emerging congregations and covenanting communities.

Youth Ministry: They provide programming for youth at the district and regional level. This includes conferences, camps, coming-of-age programs, retreats, trainings, and the annual weeklong Goldmine Youth Leadership School. They support partnerships between youth and adult leadership such as the PNWD Youth Empowerment Services Team (YES), the PSWD Youth Council, and the Youth Adult Committee (YAC).

Website Resources: They provide resources to congregations through our website.

Chalice Lighters: They promote and provide administrative support for the Chalice Lighter programs in all four districts.

District Support: They provide support to the four district boards and for the planning and implementation of district and regional assemblies.

Connection to the UUA: They help congregations identify resources and services from other parts of the UUA. They share information about congregations with the larger UUA leadership to help the whole organization provide the best possible services to congregations. ♦

OUUC gains from UUA resources



The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) describes itself as “the central organization for the Unitarian Universalist (UU) religious movement in the United States.”

BY HELEN HENRY

Many UUs are familiar with UUA because of their awareness of the annual General Assembly or the “UU World” which arrives in the mail to members. But they may not be aware of how the UUA supports congregations like ours. A fellow congregant referred to it as “the invisible UUA.”

Over the past few years, OUUC has benefited from many of the UUA services. We were assigned special support staff for the search process and the transition of our interim ministers and recently called minister. During our interim, UUA consultants came to OUUC and facilitated the “Beyond Categorical Thinking Workshop”.

UUA Assigned Staff Support

The search team was assigned a special staff person for assisting them. The UUA arranges all the deadlines and protocol for a united ministerial search process across the country that assures that all churches and ministers have the

same timelines, guidelines and opportunities.

**The Unitarian
 Universalist Association
 provides a wealth of
 services that enhance
 our life at OUUC.**

The board worked with our Regional staff during our discussion of resignation with the Rev. Perchlik. The Rev. Perchlik received individual support from a member of the staff during this time as well.

The UUA regional staff also assisted the Worship Arts Team in soliciting ministers for our Sunday services through the spring and summer. The Rev. Tandi Rogers and the Rev. Sarah Schurr, staff from our region, both preached at OUUC during this time. This was at no cost to OUUC since Sarah and Tandi are staff. (Other guest ministers receive payment from OUUC for their Sunday service.)

As a member of the Worship Arts Team, I often access the UUA online worship web pages when creating a

service. They have a multitude of resources: readings, prayers, openings, chalice lighting words, etc. The website also publishes sermons from many UU ministers.

Besides publishing the in-house magazine, “UU World”, the UUA has its own book and gift store which can be accessed online at www.uua.org/bookstore. Here you can find a library of books on spiritual guidance, church organization and community building, as well as poetry and essays by prominent UU leaders. It is where we buy our Sunday songbooks/hymnals. The bookstore also sells UU jewelry and clothing. When you see someone wearing a yellow “Standing on the Side of Love” tee shirt, it probably came from the UUA gift shop. ♦



OUUC Ministries and UUA

BY HELEN HENRY

To further understand our involvement with UUA and the services they provide, I reached out to the OUUC Accountable Persons (AP), in charge of our ministries. Here is what they had to say:



BY SARA LEWIS

The UUA provides many resources for religious education and youth ministry, most of them for free, some for a small charge.

For instance, the UUA has developed a lifespan comprehensive religious education curriculum, called Tapestry of Faith, that is available for free on their website. We use these lessons here in our religious education program. They also maintain the Worship Web, a database of words, readings, stories, and more that I often use when planning worship or other events.

Our youth are very connected to the UUA and the PW (Pacific-Western) Region because the region puts on Youth Cons and runs trainings such as Peer Chaplain trainings for youth. The UUA also supports the OWL program and puts on trainings for OWL facilitators.

And, I would not be the DRE I am without the training and support I have received from the UUA. The UUA runs the Religious Educators Credentialing program which is supported by a program of training opportunities called Renaissance

Modules. UUA staff either oversee or support both of those programs, and often also provide direct instruction or facilitation of the trainings.



BY CAROL MCKINLEY

The UUA provides me with connection, inspiration, and resources. For several years I have served on

the Pacific Northwest District Healthy Congregations Team, and have developed deeper understandings of and ways to work with congregations in conflict from several mentors, including the Revs. Margaret Keip and Bruce Davis.

Through my service on the PNWD board, the Pacific Western Region Advisory Team, and the UU State Advocacy Networks, I have worked with UU staff and volunteers throughout our region and UUs across the country. They have inspired me with their commitment to our faith, and have never failed to provide me with suggestions and resources that have expanded my ministry.

Whether I am teaching an adult education program, preparing a workshop or writing a sermon, I turn to the UUA Worship Web, education curricula, or the UUA Office of Advocacy and Witness.

