



First Unitarian Universalist Church of Essex County

December 2015

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MARK IT DOWN

- ♦ Celebrations & Music, Thursday, 3 Dec, 7 PM, Sonen Room
- ♦ Board of Trustees, Thursday, 10 Dec, 7 PM, Hall-Eastman Residence
- ♦ Canvass Ends, Sunday, 13 Dec

Where every mind is free and every soul is welcome!

Spiritually Speaking: Questions of Comfort By Sarah MacLeod

"But if you don't believe in God or some greater purpose to the universe, how do you find comfort in times of trouble?"

That was the question from a congregant after a sermon on knowledge and belief at my Unitarian Universalist church. Palpable concern tinged with emotion filled the asker's voice as she spoke: How could one manage the pain and suffering that goes with life without something greater than oneself along for the ride? Or, at least, how could one see one's way through travesty without a sense of it being part of a greater purpose?

After the speaker worked away at his answer, I turned to my pew mate who had lost her husband to cancer. Before I could form the question, she answered, her eyes wide: "If there had been a purpose, that would have been worse!"

I agree. I cannot reconcile a greater purpose with the traumas and suffering of this world, a purpose that requires, for instance, someone young to die. To do what? Teach patience? Persistence? True love? Endurance? A tolerance for suffering? Can't most of those be learned in our more ordinary moments, such as while in line at the post office or during a bout of the flu? Questions about the source of a greater force or divinity aside, the thought that a greater source or being would have a purpose to putting a father through cancer, a mother through the suicide of a child, whole countries through famine or war is just, well, unfathomable and, frankly, cruel.

But back to the asker's question: Where do you find comfort in times of suffering if you don't believe the suffering has a greater purpose? My comfort comes from three sources.

First, I ascribe to this Buddhist view: life is suffering. That's not a miserable thought designed to depress and defeat but rather a reminder that feeling unsatisfied—suffering—is reality. We all feel pain and distress, making the Buddhist view a realistic look at the world. We come into the imperfect world with our imperfect selves and, to no surprise, live imperfect lives. The Buddhist answer to this suffering is to embrace impermanence and to avoid attachment to what is and to what we wish could be.

Am I good at this? Not really, but remembering that life happens—that suffering and discomfort are part of life—helps me out when I'm uncomfortable with a twist life's thrown me. Sure, I try to control what I can. I get my flu shots, wear my seat belt, know where my kids are, save for a rainy day, and

otherwise take the precautions I can against the ways of the universe and the wiles of human nature. But in the end, I work hard to remember that control only gets me so far and so safe and that I can't protect everyone within my reach. There is comfort in knowing my limits, differentiating what is my responsibility from what is beyond my grasp.

My second source of solace in calamity is knowledge. Taking comfort in fact, in science, in knowing brings me to peace about some of the suffering life passes my way. Comprehending more about the way the world works helps me ascribe cause where there is cause and ponder where there isn't. Understanding probability and what randomness truly is removes a good deal of finger-pointing at what is fair and what is not. Storms and sickness know no "fair." Sure, where you live and your behaviors may move you closer to hurricanes or further from heart disease, but "fairness" suggests an outside arbiter, making decisions about where to place that maelstrom or blood clot. That would be

*Where do you find comfort in
suffering if you don't believe
suffering has a greater purpose?*

Continued on Page 2

Sunday Sunset Services

Services in Parish Hall start at 6 PM

Come join us for our **Sunday Sunset Services** beginning at **6 PM**. Services will take place in the **PARISH HALL**. Doors will be open at 5:30 PM for set up. Containing elements of Small Group Ministry and Intentional Listening Group formats, we envision Sunday Sunset Services as a spiritual practice of simple prayer, a moment of reflection, giving thanks, singing & music--all while sharing wine, cheese & the like. Each month, we will gather to celebrate a shared theme over words, song and food. The ritual is giving thanks, eating, sharing and community itself.

DATE THEME

13 Dec	<i>Solace</i>	Coordinators & Hosts — Darcy Hall & Greg Giacobe	Musician - TBA, Usher - Wayne Eastman
10 Jan 2016	<i>Balance</i>	Coordinators & Hosts — Darcy Hall & Greg Giacobe	Musician - TBA, Usher - Wayne Eastman

Spiritually Speaking [cont.]

unfair. And cruel. I'll take comfort in the equanimity of randomness, thank you.

There are, of course, events that are unfair and not random. War. Famine. Terrorist attacks. I've been spared these traumas, and I'm grateful. They do confound and pain me, but I don't question their purpose in the greater scheme of things. They have causes, certainly, but that is quite different from purpose. As someone who has only observed these through the newspaper, radio, and TV, I simply don't know how I would find comfort through them. But I'm fairly certain searching for purpose in the purposeless wouldn't help me.

