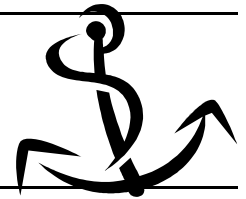


Universalist Anchor



from the heart...

After a cool beginning, we have the kind of hot summer days which we all dread, but rarely remember when the cold rain falls interminably during January, or the snow piles up during a February snow storm.

Gwen Frostic wrote:

In the individual
as in the universe
order is a profound necessity

... Summer blends into fall
and the humming finale of the insects
rises from the tangled grasses

Methodically
season follows season
night follows day
and the moon and stars move
in their unwavering pattern

Order ensures our comfort level as we live our lives from season to season. Yet, *order* also comforts us as we live the changes in our lives. We need order to remind us of the constant change which is within order itself.

We missed the hot summer days when June was cool, and we would miss the colors of fall if winter came too early. Our lives offer us continuity as well as change. We expect it all. And if we didn't have these ordered changes of life, we would wonder where they were, because we would recognize that our lives were in a furrow of sameness—often described as a "rut!"

What kind of order is there in God who exists forever? Does the Creative Force, which we often call God, need the order of continuity as well as change?

As manifested creations of the Cosmos we presume that in some way we are an analogy or a reflection of God. We are as important to an ordered and becoming God as the acorn is to the becoming tree, and God is as much a part of us as the tree is to the acorn.

David Burton in his sermon "God Reconsidered" challenged us to consider our relationship with God and to "rethink" what God is for us. As each of us becomes the person we want to be, living our lives to the fullest of our creative gifts, let us consider what God means to us in our order and our change.

See you in church,

Pastor Lillie



Services for September

Services begin at 11:00 a.m.

September 6 – "Knee Deep in a Waist-High World" Rev. Henley looks at the world of the differently-abled, and asks the question, "How do **we** see those who live in a waist-high world?"

September 13 – Homecoming Rally Sunday and Picnic on the Grounds Our annual gathering celebration, a "coming home" after a summer of holidays, travel, and Sundays in the park! We gather to revel in the beloved community and to celebrate our connections to each other. Rev. Henley will preach on what the "beloved community" means.

September 20 – "God of My Heart" How much do we depend on that One who sustains and cares for us? What is our own personal image of God? What brings us to a vision upon which we can rely? Rev. Henley invites us to explore the many images we could have for the Creator.

September 27 – "A Prayer of Faith Will..." What are the possibilities of prayer for us? There are many reasons to pray; among them are concern for others, challenges to our well-being, and most especially—gratitude. Rev. Henley preaching.

New Church Directory

A new edition of the church directory has been published. If you haven't received a copy yet, please see Sue Mosher during hospitality after worship or contact the church office.

If your contact information has changed, please send an update to office@universalist.org.

Homecoming Rally Sunday September 13!

Autumn is a time to refresh our spiritual journey, bring forth our gifts, and to deepen our capacity for prayer and meditation. If you've been away during the summer taking a respite from the city, join members and UNMC friends for Rally Homecoming Sunday on Sep. 13. We've missed you! Bring your family, neighbors and friends.

A special worship service will be at 11 a.m. followed by a picnic with lots of food on the front lawn. Dave Gatton will be barbecuing his famous burgers and hot dogs. Musical entertainment will be provided by Luci Murphy and Friends.

Volunteers will be needed to host a sidewalk lemonade stand providing UNMC welcome brochures and pens to the public. Volunteers are also needed to distribute Rally Homecoming Sunday fliers throughout our Dupont Circle neighborhood. We want a big turnout! Distribution of fliers will be after hospitality on Sunday, Sep. 6. See Ron Eanes or email him at ronald_eanes@yahoo.com.

God Reconsidered

by David R. Burton

Excerpts from a Sermon Delivered on August 23, 2009. The complete sermon is available at www.universalist.org

Universalist National Memorial Church

First, I would like to take a minute and talk about this church, the Universalist National Memorial Church. Sometimes, I think, we lose sight of how unique an institution it really is. It is the only place I know of in the Washington, DC metropolitan area where a community of believers actively supports, not merely tolerates, the exploration of what are today heterodox ideas about God and the Christian faith. Even churches like the nationally known Foundry United Methodist down the street, although extremely liberal for a mainline Christian church, are fundamentally tied down to the orthodox Christianity laid down in the ancient creeds. I know because I have attended Church at Foundry many times because my wife is a member of that warm and welcoming congregation and sings in their wonderful choir. If you have trouble with those creeds, as I do, then attending those churches means you have to reject a large number of things said from the pulpit. Nor will you hear theological explorations inconsistent with orthodoxy or a conventional understanding of God or Jesus. Either the church hierarchy, or strongly orthodox congregations, in the case of congregational polity churches, place real limits on the divergence of thought – at least as expressed publicly from the pulpit. Every Sunday becomes an exercise in compromise. You say to yourself, “I don’t believe most of what I just heard but I like the people or I like the music or there was something of value in the sermon.”

