

Universalist Anchor

Newsletter of the Universalist National Memorial Church

March 2004 www.universalist.org

1810 Sixteenth Street NW, Washington DC 20009



March Worship and Activity Schedule at UNMC

Saturday, March 6. Leland House dinner. Volunteers meet in the kitchen at 3:00 pm (additional details are provided in the articles on pages 5&6).

March 7. Inquirers Class meets at 9:45-10:30am in the Romaine-van Schaick room.

March 7. Rev. Jay Stearns, sermon title, "On Being Spoiled, Broken, and Useable."

Monday, March 8. The Board of Trustees will meet at 7:30 pm in the Romaine-van Schaick room. All are welcome to attend.

March 14. Inquirers Class meets at 9:45-10:30 am in the Romaine-van Schaick room.

March 14. Mr. James Estes will lead a brief pastoral service, before lunch and the congregational open forum.

Friday, March 19. Anchor submissions' deadline.

Saturday, March 20. Spring Fling, begins at 9:00 am (additional details are provided on page 5).

The Welcome & Membership Committee will meet at 12:30 pm in the Romaine-van Schaick room.

Leland House dinner. Volunteers meet in the church kitchen at 3:00 pm.

March 21. Ms. Jennifer Sandberg, sermon title, "The DaVinci Code and the Feminine Divine."

Leland donations collected downstairs in the kitchen on the counter next to the microwave.

March 28. Rev. Gina Campbell, preaching, sermon title to be announced.

SUNDAY, MARCH 14

CONGREGATIONAL OPEN FORUM AND LUNCH

How are you feeling about our church? Are we doing what needs doing? We will have the opportunity to discuss such questions, and anything else, in this open forum. Some may have unresolved feelings from our January 11 congregational meeting. Others, may have priorities for moving forward. The purpose is to keep us focused on what's important in church life -- particularly in this period without a minister. The purpose is also to hold us in community with each other. Please plan to come; and come prepared to talk about what's important to you and to hear what's important to others. Al Templeton will facilitate. Mindful that Sundays are a valuable time, we will follow a special schedule:

11:00 AM - 11:30 AM	Pastoral service in the sanctuary
11:30 AM - 11:45 AM	Fill a lunch plate and be seated, RVS Parlor
11:45 AM - 1:30 PM	Eat and open forum discussion
1:30 PM	Meeting will adjourn

McKim Organ Safely Removed and Stored

Kirk Denton, Organist

As of last week, the McKim Organ was safely removed and stored by our organ technician, David Storey. It now resides in Mr. Storey's workshop in Baltimore where he is carefully evaluating the organ and formulating a course of action for its complete restoration.

Mr. Storey was assisted by nearly 35 volunteers who gave of their time over the past month. These included members of the Organ Historical Society

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(Hilbus Chapter), the American Guild of Organists, and many interested friends and colleagues.

Donna has assembled a collection of photographs taken during the removal and they are being displayed in the Romaine-van Shaick room for everyone's inspection. The complete story of the removal, with photographs, is currently the feature article on the Hilbus Website located at www.Hilbus.org. I encourage everyone to visit this site to appreciate the enormous effort taken by these volunteers on our behalf. I would also like to take this opportunity to publicly thank all of those who have given so generously of their time.

However, the removal and safe storage of this historic instrument is only the beginning of the formidable task of the restoration and installation of the organ. We now are embarking on the enormous task of raising money towards this goal.

In the past month, the organ committee has been actively putting into place the seeds of this fund raising effort. To date, we have been pledged \$15,000 from sources within our congregation. In addition, we have secured the services *gratis* of a professional not-for-profit fund raiser and marketing expert to help us identify and solicit available funds from sources outside of the Church. It is our goal and expectation that not only will this professional be able to expedite our efforts for this cause, but during the exploration of these funding sources we will be able to identify promising sources for many other fund raising needs within the Church.

To date, aside from the work of the committee and Board of Directors, all of the volunteer efforts toward this cause have come entirely from **outside** the UNMC Church family. I can assure you that if this cause is not embraced by our Congregation as a whole we will surely fail.

Therefore, I would like to encourage any and all of our members who have enjoyed and appreciated the efforts of our Music Ministry, past, present and future, to step up and be a part of this unprecedented opportunity to enrich our collective worship experience.

