



# The Steeple

November 2011 Newsletter

## First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington, Vermont



### In The Interim

Now that Autumn has begun in earnest I am reminded of Percival Chubb's classic meditation on the spirituality of the season, entitled *A Harvest of Gratitude*.

*"Once more the fields have ripened to harvest, and the fruitful earth has fulfilled the promise of spring. The work of those who labor has been rewarded: they have sown and reaped, planted and gathered. How rich*

*and beautiful is the bounty gathered: the golden grain and clustered corn, the grapes of purple and green, the crimson apples and yellow pears, and all the colors of orchard and garden, vineyard and field."*

Vermont has certainly been buffeted by nature lately. Between the spring flooding and the damage from Hurricane Irene, it might be difficult to remember that in addition to bringing destruction and loss, nature has indeed kept the promise of spring. Despite losses in farmers' fields, the bounty has been gathered in. We have enjoyed splendid if late-breaking fall leaf color, delicious apples, strangely shaped and colored gourds. We are grateful for beauty, and for food, and for the labor of those who make sure that food comes to our tables.

*"Season follows after season, after winter the spring, after summer the harvest-laden autumn. From bud to blossom, from flower to fruit, from seed to bud again, the beauty of the earth unfolds."*

The UUA Statement of Principles and Purposes reminds us that our living tradition draws on multiple theological sources, including spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature. Like many aspects of our vibrant and diverse faith, we are challenged to hold in creative tension the steady and reliable cycles of the seasons that comfort us and the vagaries of nature that humble us.

*From the harvest of the soil we are given occasion to garner a harvest of the heart and mind: a harvest of resolve to be careful stewards of all life's gifts and opportunities.*

November is the beginning of a cultural phenomenon known as 'the holiday season'. Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, New Year's Day – all can tempt us to unwise consumption. Too much rich food, too much alcohol, too much spending on things we don't need. Let's instead use this holiday season to recommit ourselves to the spiritual practice of stewardship. Stewardship of the natural world, of our financial resources, and of our time and energy.

This autumn I see a special opportunity for us to join together with other people around the country who are unhappy with the direction that our economy is heading. The Occupy movement is a gift to us to remember our UU commitment to economic justice. Let's learn from each other and from the Occupy movement how we can respond faithfully to this challenge.

*A harvest of reverence for the wondrous power and life at work in things that grow, and in the soul.*

As Thanksgiving approaches we can all cultivate a personal practice of gratitude, of awe, and of openness to expanding our perspectives. UU minister A. Powell Davies was fond of saying that 'life is just a chance to grow a soul'. Even as we commit ourselves to family and job and church and advocacy, we need to leave room for the growing of our souls.

*A harvest of gratitude for every good which we enjoy, and of fellowship for all who are sustained by earth's beauty.*

I reap a harvest of gratitude this fall in this ministry among you. I find myself in the midst of good people energetically worshipping and learning together. I find so many opportunities for collaboration, for sharing the ministry, for mutual care and nurture. As we continue to walk together through this interim time, may we always remember to be grateful for who we are and who we are becoming. And may we be sustained by earth's beauty, and by the beauty of this thriving liberal religious community.

Gratefully,  
Rev. Roberta

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## A Message from Martha . . .

Allow me to suggest some generalizations about Unitarian Universalists: We are curious. We are questioners. We like to learn ideas and explore possibilities. Our universe, our home planet, and its phenomena and living expressions – and especially the human species in all its cultural and social manifestations – these tickle our curiosity. We wonder... *Why...? How...? What if...?*

And so we dig in to it all, trying to snuggle ever more securely into our own skin... asking ourselves wordlessly in quiet moments to what extent our lives are rolling forward on the track of our ideals and vision... assessing our “fit” into the web of relationships in which we find ourselves....

Meanwhile, we raise children through and into this amazing, perplexing, and often hurting world. And in so doing, we try our darnedest to hand over to these wild, freethinking creatures the ideas, discoveries, and values which we have received from our predecessors, found along the way, and shaped with our own hands, hearts and minds.

We all know that various adults influence children’s upbringing, but let me name an observation about First UU’s religious education: *Most of our teachers are parents of a child in the class that they are teaching.* In other words, there is a tendency in our congregational culture, for parent-teachers to follow one or more of their own children through the grades, groups, and curricula. Especially in younger grades, adults are largely unaware of the topic they will be teaching, and often ask around to find out who taught it last year so as to glean a little wisdom for the journey. This happens every year: most people are cutting their teeth on never-seen-nor-tried stories and activities with a group of children whom they mostly know. So I wonder... *what if -- instead of sticking with the child -- most teachers stuck with a curriculum? What would it be like to hone in on a topic of interest, and get to explore it with a new group of children for several years in a row, refining patterns and activities according to what is learned through each experience?*

If this idea intrigues you, you have company. The Religious Education Committee and I hope that more people (not just parents!) might follow their curiosity and passion, rather than their child. First UU is a place to follow your heart. How about doing that with a group of bright, young-spirited co-pilots? After all, it’s the sharing of passions and witnessing of “Ah-ha” moments that stretches and forms us on our life’s journey!

