



The Univoice

Family Promise a Success!

By: **Carla Mannix**

The Social Justice Team says, Thank You! Gracias! Merci! Kup Koon Kup! to the more than 53 volunteers who came out to host two single fathers with children in need of housing over Thanksgiving week. It takes many stones to form an arch, singly none. Thank you all for giving of your time and talent. Be sure to check out some photos on www.uuberks.shutterfly.com.

lies again from Mar. 6-13, 2011. Carla will post a sign-up board in the Gerber Room and on GoogleDocs to make volunteering easier. If you have any questions, please contact her at hfhmannix@yahoo.com

If you know anyone in need of housing, or in danger of eviction, please direct them to Family Promise at 610-373-3323. They can stabilize families-at-risk with funds from the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program.

Church Office Hours:

The church office is open Mon. through Fri. from 9:30-3:30pm, but please call ahead to ensure access.

Please contact office manager Susan Stewart to arrange for a temporary key if you need access any other time.

Rev. Fees has office hours by appointment. Please call (610) 372-0928 or email sandrafees@verizon.net, to schedule an appointment. Monday is Rev. Fees day off.

If you didn't get a chance to participate this time, you have an opportunity to help in January and March. The families in need of housing will be at St. John's Lutheran in Mohton from Jan. 9-16, 2011. They desperately need volunteer help. If you are available, please consider making a meal, eating dinner with, or spending the night. Please contact their coordinator Denise Curran directly at baxcurran@comcast.net and she will let you know their direct need. This is a nice way to help BOTH the family and a church willing to share its facilities.



UU Berks will host fami-

Univoice Submission Guidelines

Email submissions by attaching a Word file or including your material in the body of an email message to univoice@uuberks.org. You may also put typewritten submissions in our mailbox in the new Chalice House in the box labelled *Univoice*.

The deadline is the 15th of each month. Please include the date, time and location of events, and the full name and phone number or e-mail of contacts.

My telephone number is (610) 741-6006 if you need to contact me.

~Meghan Cocuzza, Editor

Keeping a Log for Sandra

While Sandra is on sabbatical, the members of the Committee on Ministry will be keeping a log about services, events, and things in general that seemed to work well and those that didn't, so she will have feedback when she returns. Please feel free to share your ideas and opinions with members of the committee, so they can be included in the log. John Weishampel, Joanne Matz, Carla Mannix, and Jane Rohrbach will be collecting the information and passing it on to Sandra when she returns.



The Circle Group Corner

G~D

By: Ann Myers

“God is not a person, God is a force.... Truth is God.” Mahatma Gandhi

We are starting the New Year 2011 with a Circle Group topic of G~d, or our concepts of the Holy or Divine. I have chosen to use the Orthodox Jewish way of designating the Holy with G~d, which represents for Orthodox Jews a refusal to name the unnamable, and suggests the awe they feel before the Divine. It can perhaps suggest for us UUs the multiplicity of our views, or even our lack of belief. Many religions have fairly clear concepts of G~d, whether it be the Allah of Islam, the Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible or the Heavenly Father of the Christian Trinity. But individual UUs hold theological beliefs ranging from paganism through humanism to agnosticism, atheism and theism, with all kinds of variations in between. Our Principles contain no specific references to belief in G~d, and while our Sources cite Jewish and Christian calls “to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves,” we are all free to pursue what we consider to be the Holy or the Divine as we choose. This is one of the great blessings of being a UU! And, whatever our current ideas of G~d may be, we accept that they are never more than a partial truth, and they may change over time and with experience.

Most of us weren’t born into the UU church, but have chosen this faith as adults. My own spiritual path has taken me from the Church of the Brethren, through a yoga ashram, then to the United Methodist Church, to the Friends’ Meeting, and finally to Unitarian Universalism. We all have different stories and experiences of G~d, and we all have spiritual journeys to recount. Now that I am in a community that supports and respects all spiritual paths, I can actually enjoy many of the Christian scriptures and prayers from my childhood and Methodist/Quaker experiences, as well as the practical wisdom from my Kripalu yoga practices. I think that our UU faith offers us a way to integrate and process all our past spiritual experiences of the Divine.