"Talk About the Passion"

Richard Hurst

"We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents." 1 Corinthians 10:9

"Empty prayer, empty mouths, talk about the passion: Not everyone can carry the weight of the world." R.E.M.

Michael Stipe and the rest of R.E.M. literally groan over the lyrics to the song on their 1983 album **Murmur** entitled "Talk About the Passion," intoning over and over again "not everyone can carry the weight of the world." It began something of the world-wide scandal when the old Episcopal church in Athens, Georgia, where R.E.M. first recorded their early tunes, was torn down; a subsequent "historic preservation" effort saved the railroad trestle featured on a later R.E.M. album cover. The lyrics could not be more topical at the moment, when so many are engaged in discussion about Mel Gibson's film **The Passion of the Christ**, scheduled to appear on movie screens in North America on Ash Wednesday. So much weight would appear to be carried on the shoulders of the film, the hopes of evangelical Christians to win over an increasingly secular world to their vision of the Savior, and the fears of others who see in the vision of one traditionalist Catholic's perhaps overly literal interpretation of the gospel story the rebirth of the Jewish blood libel for the death of Jesus on the cross.

The hopes of evangelicals, I must tell you, I find particularly odd, and a tremendous weight to place on a Hollywood spectacle, regardless of its shortcomings or its merits. The teachings of Jesus has been passed down through the medium of the Church to his followers, and the words recorded by the evangelists might only approximate his divine majesty and presence amongst his followers, but they are all we have. Popcorn, a darkened multiplex cinema, scattered ticket stubs on the floor; might these too be the milieu of communion, or more, of conversion? Only in a society that prizes so supremely the individual over the communal might the Church even begin to think that such a passive, "consumer" experience, however compelling or

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"accurate," might substitute for the real work of bringing about the Reign of God right here and right now.

The fears of those who see in **The Passion** a rebirth of the blood libel for the death of Jesus, a libel against Jews historically stirred up by passion plays throughout Christendom, may or may not be overstated. Frankly, not having seen the movie, it is impossible to say. I would like to think that the United States in 2004 is more or less immune to widespread anti-Semitism, but with images that focus not on the teachings of Jesus, not on his ministry, but on the last 12 hours of his life, and apparently most graphically on his death, who can say? In a country where secularization has, unfortunately, meant religious illiteracy, the reaction is difficult to calculate with any precision. If press accounts are to be believed, and "the Jews" in the gospel of John have been transformed in Gibson's account from the temple leadership at odds with Jesus into the Jewish mob at the foot of the cross urging on his death, the long-term effect on interfaith relations cannot be forecasted.

Not having seen **The Passion of the Christ**, I only speak of what Mel Gibson has said about his film, and can say nothing about the film itself. Gibson has repudiated the Pope's endorsement of it; that is, that the Pontiff responded that **The Passion** "is as it was;" Gibson noting that his work "is what it is," a wonderful if wholly self-evident tautology. He disclaims any anti-Jewish sentiment both for himself and the film, has discussed with ABC's Diane Sawyer his long battles with addictions of many kinds, and professes his belief that all humankind is responsible for the death of Christ. He explains that it is his left hand-his "sinister" hand-that nails the Jesus to the cross in the movie. Mel Gibson himself is thus literally "responsible" for both **The Passion** and, of course, for the passion it provokes as well.

But to quote R.E.M., I wonder how much of it is "empty prayer" and "empty mouths," the work of a Hollywood hype machine working at full tilt. In the words of Saint Paul, none of us, let alone a movie mogul working out his theology and seeking better and bigger box office at the same time, ought "put Christ to the test," particularly when we are the ones

driving the nail for the world to see, forever captured on celluloid.

Thoughts on the Meaning and Purpose of Life

David R. Burton

We are, in James Luther Adams formulation, creatures fated to be free. We cannot, therefore, escape the issue of how we should lead our lives and to what end we live our lives. Our choices have moral content, can give meaning to our lives and fulfill, or fail to fulfill, our purpose in life. But what is the meaning of life and what is our purpose? How should we lead our lives to achieve that purpose? There is, in my judgment, no more important question and it is, or should be, the central purpose of religion to help us grapple with this issue. Yet, it is quite rare to find a contemporary philosopher or theologian that gives us much depth or detail by way of an answer. It is even less common to find anything bordering on a systematic and internally consistent answer from modern writers. It is, in my experience, the uncommon minister that addresses this central question directly and without circumlocution. Instead, we usually hear sermons that address some small issue or take refuge in relatively sterile and abstract formulations.