My third source of comfort in a world of suffering is my fellow travelers. I am not alone in my suffering. The travelers I know by name comfort me most often, with willing ears and caring words when I'm most troubled. Sharing suffering lightens me a bit, and when commiseration follows my sharing, I'm reminded that very few if any of our pains are unique. We all get sick, become disappointed, lose heart, lose love, lose sleep, lose hope, ponder the place we have in the world, and worry about those closest to us as well as those nameless ones thousands of miles away. So we don't suffer alone even when we are alone. I've many times taken comfort in that reality. With seven billion other humans on the planet, I'm likely not the only one experiencing anything. And somehow that helps.

Years ago, when my beliefs included a God, I prayed when suffering or upon seeing another in distress. About a decade ago, I started questioning that process. My questions started with source and purpose: How could a relevant force in the world, greater than ourselves, omnipotent and omniscient, exist in the face of suffering? How could God

desire—even demand—praise, petition, and thanksgiving while letting horrific happenings occur despite that praise, petition, and thanksgiving? And if God did none of that—if free will reigned and all hands are off—then what was the point of all that praying?

Thus the comfort of prayer and context of purpose gradually left. Losing that easy comfort in just the conversation with a source was initially both unnerving and liberating. It took time to find that a touch of Buddhist thought, knowledge, and companions could relieve some of the inevitable suffering of life. The truth is that I still find myself starting to pray at odd moments, stopping after the invocation of the divine. "Dear God," I begin. And end. There just is no more comfort there.

So I sit, without a sense of a greater purpose to the rain that falls other than that rain falls. I've not been faced with the truly horrific, so one could say I've not been truly tested by suffering, but I've had my own traumas in my forty-four years. In the past decade or so, I've met with greater adversity than in the previous three combined, and yet, finding comfort has been far easier. I don't ask the question of the greater purpose to suffering anymore. I suffer. I will continue to suffer. So will all others. With knowledge of this, a thirst for knowledge and appreciation of fact, and the community of seven billion with whom I hurl through space, I am comforted.

Sarah MacLeod, a member of the Universalist Unitarian Church of Farmington in Michigan, teaches writing and works as a physician assistant in Metro Detroit.

This article appeared in the Spring 2014 issue of UU World (pp 23-25). This essay is adapted from a post at the author's blog, Finding My Ground, 26 September 2014.

2015 Canvass Now Underway



The First UU Church of Essex County has now launched its 2015 Annual Canvass, one of our most important times in the church year. The pledges of financial support of our members and friends provide a significant portion of our total income. Please see the appeal letter on page 5 from Church President Mindy Thompson Fullilove that outlines this year's achievements, and vision for the church's future, as well as a FAQ page to address questions you may have concerning the Canvass. Pledge cards have been mailed out to Members and Frriends separately. Please fill out your pledge card, and return it to the Church Treasurer Bill Slezak by Sunday, 13 December 2015. An assigned Canvasser will be in touch to follow up and ask for your contribution. Please be generous. If you have any further questions not addressed in the FAQ page, please contact Church Treasurer Bill Slezak at treasurer@essexuu.org. Thank you.



SUNSET SERVICE MANDALAS



These mandalas were colored by participants at our 15 November 2015 Sunset Service. We like to thank Mindy Thompson Fullilove, Bill Stafford, Wayne Eastman, Emilia Colon, Darcy Hall and Greg Giacobe for participating.

December 2015

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3 Celebrations & Music, Sonen Room 7 PM	4	5
6	7	8	9	10 Board of Trustees Hall-Eastman Residence 7 PM	11	12
13 SUNSET SERVICE: <i>Solace</i> 6 PM Canvass Ends	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25 CHRISTMAS	26
27	28	29	30	31		



First Unitarian Universalist Church of Essex County

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www.essexuu.org

November 21, 2015

Dear Members and Friends,

We are truly at a crossroads as we commemorate the 125th Anniversary of the establishment of this Church.

At our annual meeting held on June 14, the members of the First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Essex County voted to take the initial steps towards creating a different type of UU Ministry in Orange – one that strives to make our building and campus a resource to the community by establishing a wholly-owned non-profit corporation called the HUUB that will manage the church's campus and build needed social programs, while also continuing UU Services and worship as a lay-led Congregation. Our new monthly Sunday sunset services format led by Darcy Hall and Greg Giacobe have been spiritually fulfilling. At the Fall Congregation Meeting in October, the Congregation voted to approve the formation of the HUUB Committee, and also voted to give the Committee the authority to hire the HUUB Managing Director.

We are also pleased to report the completion of the major rehabilitation of the front porch and walkways to the Parish Hall, as well as a new side door which will provide the handicap access to the Campus. The Actual handicap ramp will be installed within a few weeks.