In one of my favorite UU hymns, we are invited to “Bring Many Names” of G~d, suggesting our great diversity and acceptance of the spiritual paths of us all. Ours is an ongoing and changing quest for spiritual meaning. For our circle group meetings in January, please think about what your concepts of the Holy or the Divine are. How have they changed over the course of your life, and during your own spiritual quest? Where are you now?



January Volunteers

Coffee Corps

1/3 Keith and Carol Orts VIII
1/9 Fay Oxenreider IX
1/16 Nelson & Caroline Simonson X
1/23 Joanne Just I
1/30 Norm & Bonnie Block II

Ushers

TBD

Greeters

1/2 Linda McCormick
1/9 Nadine Smet-Weiss
1/16 Judy Aubrey
1/23 Carol Orts
1/30 Cindy Mock

Caring Circle

Mindy Bortz

Special Plate Collection

By: Mike Szanjna

The November Special Plate Collection for Western Berks Free Medical Clinic brought in \$773.36.

The next Special Plate Collection will be held January 16th, 2011 for the Southern Poverty Law Center. The Southern Poverty Law Center is a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society.

The results of the Special Plate Ballot voting from our December 12th Congregational Meeting are in. A record 55 ballots were handed in. The next five groups to receive a Special Plate Collection are below.

These groups still need to be approved by the Board of Directors.

- Children’s Home Of Reading
- Reading Public Library
- Reading Risk Reduction
- First UU Church Of Berks Minister’s Discretion Fund
- First UU Church Of Berks Food Pantry

Congregational Meeting, December 12th, 2010

By: Gene Goodwin

Our beloved minister, the Rev. Sandra Fees, begins her five-month sabbatical Leave on Jan. 1 with assurances from church leaders that although she will be sorely missed, First Berks UU church will continue to thrive on the positive path.

Leaders of our church have made clear their determination to spread the benefits of Sandra's sabbatical to the church as a whole. Like longtime UU member David Alcorn told the congregational meeting on Dec. 12: The UU Church at York "is much stronger today" because of the sabbatical their minister took about four years ago, David said. Not only did the minister return refreshed and raring to go, the congregation, having learned to do things for itself, was able to respond to his leadership. David and his wife, Winnie, now live in York and commute to our church.

President Joe said he welcomes the opportunity to see how well he and other church leaders handle challenges that are ordinarily Sandra's responsibility. Answering a member's question during the congregational meeting, Joe also noted that Sandra has chosen to return from her sabbatical in June, rather than taking the full six months allowed in her contract with us. No surprise to Joe, who has observed how Sandra has been willing to give up days off during her summer break whenever she felt she was needed, as she did when she was interviewing candidates for office administrator and music director.

Board members also were impressed by the list of visiting UU ministers and other guests Sandra recruited to occupy our pulpit for the 22 Sundays she will be gone.

The Dec. 12th congregational meeting was one of the best run and most positive in the memory of most of us. Lasting a little over an hour, it was also one of our shortest. Although no major votes were called for, support for Sandra's sabbatical was obvious and overwhelming. The same could be said for Family Promise and our continued involvement in that program.

The December 14th meeting, two days later, was also a positive board meeting. A large majority of the congregation is in favor of the direction being taken by the board and other congregants' endeavors. Carla Mannix was praised for her coordination of the feeding and housing of 6 homeless people in the Family Promise, guests during the Thanksgiving holiday week. She noted in her report to the congregation that it took 53 church member volunteers to accomplish this goal. Carla added that for the next weeklong Family Promise challenge, scheduled for March 9-16, 2011, she would post a volunteer sign-up sheet in the Gerber Room for all to help, as they are able.

Further evidence of the determination of the church leaders to make the Sabbatical a positive experience for all can be found in the financial statements of the current fiscal year. Not only was the Extended Capital campaign approved in the May congregational meeting a success, the Board has been able to authorize additional principle payments on the Chalice House loan over the past year. The quicker we can pay the \$73,000 loan, the lower our costs for interest.