Should we lead a respectable, middle class life, obey the laws, honor our parents, marry, raise children, work to support ourselves and our family, pay our taxes, go to church, make contributions as we are able to the civic life of the community and enjoy life to the degree we can? Should we lead life to make a lasting mark on the world by undertaking the arduous task of excelling in some discipline such as sports or art or science? Should we devote ourselves selflessly to the service of others? Should we devote ourselves to bettering or defending the institutions of our society through politics or military service or law enforcement? Should we devote ourselves to the search for enlightenment or truth in academia or in ministry or a more private meditative path?

The beginning of an answer to this question, I believe, lies in the insight, first encountered by me

in Charles Hartshorne, that our lives are necessarily tragic -- tragic not in the sense that we must die, or that we will sin or that evil sometimes prevails against good, although all of these things are true. But necessarily tragic in the sense that a human life even well-lived necessarily pits the good against the good and that there is no escape from this truth about the human condition.

For reasons with which most would agree and that space does not permit enumerating, not all choices are equally meritorious. There is such a thing as morality, good and evil, right and wrong. Given that, we are faced with the necessity of ascertaining what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong. This is not always easy, but in most cases it can be done.

But, given the distinctly finite nature of our being, we must also choose among competing goods. We cannot, for example, become a brilliant statesman, a brilliant scientist, a brilliant ballet dancer, a brilliant musician, a brilliant basketball player and a brilliant artist while simultaneously being a good and attentive parent, actively engaged in our communities, selflessly helping others in an array of charities while seeking enlightenment and truth and enjoying what life has to offer.

Thus, our moral system must equip us not only to know right from wrong but to know how to choose among good ends. In my judgment, there are two traditions that most effectively help religious liberals address these issues by articulating and analyzing the virtues, by recognizing the need for balance in our lives and by recognizing that a virtue carried to extremes may actually become a vice. The first, perhaps surprisingly, is the scholastic tradition within Roman Catholicism which extends Aristotelian thought regarding the virtues by incorporating Christian thought. The second is American Unitarian Christianity.

In the Catholic tradition, to the four "cardinal virtues" of wisdom (or prudence), temperance, courage (or fortitude) and justice are added the Christian (or theological) virtues of faith, hope and love (or charity). The tradition contains depth and subtlety and much food for thought.

Unitarian Christians, notably William Ellery Channing and James Freeman Clarke, emphasize Jesus' two great commandments to love God and love our neighbor but paired that with a duty to self-culture and a distrust of extremes and egotism. As Clarke put it, "God has placed us here to grow, just as he placed the trees and flowers. The trees and flowers grow unconsciously, and by no effort of their own. Man, too, grows unconsciously, and is educated by circumstances. But he can also control those circumstances, and direct the course of his life. He can educate himself; he can, by effort and thought, acquire knowledge, become accomplished, refine and purify his nature, develop his powers, strengthen his character. And because he can do this, he ought to do it." He noted that "Unitarians commonly believe that in all men there are religious capacities, by which they may come into communion with God. These are reason, conscience, freedom, love of truth, of beauty, of goodness, the sense of the infinite, the capability of disinterested love; and the kindred sentiments of veneration, awe, and aspiration." They spoke of educating and strengthening the will. They understood that there was much risk in pursuing one virtue at the expense of all others.

Neither of these traditions are widely explored by religious liberals today. Yet they deserve to be because they provide a better framework -- within Christianity but enriched by the philosophy of the Greeks and, in the case of the American Unitarians, the Enlightenment -- to grapple with the question of how best to lead our lives.

Around Our Church

Welcome Team

Each week, someone from the congregation stands ready at the front door to welcome members, friends, and guests to our worship service, while someone else is busy in the parlor preparing refreshments to accompany conversation after the service. Here's the welcome team schedule for March:

March 7

Greeter: Mary Simmons,
Refreshments: Shannon Loring & Jorn Dakin

March 14

Greeter: Erin Fox,
Refreshments: Al & Mary Templeton

March 21

Greeter: Sue Mosher,
Refreshments: OPEN

March 28

Greeter: Perry King,
Refreshments: Rob Bertram
Both jobs are easy and rewarding. Sign up to help with refreshments on the list in the parlor, or contact Sue Mosher at sue@turtleflock.com or (703) 241-9828 if you're interested in greeting.