## Membership Calling Circle

Do you want to stay connected to other members of this Society? Do you have time to make some friendly phone calls each month? We need some volunteers to keep us connected to each other. In order to make sure that we are intentionally tending to our membership we are putting together a group of volunteers to check-in with each other and ensure our well being. Most likely you will be given a list of people who live close by. We know that it is easier for each of us to be active in the community when we are cared for and replenished ourselves.

Please contact Alicia Jacobs 355-0630 or [jacobs.alicia@gmail.com](mailto:jacobs.alicia@gmail.com) if you are interested in participating.

*Serving our greater purpose by caring for each other.*



## Coming of Age: A special program opportunity for youth and adults



Every year, youth in tenth – twelfth grade get to ask themselves: *Am I up for some shared thinking, feeling, and responding to the ultimate mystery of my existence? Am I prepared to delve into questions, stories, and possibilities with another person – an adult whom I choose, but whom I may not know very well? Dare I, this year, try to capture who I am and what makes me unique, write it down, and share it publicly, in our sanctuary filled with UUs of all ages? Is Unitarian Universalism special enough to me to give it (and myself) some dedicated attention in my already-overflowing life? This year, am I ready to do Coming of Age?* Here at First UU, Coming of Age is a stand-alone program, separate from our high school Youth Group. It is open to youth in 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade who would like to participate, regardless of their participation in Youth Group. The 1:1 youth-adult mentor dimension integrates youth preferences/suggestions of adults with a screening process led by the Coming of Age Leaders. Adult mentors move through the program, engaging together with the youth in deep questions and meaningful activities.

This year’s program leaders are Lucy Bogue, John Grimm, Melissa Akey, and Martha Dallas. The program content comes largely from the [Coming of Age Program Handbook for Congregations](#), a wonderful curriculum which is part of the [Tapestry of Faith](#) series.

Youth and their mentors will meet with program leaders twice a month, on Monday evenings between December and May. Mentors will also be expected to touch base with their mentee in between sessions about reflection topics and small tasks. All will participate in our annual Youth Sunday service, when youth will share their Credo statements.

Those interested in finding out more should contact Martha Dallas at [Martha@uusociety.org](mailto:Martha@uusociety.org) or 862-5630 x 28. Meanwhile, keep an eye out for dates, deadlines and details in our weekly enews blast!

## 2012 Will Bring Back the Evening Alliance. Laymen's League, Too?



Evolution science teaches us that flexibility is the key to survival, and no one demonstrates that better than our own Women's Alliance, formerly the Ladies Society and before that the Ladies Sewing Society. Over the years, through dues and special fundraisers, the Alliance has dedicated itself to meeting those little unanticipated service needs that keep cropping up without ever having a particular committee or staff member who quite has the task. When researching the Holiness of Helpfulness, I discovered that from time to time over its 185 year history, the Alliance has opened chapters for interested women who can't make weekday meetings. Often this group brought together women who looked forward to joining the Day Alliance after retirement, or when their children went to school, which is why the Evening Alliances come and go but the Women's Alliance keeps going. Over the years, through dues and special fundraisers, the Alliance or Alliances has/have stayed ready for those unanticipated service needs that have no particular committee or staff member. They have also regularly done start-up for energy to grow the Society in experiments that later went into the Bylaws, either under the Board or through the Council.

Another such time is upon us -- several women looking ahead to Day Alliance but not yet retired, the Day Alliance wondering if they will be the ones to turn out the lights. Therefore, in January 2012, the Women's Alliance is pleased to invite interested folks to join an Evening Alliance. The day and date have not yet been picked, but here is the basic information:

The Evening Alliance, like the Women's Alliance, will retain a primary mission of benefiting the operations and facilities of the UU Society in times of need. There can easily be a light supper beforehand, if people so desire. The Evening Alliance and Women's Alliance will maximize their usefulness with a coordinated Executive Planning process. The two Alliances will occasionally have social events together.

The Women's Alliance also provided initial support for a group which began as The Gentlemen's Club in the 1890s and after World War I became the Unitarian Laymen's League, itself lasting until 1975. This group presented discussions on public topics and offered regular sessions on what it means to be a man (usually with older sons invited). The Laymen's League was no slouch on work for the Society, providing Sunday ushers for most of the 20th century and running the Canvass for several decades. And yes, they either prepared and cleaned up their own dinners or provided flowers and applause to the women in the kitchen. The League's primary gift to the community was decades of support for a religiously-inclusive Old North End Boy Scout troop, many of whose functions now continue through the Boys and Girls Club.

Remembering the Laymen's League and its services to so many, the Women's Alliance has decided that the Evening Alliance, unlike the Women's Alliance, will have no gender criteria, at least at the beginning. When we gather, we'll determine whether we wish to separate by gender or remain as one. Occasional break-out sessions within a unified structure are also a possibility.

To generate an initial list of participants, and find the best night for our meeting, the contact person for this project is Elz Curtiss, 863-8403, email at [revelz@burlingtontelecom.net](mailto:revelz@burlingtontelecom.net). Please let me know what are your best two nights for a monthly meeting and when you absolutely cannot attend due to previous commitments.



