



The Univoice

Stuff UU Should Know:

By: Nadine Smet-Weiss

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Berks is all about change! In case you haven't noticed, we are now using the East doors as the sanctuary entrance. For the directionally challenged who may not carry a portable Garmin to church on Sunday mornings, the East doors are those closest to the Pagoda and, for your added convenience, they are now marked with a sign that reads "SANCTUARY ENTRANCE."

Church Office Hours:

The church office is open Mon. through Fri. from 10-3pm, but please call ahead to ensure access.

Please contact office manager Susan Stewart to arrange for a temporary key if you need access any other time.

Rev. Fees has office hours by appointment. Please call (610) 372-0928 or email sandrafees@verizon.net, to schedule an appointment. Monday is Rev. Fees day off.

Perhaps it should more properly read, "sanctuary entrance, with a twist and a turn." After entering through the East doors, we ask that you proceed into the DeBenneville Room (to your immediate left) to appreciate the beauty of our renovated spaces while preventing a chilly breeze (in the winter) or hot air (in the summer) from blowing into the sanctuary with you. As an added bonus, by entering through the DeBenneville Room you will be officially greeted by a greeter!

This is also part of a larger plan to lure you a few steps into the Gerber Room where you can hang up your coat and pick up your nametag* all at the same time – it's kind of like a UU version of one stop shopping.

From here, options abound. You may now enter the sanctuary via the DeBenneville Room or the Gerber Room, all the while having stimulating and enlightening conversations with any fellow UUs you happen to meet along your path.

On the rare occasion of your fashionably late arrival, we suggest you use the entrance to the sanctuary via the DeBenneville Room only if you want to announce your tardiness to the entire congregation by pushing your way past our musicians, tripping over the choir, etc. Otherwise, we suggest you choose to enter the building via the handicap entrance so you can slip in the side doors to the sanctuary, almost – but never completely – unnoticed.

Anyone who has difficulty with steps may also want to choose the handicap entrance. This completely step free entryway can be accessed by entering through the gate at the West side of our building complex. The West side of the building is the side that is furthest from the Pagoda and immediately adjacent to the old sanctuary entrance which will soon bear a sign that reads, "NOT THE SANCTUARY ENTRANCE."



Nadine Smet-Weiss, head of the New Member Committee

Univoice Submission Guidelines

Email submissions by attaching a Word file or including your material in the body of an email message to univoice@uuberks.org. You may also put typewritten submissions in our mailbox in the new Chalice House in the box labelled *Univoice*.

The deadline is the 15th of each month. Please include the date, time and location of events, and the full name and phone number or email of contacts.

~Meghan Cocuzza, Editor

What do you think?

On Jan. 17 we will be gathering at 11:45 to discuss our church's Vision and Mission statement. Please take a moment to stop by and let us know what you think!

*NOTE: We strongly encourage you to use your nametag at all times since it helps the rest of us to know that we know you. If you do not have a nametag, please ask a greeter to direct you to the "nametag request book." Greeters, as you may recall, can be located at the entrance to the DeBenneville Room.

From Sandra's Study

A Sabbatical Leave



By the end of this church year, I will have served as your settled minister for five years. I served an additional year as your Acting Minister prior to being called. Per my covenant created at the time of the call, I qualify for one month of sabbatical time per each of those five years. After consulting with the Committee on Ministry and the Board of Directors, we have agreed that January through May of 2011 is the appropriate time for me to take a sabbatical. That's a full year from now, which means there's plenty of time for us to plan and to plan well for my leave.

Some of you were around when previous ministers took a sabbatical, and so you have some recollection of what that's like and why it's important. Others are newer to our congregation and even new to Unitarian Universalism, and you may have many questions. This is my first sabbatical, so I am learning about what to expect too. I hope to answer a few questions now in this column, and I will continue to have many conversations with you over the next 12 months. As always, I encourage you to talk with me about your concerns.

It's fairly customary for Unitarian Universalist ministers, similar to academics, to take a sabbatical every four to five years. It is typically written into the minister's covenant at the time of the call, as it was for me. A sabbatical is a time for rest, reflection, renewal, to break away from established routine and responsibility, to learn, study, and/or travel. It is intended to improve my skills for a better ministry of the church, and to enable the kind of extended time it takes for a fresh enthusiasm, new ideas, and a clear focus to emerge.