Inquiring Minds Want to Know!

Find out more about the Universalist National Memorial Church, its history, organization, mission, and faith at our current series of Inquirers Classes. The first session of this 3-part series met on Sunday, February 22. It is not a problem if you missed the first session, you are welcome to attend one or both of the remaining sessions (March 7 & 14). The classes will include time to enjoy bagels and coffee or tea and get acquainted. Class meets in the church library/study on the first floor at 9:30 - 10:45 a.m. and will have something to offer for everyone from newcomers to longtime members. Ask class leaders Jennifer Sandberg, Dave Skidmore, and Vicki Pepper for more information. Contact any of the leaders or the church office to sign up for the classes.

Spiritual Growth through Small Group Ministry

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, VA, is hosting a conference on covenant groups for lay and professional leaders at all stages of knowledge and development Friday evening April 2 and all-day Saturday April 3, sponsored by the Center for Community Values. Workshop topics include service as spiritual practice, growing churches through small group ministry, small group ministry through the lifespan, developing session content, and empowering lay leaders. More information is available from the CCV at <http://www.the-ccv.org/Arlington/About-conf.htm>. Registration closes March 4.

Spring Fling

Had enough of winter? Ready to welcome spring? Spend the morning of the first day of spring, Saturday, March 20, starting at 9 a.m., helping the Welcome & Membership and Building & Grounds Committees spruce up the church inside and out to get ready for Easter. Drop in just for an hour if that's all the time you have. Bring your lunch to share at noon. All are invited to stay for the Welcome & Membership Committee's regular meeting at 12:30 p.m. For more information, contact Sue Mosher at sue@turtleflock.com or (703) 241-9828 or Jorn Dakin at ldakin@alumni.uchicago.edu or (703) 534-8691.

Buildings and Grounds Report

Recent items on the B&G front have included several events in which outside organizations or individuals have rented space in the church, thus providing revenues to the church.

In particular, Washington Improvisational Theater ("WIT") held an all-day event on Saturday, January 24. In connection with this I want to thank Al Templeton for all of his work in making sure that this event went off successfully. We anticipate that WIT will continue on occasion to use the building in some ways that are beneficial to WIT and the church.

A nice wedding was held in the church in mid-December, with reception in Perkins Hall. The folks were able to decorate Perkins Hall in such a fashion as to make it a very attractive venue in which to hold

a wedding reception. We hope to have pictures to display on the church's web page before too long.

The Eritrean church continues to meet in Perkins Hall on Sunday mornings. Paul Hannah and Al Templeton have recently been discussing with the leaders of the Eritrean church ways in which the relationship between our two churches could be improved. I look forward to those improvements, including the higher revenues that will be coming to UNMC from an agreed-upon increase in the rent that the Eritrean church pays to UNMC.

Another improvement that has recently been achieved is in the Weston Room in the church basement. This is the former site of the Gift Nook. Al Templeton recently arranged for an electrician to provide additional wiring into that room, which in turn made it possible to install some electric space heaters that can be used to heat that particular space without having to run the boiler in order to provide hot water to the radiator system. Al also improved the physical look of that room, and I want to thank him for that effort.

The B&G committee is attempting to improve the church's trash collection service, so that greater certainty and accountability for trash pickup can be achieved. We are also planning for the March 20th "Field Day" on which we hope to make some significant progress on some of the physical problems of the UNMC building and grounds. Please feel free to sign up to participate for half a day, morning or afternoon. We will be developing a list of projects that are feasible for such an undertaking. If anyone wants to make suggestions for doable projects for that day, please feel free to send me an e-mail at: ldakin@alumni.uchicago.edu, or else leave a phone message for me at my home phone, 703-534-8691, or at the church office, 202-387-3411.

Chancel Flowers

March 7. In loving memory of his grandparents, Paul J. Hannah, Jr., Elizabeth J. Hannah, and Rev. Floyd J. Taylor by Paul Hannah.

March 14. In memory of his father, Richard e. Fogwell and his brother Richard E. Fogwell, Jr., by

Seymour J. Forgwell.

March 21. In loving memory of Frances Marin Peper beloved daughter of Vicki and Brian, beloved sister of Stephen and Irina Pepper and beloved goddaughter of Pi-Rung.

March 28. In memory of her brother, Ben Hanford Thompson by Amy Thompson Tipton.