### Time to Buy the Book!

The Women's Alliance is pleased to announce that we are now taking advance payment for **The Holiness of Helpfulness: The First Two Hundred Years of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington, Vermont**. Copies are \$20 and will not be printed until paid for. Look for author Elz Curtiss or another Alliance member in Coffee Hour after second service. Because the Alliance commissioned and paid the author in advance, all book sales will either fund subsequent printings or benefit the UU Society.

### Thanksgiving Service Opportunity

Participants needed at the November 20<sup>th</sup> Multigenerational Service. Do you have a special table cloth, candle holder or vase or some other family heirloom? Are you willing to bring them to the Society on Sunday November 20<sup>th</sup> and take part in a ritual 'setting of the table' for our Thanksgiving service? Do you bake bread or make wine? We need those as well. If you are willing to participate (we'll help with the speaking parts, don't worry!) please contact Rev. Roberta ([revroberta@uusociety.org](mailto:revroberta@uusociety.org)) or Martha Dallas ([Martha@uusociety.org](mailto:Martha@uusociety.org)).



### Baby Dedication Planned

Calling all babies. Please tell your parents that on November 20<sup>th</sup> we will include a baby dedication as part of the Sunday services. Families with babies born since the last Dedication ceremony as well as families with babies and young children who have recently joined the congregation are invited to participate. The purpose of the Dedication Ceremony is to name the baby/child in the congregation and welcome them. It is also a time for the congregation to renew the promise we make to all parents to nurture and support them and their children in their growth and development. If you would like to learn more, or wish to participate, contact Rev. Roberta.

### Chancel Floral Arrangements

Love those flowers on the chancel? They might have been donated by Chappell's Florist in S. Burlington. Their newly introduced "Vermont Recycles Flowers" program benefits non-profits, nursing homes, hospitals, schools, assisted-living facilities, etc. by recycling donated or "event" flowers back into the community rather than having them thrown away. Once a month, or more we are very fortunate to receive flowers to use for Sunday services. If you see Diane Boucher, who sings in our choir and is a Chappell's co-owner, please thank her for this wonderful program we benefit from, and if you know of a non-profit group that would be interested in this program have them email [recycleflowers@yahoo.com](mailto:recycleflowers@yahoo.com) or visit [www.vermontrecyclesflowers.com](http://www.vermontrecyclesflowers.com).



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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**



## Sunday Worship in November

### November 6 - *“Faithful Democracy: An Election Day Reflection”*

Fully at the heart of our Seven Principles are the words, “We covenant to affirm and promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.” As Election Day approaches, let us reflect together on what it means to be faithfully democratic.

### November 13 - *“The First Smooth Stone: Revelation is Continuous”*

Our interim minister will begin an irregular sermon series based on an essay by UU theologian James Luther Adams entitled *The Five Smooth Stones of Liberalism*. The title draws on the biblical image of the shepherd boy David carefully choosing five smooth stones for his sling shot as he prepared for his confrontation with Goliath. This essay will also be the basis for an adult education series beginning in February.

### November 20 - Multigenerational Service *“Setting the Table”*

Rev. Roberta and Director of Religious Education Martha Dallas will co-lead this service. We will literally set a table in the sanctuary with beloved table cloths, dishes, and other objects from your homes. Do you have a precious object that you place on your Thanksgiving table? Would you be willing to share it, and its meaning? If so, please contact either Roberta or Martha.

### November 27 - *“Equal Marriage – the Right to Marry Whom You Love”*

Charlie Clements will explore why some rights are protected by the Constitution and others like 'equal' or same-gender marriage are subjected to plebiscite. He will explore 'equal marriage' in the context of other rights such as to serve in the military, visit your loved one in an ICU, or inherit property from your partner for life. Though same-gender couple may marry in Vermont today, there are still 44 other states in which this right is not recognized.



## Flower Committee Seeks Members

The flower committee is looking for people who love flowers and would be interested in making flower arrangements for Sunday services.

Members take turns signing up for different Sundays, and the rotation is once every 4-8 weeks depending on how many arrangers are in the group and their personal schedules. We are also open to "guest" arrangers who drop in on occasion. Sound intimidating? Don't worry, a flower committee member will be happy to assist you until you are comfortable with the process. Come express your floral creativity!

Contact Sarah Forbes with any questions or to sign up.  
[sarahforbesdesign@comcast.net](mailto:sarahforbesdesign@comcast.net) 872-8743.

## History Talks and Conversations Planned in January and February

You've got questions, research gets answers. You've got experiences, ideas, and things you know about our past: dialogue brings it together. So from January through March, watch for talks by Elz Curtiss on specific topics in our history. Topic One: The First Fifty Years. Topic Two: The Golden Era: 1845 - World War I. Topic Three: The Roller-Coaster Century. Topic Four: Our Journey of Faith and Worship. Topic Five: Religious Education for All Ages. Topic Six: Unchanging Ethics, Changeable Structures for Community Outreach.