There are obligations that come with the privilege of a sabbatical. I do consider it a privilege. I know that not everyone receives sabbatical time. So I will be developing a plan that outlines what I will do for my sabbatical and what the benefits will be. I will need this, and so will you. You'll want to know how this leave will contribute to my professional development and to the ministry of the church. Sabbatical experiences of other Unitarian Universalist ministers have included: time at a Zen Buddhist monastery for meditation, study abroad, working at home on publications of worship materials, writing a book, martial arts study, research, studying painting, language studies, leadership training, and serving as minister-in-residence at a seminary.

I have already begun assembling a sabbatical committee to provide support and communication throughout the process. We will be creating a sabbatical brochure, and continuing to communicate with the entire congregation as plans are developed. I am working with committees, especially worship and pastoral care, and the Board to ensure continuity during my leave. My sabbatical is coming at a good time in the life of the church. Even so, I recognize this will require us all to let go of some of the ways we are used to doing things. Our religious community is strong and vital. We have excellent leadership in our board, committees, and staff. I have every confidence that the sabbatical will be a time of growth and learning for all of us.

Yours in faith and love,

Sandra

Special Plate Collections

The 5 winners of our Special Plate Ballot vote held at the congregational meeting December 6th were Berks Women in Crisis, Opportunity House, Family Promise of Berks County, Planned Parenthood of Northeast and Mid Penn and Wisdom31. These groups will receive plates beginning in January 2010 pending approval by the Board of Directors. The Minister's Discretion Fund total for the November 8th collection was \$711.00 with at least one check of \$50.00 arriving a week after. The December 6th collection for Mentors for Berks Youth brought in \$555.00. Thank you for your generous support of the Special Plate Collections in 2009. Please see pg. 3 for more information.



Splinters From the Board

Board seeks fund-raising ideas

By: Gene Goodwin

The first of two town hall-style meetings to allow members to propose ways to raise funds to complete payment for our new Chalice House addition will be held at 11:45 am on Sunday, Jan. 31.

We will need an additional \$68,000 to pay off loans made against pledge payments still coming in before July 1, 2010. The shortfall could be as high as \$80,000 if several pledges turn out to be hollow.

The \$68,000 to \$80,000 needed is “relatively small” and “within our means,” Board member Jeff Woodward told the Dec. 6 congregational meet in his report as chair of the Stewardship Committee.

Urging the congregation to go this “extra mile,” Jeff said the renovated space “has already opened up a number of opportunities for our church” and “will afford us the future that a few years ago we could only have dreamed about.”

More than half the new space—the entire second floor and the RE director’s office on the first floor—now belong to our thriving religious education program. The rest of the first floor houses offices for the minister and the office administrator, a nice meeting room, a copy room and a unisex toilet room.

Board President Joe Plageman scheduled the Jan.31 town hall meeting after telling the congregational meeting that he planned to call two such meetings in the next two months to assure that all fund-raising ideas get aired. But the date for the February session has yet to be determined. The Jan.. 31 meeting is to be held in the new meeting room in the rear of the first floor of the addition.

Joe also told the congregational meeting that the Board is applying for a Chalice Lighter grant from our Joseph Priestly District of UUA, which could bring us \$40,000 or more to reduce our shortfall obligation. We should know about this grant request in April before our May congregational meeting when we have to decide what to do about the shortfall.

In its discussion of the shortfall problem, the Board seems to prefer extending the capital campaign two more years through 2012 over creating a stand-alone mini-campaign. But it has put off a definite decision until May when it hopes to have a concrete plan for the congregation to vote on. “We are not in a crisis situation,” Joe said. “We have plenty of money to pay our loan obligations now and our pledges are coming in, but we want to be responsible and work out a plan to pay what we had to borrow above the amount we now know has been pledged.”

Members attending the congregational meeting on Dec. 6 voted to recommend five local charitable organizations to receive Sunday place collections in the coming Spring. Subject to Board approval, here are the five top vote-getters and the number of votes each received:

BERKS WOMEN IN CRISIS: Their Mission is to provide supportive services to victims and eliminate domestic and sexual violence in Berks County. Free and confidential services include: Hotlines in both English and Spanish, Emergency shelter, Specially trained staff members will go with victims to local hospitals or the courthouse, Individual counseling and group support, Support and advice for individuals applying for protection from abuse orders. 32

OPPORTUNITY HOUSE: Opportunity House is a multi-service organization that improves the quality of life for children, families and adults who face various obstacles to independence, and supports their efforts to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency and well-being. 27