Growing in Service

Leland Place

Leland Place, a residential facility on North Capital Street for men in recovery from homelessness and addiction to alcohol and other drugs, needs your help this month. We are scheduled to cook and share dinner with the men of Leland Place on the first and third Saturday of the month — March 6 and 20. We meet in the church kitchen at 3:00 pm and serve the meal at Leland at 5:00 pm.

Volunteers share the cost of the meal, usually \$10 to \$20. As always, we will be collecting groceries and men's toiletries on Sunday, March 21, so bring your groceries to the church kitchen and place them on the counter by the microwave. To sign up, in advance of the scheduled events, please contact Dave Skidmore at (703) 237-2145 or dave_skidmore@mindspring.com. Leland Place is a program of So Others May Eat, Inc. (SOME), which is designate #8189 in the CFC/United Way Campaign.

Feed Your Soul!

Dinner at Leland Place

Dave Skidmore

Perry King, an experienced Leland Place volunteer, put his finger on the heart of the Leland experience in his sermon on February 15. It's a real gift to be around people, if only for an hour or so, who are in the midst of making such a fundamental shift in their lives. (And the food's not bad either!)

Leland is a transitional residential facility on North Capitol Street for men in recovery from homelessness and addiction to alcohol and other

drugs. Residents, about a dozen at any one time, arrive at Leland after three months of rehabilitation. They generally spend three more months at Leland, getting help in searching for a job and saving money in preparation for more independent living. It is a program of So Others Might Eat Inc. (SOME), which is designate #8189 in the CFC/United Way Campaign. Volunteers and the men of Leland enjoyed two wonderful meals in February. On February 7, we dined on jambalaya, tossed salad, homemade biscuits and cherry clafouti a la mode. (It's French and very good!) Thanks to volunteers Walker Pheill, Judy Burns, Catherine Kitchell, Emily Skidmore, and Rev. Susan Starr. February 21 was a father-daughter production with Clint and Linnea McCully and Dave and Emily Skidmore. We served an original creation, "pasta a la Jennifer," in both vegetarian and non-vegetarian versions, along with salad and cherry pie a la mode. (George Washington was well-honored during his birthday month.)

As always, the real main course was not the cooking but the opportunity to share the meal with the men of Leland. A sincere, "How are you doing?" is a greater gift than any dessert. (Although both together are even better.)

We are scheduled to cook again on Saturdays March 6 and 20. We meet in the church kitchen at 3 p.m. and serve the meal at Leland at 5 p.m. Volunteers share the cost of the meal, typically between \$10 and \$20.

As always, we will be collecting groceries and men's toiletries on Sunday March 21. A newly revamped sign-up sheet will be available at the after-service social hour on March 14.

To signup for the dinners, please contact Dave Skidmore, in advance, at (703) 237-2145 or dave_skidmore@mindspring.com.

Joseph Priestley District's Annual Meeting

Bending Towards Justice

Our local Joseph Priestley District of the Unitarian Universalist Association will hold its annual meeting and spring conference Friday night and Saturday, March 19-20, in Wilmington, Delaware, with a theme of "Bending toward Justice: Building a Multicultural World." The program consists of worship, workshops, the district's annual business meeting and a keynote address by UUA President the Rev. William Sinkford. Many of the workshops will focus on social justice issues. Also on the schedule are workshops on a growth strategy for the Baltimore/Washington and Philadelphia areas, lay leadership development, and fundraising.

Registration costs \$85. For young adults age 18-35, registration is \$65. More details and a registration form are available at the district's web site at <http://jpd.uua.org/sprcon.htm>.

Anchor Deadline!

The deadline for submission of articles for the April edition of the *Anchor* is Friday, March 19. Please attach a copy of your article via email and send it to office@universalist.org. Thank you. Kimberly Durham Bates, Church Administrator

Our Mission

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.

Our Goals

We want to grow as a spiritual community, both in numbers and in the depth of our faith experience.

We want to revitalize our building to make it a welcoming house of worship, study, fellowship, and service with the potential to contribute financially to the long-term viability of this congregation.

The *Universalist Anchor* is published monthly for the members and friends of the Universalist National Memorial Church in Washington, D.C.

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Mr. Kirk Denton, Visiting Organist
Ms. Kimberly Durham Bates, Church Administrator
Hours: MWF 8:30am-1:30pm

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