With the key decisions made and the new direction for the Church underway, we are now in a position to initiate our Annual Canvass for the 2015-16 Church year. This canvass represents our commitment to implement this new Ministry for this Church as we approach Year 126 in the life of this Church, and our commitment to social action and maintaining a UU presence in the Orange Community.

The First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Essex County has been in Orange since 1890. Since that time, our Church has been a spiritual, educational, emotional, artistic, musical, intellectual and social home to our members, the people of Orange and the surrounding communities. This is an extraordinary record of accomplishment! We have so much to be proud of in our past, but we are also very excited about our future.

As Church President, I ask you consider make a financial contribution to support the Church during the 2015 – 2016 Canvass. It is through our annual budget drive that we raise the funds needed to continue the Ministry of this Church, that includes providing a spiritual home for members and friends, and also for the Orange Community. Attached is a Q&A Fact sheet about the Annual budget drive.

We are happy and proud to be a part of the Orange community. We look forward to continuing to do good as we live our Unitarian-Universalism faith in Orange and Essex County for many more years to come. To continue this momentum, we need your support. I hope you will join me and respond generously when you are contacted by a Canvasser requesting your financial commitment for the next Church year.

Thank you for your support,

President, First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Essex County, Orange, NJ

A church where every mind is free and every soul welcome!

Q& A'S ABOUT THE 2014-15 ANNUAL BUDGET DRIVE (CANVASS)

What is the Purpose of the Annual Budget Drive?

Our annual Budget drive provides the opportunity for our members and friends to support the Ministry and Mission of the Church that enables the Church to plan next year's program. Along with rental income, funds raised through the annual budget drive provide over 95% of the income to run the Church. Excluding major capital expenses, it generally costs about \$75,000 per year to operate the church. This year we plan to spend about \$60,000 in major upgrades to the campus, such as the front entrance porch, sidewalks, landscaping, new side entrance with a new handicap ramp, improved outdoor security lighting and window dates, replacing outdoor siding and kitchen improvements. We plan to utilize about \$30k from our reserves with the remainder to be raised through the canvass, our rental income, and other fundraising.

We are fortunate to have several churches and non-profit social service organizations utilizing our building that support the community and also generates rental income of about \$85,000. But we rely on the generous support of our members and friends during our annual canvass to support the Ministry of the Church and the establishment of the new HUUB program. The financial goal of the Canvass is \$15,000.

When will the Annual fund drive (Canvass) be taking Place?

The formal canvass period runs from 27 November through 11 December 2015. Canvassers will provide their own financial commitment at an orientation workshop prior to the start of the canvass.

How is the Canvass conducted?

You will be contacted by a canvasser either in person or by phone who will answer any questions that you might have about the church, explain their own financial commitment to the Church, and request that you provide (by signing a pledge card) as generous a financial commitment as you can, which can be paid out over the year, either weekly, monthly, or otherwise.

How much am I expected to pledge?

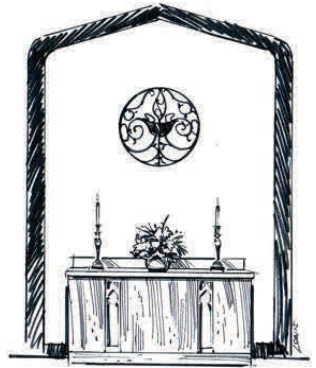
The UUA suggested guideline is 2½% of gross income, which we hope will you consider based on your own particular financial situation. During the past year the average pledge has been approximately \$1,500. In considering your pledge, please also take into account that our Church is responsible for contributing about \$100 in dues per member to the UUA, Metro District, and UU Legislative Ministry of NJ.

What if my financial circumstances change and I am unable to fulfill my Pledge?