FAMILY PROMISE OF BERKS COUNTY: Provides temporary accommodations for homeless families. They serve as an alternative to the shelter system, which often has families living apart. Currently a network of 16 host congregations rotate responsibility for sheltering a family for a week. Families may stay in the network 45 to 90 days providing they are adhering to guidelines. 26

PLANNED PARENTHOOD OF NORTHEAST AND MID-PENN AT READING MEDICAL CENTER: As more families and individuals find themselves without medical coverage they have been turning to Planned Parenthood for a variety of Health Services. 26

WISDOM 31: Formerly Motivated Moms, has operated in Reading since 1995. It is a volunteer run, faith-based ministry which serves primarily Spanish-speaking women and their children. They offer adult English classes three times a week to teach conversational English. These classes give the women prayerful support, cross-cultural understanding, and socialization. 22



Religious Education

Dear Friends,

As the new year begins, I want to remind you of what an extraordinary group of people we have in our RE teachers. Throughout the first half of the year, I have been deeply moved by their commitment to our UU children and youth as well as their organization, creativity, and flexibility. Please take some to thank your child's teacher.

Sparks (PreK/K):

Lisa Wilder, Julia Smith, Kent Gutzler

Discoverers (Early Elementary):

Kent Gutzler, Lisa Frank, Shelley Kauffman

Explorers (Upper Elementary):

Jessica Chadwick, Doc Hawk, Stephanie Elliott, Mark Burton, and Jane Palmer

Seekers (Middle School)

Jeff Marshall, Colleen Vargo, Emily McNulty, Michelle Post, and Carla Mannix (social justice)

Youth (9-12 graders)

Barry Groebel

RE Calendar of Events

Youth Sleepover Retreat for 9-12 grade Youth 7 pm, Friday, January 8 to 4 pm Saturday, January 9, 2010 Unitarian Church of Harrisburg

All programming has been planned by Unitarian Church of Harrisburg's youth group under adult supervision. The evening will begin with some icebreaker games, before going over the rules, and breaking up into 'family groups.' The evening will wrap up with worship, and possibly a movie, crafts or sleep. On Saturday, there will be three workshops, including engaging activities such as Valentine letter writing, Apples to Apples, and Guided Meditations. Breakfast & Lunch will be provided.

For safety purposes, a ratio of five youth to one adult is required. Tracy Brant has offered to drive and be our chaperone. Registration fee for each youth is \$30. If interested, please contact Elizabeth at 610-371-9199 ASAP.

RE Teacher Meet-Up (For all RE Teachers and Sunday Helpers): Friday, January 8, 2010, 6 PM

Beat those post holiday-blahs with a friendly gathering to meet with your teaching team, review classroom progress for the year, discuss any issues or concerns, and fill out the calendar for the second half of the year. Dinner will be provided and your families are welcome to join us.

Sunday Helpers & Substitute Teachers

Walter Axsmith, Joanne Matz, Tracy Brant, Meghan Cocuzza, Joanna Groebel, Jane Marie Clipman, Mike Mannix, Randy Newnham, Laurie Grelle (if I've forgotten your name, I'm very sorry—thanks for being a helper!)

To thank our wonderful teachers and Sunday helpers and to give them a chance to check in with each other and set up the calendar for the rest of the year, we are having a special RE teacher meet-up. Details are below in the RE Calendar of Events.

Best Wishes for a Happy & Healthy 2010,

Elizabeth

RE Committee: Lisa Wilder (Chair), Emily McNulty, Susan Stewart, Kent Gutzler, Stephanie Elliott, Tracy Brant, Celeste Galanos (Youth Representative)



Elizabeth Kaufmann (pictured above with daughter)
Director of Religious Education

Interfaith Potluck Dinner and Panel Discussion Thursday, January 28, 2010, 5-7:30 pm, Islamic Center of Reading

Several First UU Berks families attended or participated in the Interfaith Children's Sabbath back in October. That service was a project of the Berks Intercultural Alliance. Other congregations active in the alliance include the Islamic Center of Reading, Temple Oheb Shalom, and Washington Presbyterian. Part of our mission as a denomination is to encourage understanding between religions and the efforts of the Berks Intercultural Alliance seem to dovetail beautifully with this mission. Our congregation is responsible for bringing desserts to this potluck event. We also need a Middle School or High School student willing to sit on the panel and give a brief presentation on Unitarian Universalism. I have a prior commitment on this evening and need someone to be in charge of our group at the event. If someone can volunteer, it would be helpful if they could attend the planning meeting with me on Thursday, January 21, 2010 at 7 pm at the Islamic Center of Reading. Don't miss this opportunity to spread awareness and understanding between different religions in our community.

