



ransforming Times



Concepts of God

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Our way of religion is open and affirming, encouraging our best selves to flourish. Turns out that Unitarian Universalism is more than just a good idea, it's good for you, too!

Some of our Unitarian Universalist religious thinkers intuited what science has now shown. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "It behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping, we are becoming." And religious educator, Sophia Lyon Fahs said, "Some beliefs weaken a person's self-hood. They blight the growth of resourcefulness. Other beliefs nurture self-confidence and enrich the feeling of personal worth."

New brain imaging technology has been used to investigate how beliefs about God affect brain health, and therefore, general well being. *How God Changes Your Brain*, by Andrew Newberg, M.D. uses neuroscience to explore how different spiritual practices affect structures of the brain. In short, Newberg has found that many spiritual practices affect the brain in fundamentally healthy ways, regardless of whether one believes in God or not.

I'm not surprised. As an on-again-off-again meditator for most of my adult life, I can attest to the benefits. I am surprised to learn that concepts of God can have an effect on brain health, for better and for worse.

People who envision an authoritarian God or a critical God will activate the limbic areas of the brain that generate fear and anger. These emotions prime the body for fright or flight. According to Newberg, "Excessive anger or fear can permanently disrupt many structures and functions in both your body and brain. These destructive emotions interfere with memory storage and cognitive accuracy, which in turn, will disrupt our ability to properly evaluate and respond to social situations."

People who envision a benevolent God or a distant God, that is, one that doesn't intervene in the lives of individuals, will activate a part of the brain called the anterior cingulate. According to Newberg, "When stimulated, it suppresses the impulse to get angry or frightened. It also helps generate feelings of empathy toward others who are suffering or hurt."

As the winter months draw close around us, we enter a season that invites reflection on ideas of divinity. What is your concept of God? – either the God you believe in or the one you don't. What are the practices that nourish and enrich your feelings of personal worth?

May the holy days of this holiday season bless you with happiness and peace.

Yours in the spirit,
Diane

Transforming Times is organized around theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church's offerings are by no means limited to the themes. They do provide common ground for community conversation, a way to gain more meaning and depth. We want to hear many perspectives on each theme. You are invited to submit your original poetry, artwork, or short essays of 400 words or less.

Be warned: seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

September: Freedom
October: Covenant
November: Religious Authority
December: Concepts of God
January: Evil

February: Love
March: Brokenness
April: Forgiveness
May: Transformation

UUCT Homeless Hospitality Needs You!

Once again, we will host up to 14 homeless guests a night for a warm place to sleep enjoy nutritious meals and enjoy some good 'ol fashioned hospitality in a safe environment, things we take for granted every day! Below are the dates:

Dec 3rd & 4th; 7th & 8th

Jan 7th & 8th

Feb 4th & 5th; 18th & 19th

Please consider lending a hand for one or more of the following areas necessary to successfully host our guests for 5 nights over the next three months:

Two Overnight Chaperones required per night. We must have one man and one woman 18 yrs or older. Chaperones can help with dinner or arrive at 7:30 pm to spend the night with guests. Chaperones may leave when breakfast crew arrives or help with breakfast.

Dinner: Crew (4-6 folks) arrives at 4:30 pm to set-up tables, prepare/heat meal, prepare sack lunches, set-out mats & blankets, serve, eat meal with guests, clean-up. Crew should be done by 7:30 pm.

(2) Main dishes (serves 8-10)

(2) Side dishes/salads (serves 8-10)

(2) Rolls/bread (serves 8-10)

One gallon whole milk

One gallon juice (OJ, lemonade, etc)

(2) Desserts (serves 8-10)

Lunches: Items should be delivered in time for dinner crew to assemble.

Bread (2 loaves)

Lunch meat (serves 14)

Whole fruit (serves 14)

Peanut butter pretzels, chips, etc (serves 14)

Juice boxes (serves 14)

Breakfast: Crew (4-6 folks) arrives at 5:30 am, makes coffee, heats water, prepares/heats meal, eat with guests, put out lunches, clean-up, put away mats/blankets, bag dirty linens to be washed. Crew should be done by 7:00 am.

(2) Main dishes (serves 8-10)

(2) Bacon/sausage/ham (serves 8-10)

Fruit (serves 14)

One gallon whole milk

One gallon juice (OJ)

Additional Donated Items Needed:

Socks

Jackets, sweaters, sweatshirts

Toiletries – travel sized toothpastes, toothbrushes, soaps, shampoos, & conditioners

For more information to volunteer, please contact Erin Deely at 609-2422 cell, 320-7688 hm or at edeely@cox.net

How Do We Teach Religious Education?