These are connections that continually inspire me and deepened my faith in the endless possibilities of Unitarian Universalism to keep working for a world of love, justice, and equality.



BY BONNIE GUYER-GRAHAM

My UU colleagues share their experiences with me. I

completed the UUA class offered to staff about Interim Ministry. When Rev. Melcher arrived, I had some idea about the process of Interim Ministry and how it differs from regular settled ministry. Having that background was reassuring.

I appreciate having our Regional staff person, Tandi Rogers, available. Tandi provided support and ideas for OUUC's off-site delegates to the UUA General Assembly. She helped give background info on how this year's General Assembly could be different from previous General Assemblies because of the awareness of institutional racism.

I am a member of a UU professional organization—UU Association of Membership Professionals (UUAMP.) While this is not the UUA, the organization maintains connections with UUA staff all over the country.

I check in with my UUAMP colleagues regularly through email and Facebook. I get to see examples of things people have tried, participate in information sharing, join in book discussions, and share what I have learned here in Olympia. Last spring, I was fortunate to attend the UUAMP Professional Days—three days spent examining the many different ways we can encourage belonging in UU congregations.



BY DARLENE SARKELA

The UUA provides list-serves for church leaders. I belong to the Administrator's list-serve.

That's where Administrators ask questions and share ideas. It is a very valuable service, especially since many Administrators are not connected to any professional organizations, and many work in churches that are not geographically close to other UU churches.

The UUA provided a facilitator, Tandi Rogers (via the region) for the Administrator's Retreat that happened at OUUC last spring.

The UUA staff are available to answer questions. The people who work for the Office of Church Finances have been especially helpful to me when I have had questions about staff benefits like health insurance, disability insurance and retirement accounts.



BY THE REV. ERIC POSA

The UUA? They give me my marching orders, of course!

At least, that's what some people believe. It's not true, however. There are many reasons why it's not true, but the main point is that interim ministry is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Each congregation has its own needs and strengths during times of transition. Interim ministry is a collaborative practice. Many of the staff members of the UUA provide

invaluable resources to aid that collaboration.

The most obvious resource they will provide for OUUC these next two years is their facilitation of the ministerial search process. The Transitions Office at UUA HQ provides invaluable structure for a process that sometimes seems onerous in its thoroughness, but which provides the best possible chance for a successful search. They also provide a Regional Transition Coach to guide church leaders through the search

Interim ministry is a collaborative practice for which UUA provides invaluable resources.

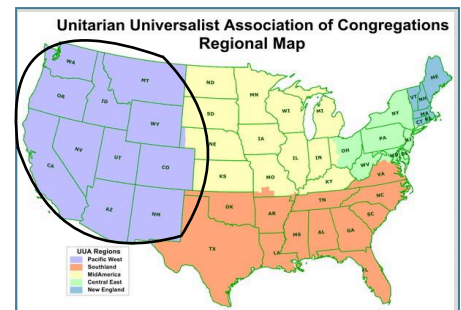
process. (Our Coach for this Transition period is Rev. Tracy Springberry, who serves the UU Fellowship of McMinnville, OR.)

They also provide for the health and strength of interim ministry in the UUA. The Transitions Office subsidizes the training of new interims and aids the Interim Ministers Guild in accrediting experienced interims. They also help coordinate our annual UU interim ministers' seminar every year (late April). The UUA is deeply invested in promoting good professional ministry in general, so provide countless resources to train and credential UU ministers at all stages. And they manage our pension, health care, dental...you get the idea.

For congregations, they offer countless resources. Just in the spiritual life area, I personally have used the online Worship Web (with a couple thousand UU readings, liturgies, etc.) and a couple different books from Skinner House Press (our in-house

UU publisher) on worship and spiritual practices. I've also taught an online curriculum for adults on spiritual practices. And I've attended worship services and spiritually-themed workshops at General Assembly, the annual UUA convention (coming June 2019 to Spokane). And of course, I've worked now with regional field staff from three of the five regions in the UUA who support congregations in countless ways.

One final note: the UUA is, ultimately, us. It is an association of congregations; OUUC is one of its 1,000+ member congregations. To think of "THE UUA" as a monolith just does not match the reality. There are over 100 staff members employed directly by the UUA. UUA staffers are usually what is meant when people deride the UUA board. Staff members do not agree with each other on many issues about what is best for our congregations. But I truly believe, and have experienced, that all of them long to do right by our congregations. I deeply appreciate their efforts. ♦



**Pacific Western
Region**



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION



OUUC River

OUUC: Flowing With Change


We are a liberal religious community that opens minds, fills hearts, and transforms lives.

We are also a welcoming liberal religious community, a spiritual home where people of all ages engage life's big questions, find purpose and meaning, deepen and live our values, and serve the cause of justice in the wider community.

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