Even UCC churches are surprisingly orthodox. And other Unitarian-Universalist churches, when they actually do talk about God, must avoid upsetting their large humanist-atheist contingent. They are not God-centered religious communities as is UNMC. Almost no other UU worship services bear even a passing resemblance to ours. So we stand alone, a community of believers, unique in our willingness to explore new ideas and fresh approaches to the divine. For that reason alone, we should treasure this place.

Christian Orthodoxy

In Christian orthodoxy, God is traditionally conceived as having a number of key attributes. God is regarded, among other things, as (1) Omnipotent, (2) Omniscient, (3) Perfect, (4) Unchanging or Immutable and (5) Good, Benevolent, Just and Loving. It is my contention that a conception of God that holds God to have all of these attributes is mutually inconsistent and that these traditional propositions or assumptions about God’s nature need to be relaxed or the understanding of their meaning changed. God is not, in the sense usually meant by traditional theology, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Unchanging or Immutable. Moreover, our ideas about God’s Perfection, Goodness, Justness and Love need to be carefully wrought to be both reasonable and consistent with experience. This short sermon is necessarily only an introduction to the issues involved. It draws both on traditional Unitarian ideas and modern theology and science.

It will, perhaps, serve to open a new perspective for some on who God is.

Traditional Theodicy

Let us begin with the oft-stated problem of evil. Assume a God who created this world, who knows everything that is going to happen and who has the power to do anything, a God that uses that power by, for example, answering prayers and causing miracles (i.e. a God that supernaturally violates the laws of nature). Why does a God with these attributes who is also a good God allow the evil things that do happen to happen? Why did God choose not to intervene to stop the holocaust or the mass murder by Stalin, Mao or the Khmer Rouge or the genocide in Rwanda or Darfur? Why does God allow innocent children to suffer the ravages of painful disease? Why does God allow so much suffering whether natural or caused by humankind? Why does God permit evil? We would not, after all, call a human person good who created a situation that caused much suffering and who had the foresight and power to stop the suffering or thwart evil but yet did nothing. Presumably, we are not demanding too much of God by holding God to at least as high a moral standard as we hold humanity.

Conventional theologians have a word for trying to square this circle: theodicy. Although countless words have been penned trying to do so, no one has satisfactorily done so. Some progress can be made but, ultimately, there is a necessary retreat to “mysteries beyond human understanding.” This is because no theologian can make the illogical logical or irrational rational. What needs to give ground here is not rationality but the traditional, orthodox conception of God’s attributes.

Omnipotence and Omniscience

When God created the universe, the universe that was created was capable of supporting free creatures. Our free will is real. We make moral choices (as well as choices that involve no moral content). We choose to love or withhold love. We choose to create things. We act. As I have discussed elsewhere, denying that people have free will is tantamount to denying their humanity and would make them ethically and ontologically no different than inanimate matter. The property that allows free will is an inherent constituent of the Universe just like space-time and matter-energy. This property may be linked to apparent quantum mechanical randomness or it may prove to have another origin, but it is real. This property combined with the existence of space-time and matter-energy is the “ground of our being,” to use Paul Tillich’s phrase.

It does not materially matter whether God created the Universe such that God cannot interfere with other agents or God simply chooses not to do so (while retaining the power

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to do so). In the one case, God made the decision to forgo interference with free agents at the creation and, in the other case, the decision not to interfere involves ongoing restraint. In either case, however, God has self-limited. The Kabbalistic doctrine of *tzimtzum* (צמצום) is at least analogous to this analysis. God's "contraction," or "withdrawal or "self-limiting" is regarded as the explanation of how finitude may emerge from infinity and plurality from absolute unity of God.

Charles Harthorne argues that God is not a tyrant. God does not dictate in every particular how we live our lives. Our lives are bounded by the laws of the universe and by time but we are offered a wide degree of latitude in how we lead our lives. We may use or misuse that freedom, we may make poor choices or good ones, moral choices or immoral choices, choices that lead to extraordinary lives or more ordinary lives. The God-given freedom to choose, however, is ours and how we exercise that freedom is our great responsibility. It is the signal characteristic of being human.