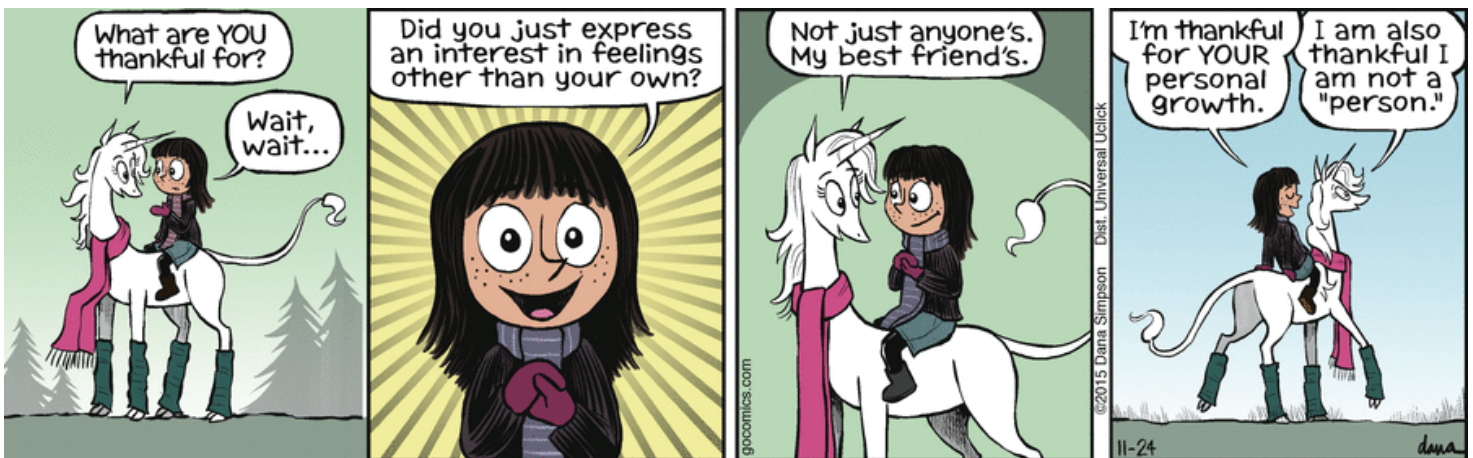
While the Church's budget relies on members and friends satisfying their financial commitment, the Treasurer should be contacted if financial circumstances change that requires modifying one's pledge.

Happenings @ Montclair

- **Women's Group — Friday, 4 December, 7 PM (Rotunda).** Please join us for the launch of UUCM's Women's Group! This is intended to be a social group (mostly) free of agenda and structure. Come as you are; feel free to bring your dinner if you're coming straight from work, and of course liquid refreshments are encouraged. For more information, contact Mary Moriarty at marymoe.55@gmail.com or 973-800-0575.
- **Senior Lunch Bunch — Wednesdays, 9 & 23 December, 12 Noon (Peierls).** We generally choose a topic at each meeting for the next meeting, but the conversation usually wanders over several topics of interest to the group assembled that come up spontaneously (and with plenty of laughter thrown in). Everyone is welcome! For info, email Gary Sanderson at gwsanderson@verizon.net.
- **Solo UU's — Friday, 11 December, 6 PM (Peierls).** Solo UU's are adults living the single life from our unique perspective within the UU community. We find many opportunities to connect socially, while we build a support network with adults currently living solo. Activities include joining together for discussions and dinner, and going to a movie, concert or play. To find out more, join us on the second Friday each month at UUCM where we meet at 7:00 PM for drinks and appetizers, and then socialize at a restaurant in Montclair. Newcomers are welcome! For info, call Ed Harris at 973-783-7645 or edwardbharris022@verizon.net.
- **Men's Group — Saturday, 12 December, 8:30 AM (Alliance).** Are you a man? Are you a UU man? Would you enjoy getting together with other UU men? All UU men are welcome to join a thoughtful, mutually supportive group. Friendly, fraternal conversations provoke reflection, insight and more than a little uplifting humor. Visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/uucammen/> to learn more about our group.
- **Christmas Eve Services — Thursday, 24 December, 5:00 & 7:30 PM with Rev. Dr. Justin S. Osterman & Rev. Judy Tomlinson.** The 5:00 service is especially for families with young children. The choir will sing at the 7:30 gathering, which will be a more reflective worship experience.



Heavenly Nostrils by Dana Simpson



We are on the web: essexuu.org

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

Mailing Address:
PO Box 998.
Orange NJ 07051-0998

Church Phone: 973-674-0010

Office Email: office@essexuu.org

Web: essexuu.org

**Acting President: Mindy
Thompson Fullilove**

**Vice President Pro Temp:
Frank Barszcz**

Treasurer: Bill Slezak

Secretary: Greg Giacobe

Administrator: Greg Giacobe

Sexton: Tony A Jones



WE VALUE: Community...
Exploration... Fellowship...
Spirituality... Liberal Religious
Education... Diversity... Freedom...
and Action.

OUR VISION: To be a life-affirming liberal religious community where people of diverse beliefs, ideas and background come together to provide spiritual and intellectual growth to one another and to work together in Orange, New Jersey for a greater good in the world.

OUR MISSION: To study and practice religion in freedom and fellowship. To provide support and care for our community and the community at large.

Founded in Orange in 1890 as the First Unitarian Church of Essex County, the congregation has worshipped in the present Sanctuary since its construction in 1892-3. The Church continues the ministry of the Union Universalist Society (also known as the Church of the Redeemer), founded as the First Universalist Society of Newark in 1834.



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Church of Essex County**

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Making the connections