None of us joined the UU church to attend committee meetings, but we do so out of our love for each other and our values, Joe said in his report to the congregation in December. "There are many possibilities for all of us to get involved in something. It brings value to us and to the rest of our members. Service should be fulfilling not exhausting. It should feed our passion and grow our soul. Through service we gain connection to our UU faith and each other. It gives us the opportunity to develop our skills and serve our own interest."



Joe and Paula Plagueman

Food Pantry

On Dec. 2 our church distributed food to 134 households; 29 families came to our pantry for the first time. A total of 518 people were served including 257 children, 244 adults and 17 seniors.

This winter we are collecting outer wear for adults and children. Please put warm clothing such as coats, gloves, scarves and sweaters on the coat rack closest to the Gerber Room or in the gray boxes below that rack. We also appreciate your

gifts of non-perishable food items such as canned fruit, vegetables and tuna. These items may be placed in the entryway basket

The next pantry dates will be Jan. 6 and Feb. 3.

New volunteers are always welcome, anytime between 9 AM and noon on the first Thursday of every month. For more information please contact Walter Axsmith at w2axsmith@comcast.net.

Religious Education

Dear Friends,

Now that the hub-bub of the holidays is over, the quiet of winter reigns. I don't know about you, but for the most part, I like winter. It's a time to enjoy snow, quiet evenings, and the bare silhouette of the trees against the gray sky. But when there are kids in the house, the long days of confinement, snuffly noses, and fraying tempers can make the warmth of Spring seem very far away.

If you have a case of the winter blahs, you might want to think about putting some simple family celebrations or "rituals" onto your new 2011 calendar. What do you think of when you hear the word ritual? You might think of something like a Jewish family lighting Shabbat candles together every Friday night or the celebration of a child dedication ceremony. And, indeed, these are both special rituals.

But according to Meg Cox, the UU author of the Book of New Family Traditions: How to Create Great Rituals for Holidays and Everyday, a family ritual can be even simpler. Cox defines a ritual as "anything families do together deliberately, as long as it's juiced up with some flourish that lifts it above the humdrum routine...it's everything we do to celebrate our families, not just on special occasions but also every day, every meal, every bath and every bedtime story."

Cox goes on to list ten good things that family rituals do for children:

- Impart a sense of identity
- Provide comfort and security
- Help to navigate change
- Teach values
- Pass on ethnic or religious heritage
- Teach practical skills
- Solve problems
- Keep alive a sense of departed family members
- Help heal from loss or trauma
- Generate wonderful memories

One of the family rituals at our house involves a poem called "On the Night Before the Birthday." The children like me to read it to them before they go to sleep on the eve of their birthdays. They all cluster at the birthday child's bedside while I read the poem. It is a simple ritual, but it seems important to all of them.

Next month, I'll give you some examples of family rituals from Cox's book and from other members of our church community.

Warm winter blessings,
Elizabeth

RE Committee:
Lisa Wilder, Stephanie Elliott, Kent Gutzler Celeste Galanos, and Emily McNulty

RE Calendar of Events

RE Teacher Breakfast & Scheduling Session: Sunday, Jan. 9, 9:15 AM in the Gerber Room

Come early for church on January 9 at 9:15 for a light breakfast and a chance to talk to the other teachers on your team about what is and is not working with your RE class. Bring your calendar and we'll make out the teaching schedule for the rest of the church year. If you cannot attend, please send your list of available teaching dates to Elizabeth.

OWL Classes: Sunday, Jan. 9 and 23 from 12:15 to 3:30 PM

Sessions for participating Middle School students will be held in the OWL Classroom on the second floor of the Chalice House. Please don't forget to eat a nutritious lunch before class. (OWL is the Our Whole Lives sexuality education program developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ.)

JPD Winter Con at UU Congregation of Frederick, MD, Weekend of Jan. 14-16


Please contact our Con advisor, Jessica Chadwick at j_lives4art@gmail.com if your high school student is interested in attending.