By Kathleen Hogue- Religious Education Coordinator

Over the weekend of October 31st, I attended a Renaissance Module titled “The Philosophy of Religious Education”. The focus of the training module was to learn the what, when, whom, where, how and why of Religious Education. The Renaissance Module was very informative and I was even able to articulate my personal philosophy of what Religious Education is: “a shared, collaborative, and intentional spiritual journey of discovering what we each hold true in life through open hearts and open minds.”

I found the most difficult question the *how* of Religious Education. By some horrible twist of fate, this is the question that, after we were divided into pairs, my partner and I had to address. I pondered the question all night as we were to present our findings in the morning. The why did not concern me so much. The purpose of Religious Education is to nurture Unitarian Universalist identity, spiritual growth, and to create vital communities of justice and love. How was I supposed to know the how of RE? That’s what I came all the way out to California to learn!

I believe the old saying “It takes a village to raise a child,” but what does it take to raise a Unitarian Universalist? *How* do we go about it? I received inspiration from our required text “Essex Conversations”. In the article *Sunday School Is Dead — Long Live Sunday School* Rev. Greg Stewart writes: “Hard work and hospitality, not workshops and curricula are what is necessary to realize our beloved community.” Greg Stewart says that responsibility goes beyond the village. We each have individual responsibilities. We must each be villagers at church, at home and in our daily lives.

The real answer to the how may be in the question “Are you a villager?” Are each of you nurturing the spiritual growth of our children and youth? “Forget the village”, proclaims Stewart., “ Become a villager to all the children of our church community”. But the how cannot come from the Religious Coordinator or the RE Council alone. We need to know what each of you believe should be the how of RE. Over the next few weeks we will be asking each parent, teacher, child, and youth to participate in a survey. Your answers will help us in deciding what direction to take with our Religious Education during these transforming times.



A Message from the PSWD President

I am on jet plane high above the Wild Wild West, the name coined by the UUA staff who serve the region containing the four westernmost districts of our association of congregations. The districts that form the region are Mountain Desert, Pacific Northwest, Pacific Central and Pacific Southwest, the district I am honored to serve. As I return from Boston, after spending three days with my colleagues in the District Presidents Association, I am more mindful than ever that when I was elected President, I was accepting a call, not only to serve, but to lead the governance of our district. I entered into a trust with the member congregations that I would bring my gifts into the service of our common hopes and aspirations.

In the chapel on the second floor of 25 Beacon Street, the national headquarters of the UUA, the District Presidents met with Rev. Peter Morales, President of the UUA. Of the two hours we spent with Peter, less than 15 minutes was prepared remarks, the balance of the time was in dialogue. We learned a great deal about his vision, but Peter also listened carefully to the DPs hopes and aspirations and invited us to be partners with him. It was a call to serve.

Growth, ministry and social witness were three of the several topics discussed with Peter. While overall growth is nearly flat, there are congregations that have grown at many times the rate of the typical congregation and we need to learn from them. To have a ministry that can meet the needs twenty years in the future, we need to assess the changes necessary today to get there. And social witness, an aspect of our faith taken to a new level by Rev. Bill Sinkford, has a momentum that must be sustained and strengthened.

UUA Moderator, Gini Courter, also spent considerable time with the DPA. It was in these conversations that lay the greatest challenge to the presidents gathered around the heavy wooden tables. It was in these conversations that we heard the call to lead.

The UUA Board of Trustees has been preparing for the move to Policy Governance and only recently adopted its first set of Ends Policies that arise from the UUA's sources of authority and accountability. As we reviewed the new Ends, we recognized that while there are differences in wording and sequence, there is clear alignment with the Ends of the districts. There are no schisms or disagreements. Unlike some religious denominations, Unitarian Universalists have a shared vision of the Beloved Community Made Whole.

As the conversation unfolded, we realized that the earlier work of many district boards (who adopted Policy Governance long before the UUA Board) directly and indirectly informed the Ends of the UUA. Our individual district Ends have not been subsumed, but rather embraced by the UUA Board. As a result, the District Presidents Association is ready to align its vision across the continent, thereby realizing our shared intention to empower our UUA President by clarifying co-employee reporting relationships and evaluation processes, allow the Association to do more with the resources we have and use them more wisely and effectively, and consider new roles for regional and district leadership to support new forms of governance.

The intention of the District Presidents is to lead, but certainly not to do so alone. I am depending on, as are my DP colleagues, the cooperation and collaboration of my district's board members and staff, my colleagues in this sacred work. This will be a shared opportunity to rethink governance, service delivery, assessment, resource alignment, organizational structures, and more.

This will be an exciting and singular opportunity to re-imagine ourselves.
I look forward to the opportunity to serve and lead.

Living my faith,
Michael Sallwasser

Article written by Michael Sallwasser, President of the PSWD Board of Trustees and will be in the next NetUUrk Publication.