God's self-limitation is necessary to freedom and the preservation of freedom requires some suffering. God so valued freedom that the Universe was created such that it sustains freedom notwithstanding the suffering freedom inevitably causes. Christians may regard the crucifixion of Jesus as the ultimate expression of the value God attaches to freedom. God did not intervene to save Jesus but, instead, allowed Jesus' enemies to exercise their will and kill him.

If God so values freedom, it would seem to follow that we, God's children, should also place a high value on freedom as well. Why might God value freedom so highly? From freedom comes dignity and the possibility of meaning or a meaningful relationship with God. Freedom offers the possibility of love or the withholding of love and the possibility of good or evil, to be honorable and noble or to be base and contemptible. It is, after all, impossible to have a meaningful or loving relationship with inanimate, unfree things. Since God wanted to have a meaningful relationship with the creation, it had to contain free agents.

Jan-Christine marks 30 years as a UU

It has been thirty years since UNMC member Jan-Christine Johnson has been an Unitarian-Universalist. In 1979, she joined "The Onion" at the Sepulveda Unitarian-Universalist Society (SUUS) in the San Fernando Valley (California). In 1985, Throop Memorial Church in Pasadena, California became her second UU home. It has been a colourful history that she is proud of. She is continuing to grow as an UU in 2009.

Interweave

Interweave is planning another brunch social in Dupont Circle for October with All Souls Unitarian Interweave/Lambda Souls. Look for a future service project listed in the Order of Service. Interweave is UNMC's GLBT social/service organization. For more information, see Marti Martinson or Ron Eanes.

Dark and Stormy Night --- Hearty Meal --- at Leland Place

It was a dark and stormy night (truly) on Saturday Aug. 22 when volunteers from our church dined upon a hearty dinner with the men of Leland Place. The dining room overflowed with residents and with food!

Masterfully planned by Jorn Dakin, the meal consisted of oven-barbecued chicken quarters, brown rice, a zucchini and onion saute, corn bread, and a cucumber and garden-grown tomato salad. We finished off with strawberry cake (courtesy of Pastor Lillie) topped with vanilla ice cream and fresh strawberries. Other volunteers included Charles Gravis, Nick Bowden, Sankar Sitaraman, Marsha Silverberg, and Dave Skidmore.

Leland, a facility of S.O.M.E. (So Others Might Eat) on North Capitol Street, is a halfway house for men in recovery from addiction. Our next meal is scheduled for Saturday Sept. 19. We gather in the church kitchen at 2:30 p.m., with the goal of sharing the meal at Leland at 5 p.m. To reserve a spot, please RSVP to Dave Skidmore at dave_skidmore@cox.net or (703) 237-2145. Volunteers generally split the cost of the meal, usually between \$15 and \$25 each. If you'd like to volunteer your time, but not contribute, see Dave or Pastor Lillie.

Growing Community, Seeding Our Electronic Garden

Many newcomers to UNMC visit the church's Web site before they attend their first worship service. What are other local UU churches doing to put their best foot forward on the Web? How can social networking venues like Facebook and Twitter foster community? Explore these questions and more at a free conference on Saturday, September 26, 2009, 8:30 a.m. – 1 p.m., at Cedar Lane UU Church in Bethesda. It's absolutely free, with a continental breakfast, lunch, and childcare provided. All are welcome – from newbies and casual surfers to power users and web professionals. Just register and show up ready to share your thoughts and help build a stronger, more vibrant community by using today's electronic tools.

For more information and free registration, visit <http://liftingup.org/?q=wc09/webcon2009>. Organized by the Chesapeake Unitarian Universalist Growth committee serving the 29 Unitarian Universalist congregations in the Washington/Baltimore region.

Sharing Our Plate

Each month we share 10% of our free-will plate collection with a non-profit organization that works in our neighborhood and gives to those in need. In September, UNMC will share ten percent of its collected offerings to the OpenDoor Housing Fund.

The OpenDoor Housing Fund lends money to affordable housing developers with the goal of creating or preserving 5,000 homes over the next five years.

New Course at UNMC for Fall! Delighting in the Feminine Divine

Based on a book by Bridget Mary Meehan of the same name, we will be exploring the Feminine Divine in the Hebrew Scriptures and how Jesus embodied Sophia. Some of the topics we discuss is, how she created human life in her image, the Shekinah, why Sophia is Jesus, and how Sophia fits into the development of the Christians. For those who would like to purchase the book it is available on Amazon.com, through the church website (so that a portion of your payment is donated to the church's Pastoral Discretionary Fund). The book is new for \$20, but used are as low as \$1.07. If you cannot purchase the book, copies of the chapters we will be covering will be available to you. We will meet for the first time on Sunday, after church (12:30 pm or so) in the upstairs library on September 20th. Intrigued but want more information? Contact Jennifer Sandberg via email: gaelviking@hotmail.com or see her in church!