Dessert Buffet/Game Night, Saturday, Jan. 29, 6:30 PM

Bring a favorite dessert, snack, or beverage to share and your favorite card, board, or party games.



Elizabeth Kaufmann
Director of Religious Education

January 2011						
						1 New Year's Day 
2 Sunday Service 10:30am	3	4 Reading Beautifica- tion Board Mtg 6-8:30pm	5 Choir Practice 7:15 – 8:30pm	6 Food Pantry 8-12pm	7	8 Arts and Crafts Group 11-2pm Totally Tolle 9:30-1pm
9 Sunday Service 10:30am OWL Session 12:15-4pm	10 Heart to Heart 7:30-9p,	11 Board Meeting 7-9pm	12 Choir Practice 7:15 – 8:30pm	13	14	15
16 Sunday Service 10:30am Building Keepers Meeting 12-1pm	17	18	19 Choir Practice 7:15 – 8:30pm	20	21	22 Arts and Crafts Group 11-2pm
23/30 Sunday Service 10:30am (23)OWL Session 12:15-4pm	24/31	25	26 Choir Practice 7:15 – 8:30pm	27	28	29

Sunday Service Schedule

10:30am every Sunday

Jan. 2 Be Still and Know That I Am God

Craig Schollenberger, Peter Mitchell, Ann Myers, Brad Richardson and Jane Rohrbach.

Let's bid farewell to 2010 and welcome 2011 with a special service focused on meditation, music, prayer, and candle lighting. (Centering prayer/meditation group that meets at the church on Sunday mornings at 9:30 and Wednesday evening at 6:30.)

Craig is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Private Practice at 4 Park Plaza where he hosts an open 1 hour silent meditation each Thursday. He began practicing yoga and meditation in 1971. Craig is a graduate of Albright College and Marywood University and is nationally recognized as a Board Certified Diplomat in Clinical Social Work. He recently completed a Practicum for Teaching Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction at University of Pennsylvania's Program for Mindfulness. When not working, Craig can usually be found cooking, reading or renovating his 90-year-old bungalow style home.

Jan. 9 Matters of Faith

Kate Diller

What is faith, and does it matter? How do we know? Can faith be learned or developed? James Fowler, expert of "faith development" has some interesting ideas for us to consider.

Kate Diller, May 2010 graduate of Lancaster Theological Seminary, served as Student Minister to 1st UU Berks in 2008-2009 and is currently in aspirant status as she continues her journey toward ordination.

Jan. 16 A Sabbath from the Work Towards the Dream?

Rev. Robert F. Renjilian

On this Martin Luther King, Jr weekend, I explore the possibilities that our religion still draws us to continued work, not a day of rest.

The Rev. Robert F. Renjilian has been in ministry for over 20 years so far, almost half of that since coming to the U.U. Congregation of York, PA with his family in 2001. His specialty was as Minister of Religious Education in the early years, until he got the "preaching bug." He is co-leading the anti-racism work among UUs in York.

Jan. 23 The Green Bag

Rev. Dr. Len De Roche

The sermon centers around the story a Norwegian gnome who had a wished and what happen when wishes are granted.

Rev. Dr. Len De Roche resigned in 2007 after five years as minister in the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem, PA. He served churches in Charleston, WV and at Kingston, MA and as a Pastoral Counselor/psychotherapist and as a Chaplain at the University of Chicago Hospital. He ended his military career closing bases after the Berlin Wall crumbled. He lives with 300 pounds of frisky Labradors in Bethlehem and works for a fortune 300 investment firm.

Jan. 30 Father Abraham: a Tale Told in Retelling

Peter Newport-Minister at the UU Church of Lancaster

We will never know if there was one man named Abram who walked to Caanan from someplace called Ur four thousand years ago, but we do know there were multitudes of such migrants. What does the telling and retelling of the Abraham saga in four different faith systems tell us about the religious journey?



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of Berks County

Church

First Unitarian Universalist



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