Keeping up UNMC and its grounds!

Buildings and Grounds (B&G) has traditionally been involved in efforts and projects from time to time to improve various parts of the church. In the recent past this has included tangible projects such as prepping and painting walls of Perkins Hall in the basement. More recently, B&G folks painted the office of Darryl Winston, the church director of music. This project is not yet completely finished, since replacement of a large window and frame are awaiting improved financial circumstances for the church. In the meantime, the office walls are nicely decorated. We are also somewhat involved from time to time in delivering furniture in need of repair to good repair locations around the city.

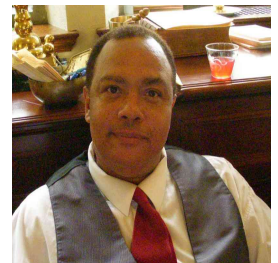
A more recent project arose out of the slump in the church's income from its endowment. In order to make this remaining income go further, the Board of Trustees has asked B&G to undertake some of the work that in the very recent past has been carried out by the church's maintenance contractor. In the last several months several members of B&G have therefore undertaken to do some of this work. It is this work that is the primary new task that B&G has acquired, and that B&G is especially interested in finding additional volunteers with which to go forward. The work involved is not insurmountable, inasmuch as tasks involve things like putting out trash and replacing light bulbs and general cleaning. Another item that is very doable is washing windows. This particular task has the virtue of leaving one feeling that something tangible has been accomplished and being able to see directly the fruits of one's labor. I would urge that anyone interested in assisting with work on the church premises that can indeed make a difference contact either Jorn Dakin [ldakin@alumni.uchicago.edu, or 703-534-8691] or Catherine Robbins [catherine518@netzero.net]. I should add that we are making plans for a church "work day" to be held not long after Rally Sunday. If you have questions, please get in touch with me at the address listed above. Thanks for your attention to this. Jorn Dakin.

Worth Her Wait in Gold

We have all had pressing engagements both personal and public for which we have had to make a personal appearance only to be self-sabotaged by misplacing our wallets, bow ties, that ticket for that newly altered gown or tux in cleaner or worse...our car keys. Oh yes our car keys; the one thing that we really need to get us to the church on time. As both a performer and impresario of sorts; I to have had my life flash before me when needing to be at a concert, important dinner, or performance when I can not locate my keys. Panicking only makes thing worse. This is the time when you really need to using your brain. "More things are wrought by prayer than One imagines" has been my motto most of my adult life" A similar thing happened on Sunday when our honey-toned soprano Joyce Lundy found that she could not find her car keys an hour or so before her concert last Sunday at UNMC. I knew with Joyce being an ultimate professional that things would work out well. After telling an adoring crowd the unfortunate news, making a few slight changes and having world re-known musician Dr. Gerald Muller do what he does best charm a crowd with music and his personality I knew that we were going to have one of God' Best Days.

Joyce arrived composed and beautifully gowned and after getting acclimated to the temperatures of the hall, and a few moments of meditation etc. was greeted warmly and enthusiastically by a crowd composed of people from all walks of life. It must be added that where was a virtual Who's Who from the music community that came out to support Ms. Lundy's artistry and God-given talent. From the first note until the last it was afternoon of beautiful, reflective, responsive, glorious music that pour forth from the mouth of Joyce Lundy, a fine soprano who was excellently partnered by Michael Crabill at the piano. The audience showed their appreciation with applause, shout, clapping in time with the music and tears. Yes TEARS! Many were so touched by the inspirational magnitude, dignity, and spirituality of this woman's gift that tears flowed visibly.

On another note the choir's Retreat is Saturday August 29th from 1-4pm. We will be sharing an afternoon of music, fellowship, and food. We will be getting a head start for the upcoming year's music. The choir and the congregation will be growing. Please be on the lookout for our new member of which I believe several will be joining the church. So when you see a new face in the choir; please extend a warm hand of fellowship in the UNMC's tradition which is truly a feeling of..."WELCOME!"



Blessings,
Darryl

Why do I believe what I believe? Why do you believe what you believe?

by Shawn Logue

About a month ago, I went out to a Happy Hour and struck up a conversation with someone about football. He is a Washington Redskins fan and I am a New York Giants fan. We agreed on one thing: we don't like the Dallas Cowboys. We had good reasons, I thought. We don't like that they have the nickname "America's Team." We also don't like that the Cowboys actually have fans that grew up in our respective regions that had no connection to Dallas.

A woman joined the conversation and asked us why we were so passionate about our teams. She also wanted to know why we disliked the Cowboys so much. She asked some rather provoking questions, which led to some simple, repetitive answers from myself and the guy I was talking to. For example, I said that the Giants were the team I grew up with and they were one of the closest teams from home. The woman asked why that mattered so much, and I got a little stuck on that question. After all, I could have just as easily been a Jets fan, and given that my native state of Connecticut is part of New England, I could have just as easily been a New England Patriots fan.

This conversation got me thinking about faith. Why do I believe what I believe? I grew up in the Episcopal denomination, and went to a Roman Catholic High School. I took classes on Sacraments and Morality, and was used to having services with Peace Offerings and weekly communions. I do make the occasional visit to the Episcopal Church, and admit that sometimes I feel a little more at home. The Episcopal Church has the sacramental rituals of hymns with the trinity and has readings that are translated but not adapted. I like tradition, and for example, I hold myself closely to Psalm 23. When I was sitting in church hearing the adapted version, I didn't much care for it. Thankfully, Pastor Lillie read the original translation in her sermon and I felt a bit better!

Much like the New York Giants have been my team, the Episcopal Church had been my church. After all, the Episcopal Church is what I know, and it is comfortable. I had even considered the thought of going back as recently as last month. I have taken some time to reflect and to challenge my beliefs. I have taken the time to figure out what my beliefs are. What I have concluded right now is that I do firmly believe in God. I believe that there is a maker of creation.

Just as the teachings of Jesus Christ brought on enlightenment from before the time he lived, mankind continues to be enlightened from the time that Jesus lived. In saying this, we now know that dinosaurs and other species predated humans though that does contradict the Bible. I take that with the same grains as Jesus, who contradicted the Old Testament quite often. Thus forth, modern revelations do not take away from my faith in God.

I do believe that Jesus lived and hold closely to his teachings. What I may struggle with sometimes would admittedly be the ability for God to be a man on earth. I will say this...

no modern science revelations I know of have demonstrated a man's ability to walk on water.

I see God as a being. I see all people as eternal beings even after our time as humans expire. I believe that the end of the world is the last breath I draw. I believe that God is love and all things graceful. I believe that God is most present when a community comes together. As I recall from the Sacraments class in High School, the true sacrament of communion is the gathered community. In the Roman Catholic Church, the bread and wine cannot be consecrated as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ without the gathered community. As I see it, even if we don't come to the table every week at my church to share bread and wine, I firmly believe that we have communion every week. We have the presence of God and the Spiritual Authority of Jesus Christ with us every time. I also believe that if we so choose, we can have communion every time we gather with others. Imagine gathering with a group of friends having pizza and soda, sharing with each other. To me, that is communion.

I see the value from the lessons and teachings from other religions and other calls to being. Much like my Celtic ancestors, I like to think that I have an open heart and open mind to a diversity of faiths though hold most closely to Christian teachings. When the Celts embraced Christianity, they continued to embrace traditions outside of Christianity, such as Halloween!

Keeping myself open and embracing that the revelations of God continue in many ways since the last word was written in the Bible can only begin to explain why I believe what I believe. In fact, I could not say I could completely explain why. Some dimensions of being are not meant to be explained or understood.

To go back to the football analogy, I have concluded that I am willing to switch teams within the same division. I remain committed to the Christian faith, though I see that Universalism is a better fit for me. While I have a great love for tradition, my faith shows hunger for continuous transformation and reflection. But one thing I can tell you is that you won't see me rooting for the Redskins or the Cowboys any time soon! I am seeing myself ready to make a change in church denomination... but with football, I am sticking with my Giants.

Much like I had been challenged about my football allegiances, I challenge you to think about your religious beliefs, or perhaps something else, like for example, where you want to go with your career. So now I turn the question back to you. Why do you believe what you believe?

I look forward to officially becoming a member of the Universalist National Memorial Church on September 13th!

The deadline for submissions for the next Anchor newsletter will be Thursday, September 24th. Please e-mail submissions to shawn.logue@gmail.com

The Universalist Anchor is published monthly for the members and friends of the Universalist National Memorial Church in Washington, DC. It is also on our website, along with Rev. Henley's sermons, and announcements and activities.

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Minister Emeritus

The Reverend Dr. William L. Fox

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Mosher, Jennifer Sandberg, David Skidmore

Music Director Darryl Winston

Church Administrator Marguerite Bogle

Anchor Team: Shawn Logue, Jan-Christine Johnson

Our Mission (adopted May 2002)

We create a loving community
for worship and service
in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

We welcome all and respect individual beliefs as we grow
together

The Universalist Anchor

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