January RE Committee Meeting Sunday, January 24, 2010, 12 noon

We will meet in the Seekers (Middle School) classroom at the top of the steps on the 2nd floor of Chalice House to chart our course for the rest of the RE year.

Adult Program Offerings

Join the Lunch Bunch on Tuesday, Jan. 19, at noon. We'll share in conversation about the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. Bring a brown bag lunch. Contact Rev. Fees for more information.



Mark your calendars for a new adult theology class: What Moves Us: Unitarian Universalist Theology, developed by Rev. Dr. Thandeka. This program explores the life experiences of both historic and contemporary Unitarian Universalist theologians, highlighting that which caused in them a change of heart, a new direction, new hope, and a deeper understanding of their own liberal faith. The course will be offered on six consecutive Thursday evenings, beginning in February (exact dates and times TBD). Contact Rev. Fees for more information.

Holiday Gift Project

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of our holiday gift collection for children whose parents are incarcerated. It is a program of Berks Connections/Pre-Trial Services. We provided gifts for 26 children this year, up from 20 last year. A special "Thank You" to Kent and Rachel Gutzler for coordinating this holiday effort.

Minister's Discretionary Fund Provides Holiday Assistance
Through the Minister's Discretionary Fund, a number of individuals received assistance this fall and during the holidays. Thanks to the generosity of members and friends, six families received grocery cards at Thanksgiving and Christmas. The fund also provided assistance with utility costs and scholarships for members to participate in church-related programs.

UU Books

The Jan. 10 discussion will be of "The Spiritual Life of Children" by Robert Coles. The contains in-depth interviews with over 500 Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and agnostic children ages 8-12 describing their understandings and reflections on God, the meaning of life, and spiritual concerns, with examples of their related artwork.

The Feb. 14 selection is "Picking Cotton: Our Memoir of Injustice and Redemption" by Jennifer Thompson-Canino and Ronald Cotton. Thompson was a twenty-two year-old college student in NC. While she slept a black man broke into her apartment and raped her at knifepoint. In a police line-up she positively identified Ronald Cotton as her attacker. Cotton insisted he was innocent, but Jennifer's testimony sealed his conviction and a sentence to life imprisonment.

Eleven years later, he was allowed to take a DNA test, which exonerated him after a decade in prison for a crime he did not commit. More astonishing, however, was his willingness to forgive persons who had put him there, including rape victim Jennifer Thompson, who had erroneously identified him. During these same years Jennifer had lived in freedom, marrying and having children. But Cotton's exoneration greatly troubled her, in realization of her wrong.

Ultimately they arranged a meeting, and thru their individual pain forged an improbable friendship. Each tell their own extraordinary stories about crime, punishment and exoneration, built upon a shared spiritual journey toward reconciliation and forgiveness.

Coffee's on at 9 am, with discussion beginning at 9:15 am. For further information, please contact Nadine Smet-Wiess, njw1258@hotmail.com, or Kelly Hartman.



All Night Creative Arts Vision Quest, 2/6/10 6:30 pm to 9:00 am

Our highschoolers experienced this quest in December and had a very powerful experience...now it's the adults turn! Come join Joanna Groebel, Dance/Movement Therapist, and Susan Lazarchik a fabulous local artist for a transformative, intensive exploration of your inner landscape. We will be trance dancing and painting throughout the night.

Pushing past resistance and our own expectations about what is possible, we will support each other through an evening of creative possibility. There will be a \$10 suggested donation to help cover the cost of materials. Space is limited to 9. Please call Joanna if you are interested in attending.



This Month's Volunteers

January Ushers

- 1/3 Debroux/McLeish
- 1/10 Showalter/Lucas
- 1/17 Oxenrider/Orts
- 1/24 Simonson/Cocuzza
- 1/31 Axsmith/Thibault



Coffee Corps

- Jan. 3 VIII Keith & Carol Orts
- Jan. 10 IX Fay Oxenreider
- Jan. 17 X Nelson & Caroline Simonson
- Jan. 24 XI Joanne Just
- Jan. 31 XII Norm & Bonnie Block

Food Pantry

By Kelly Hartman

On Dec. 3, the Good Pantry distributed food to 134 recipients, 14 of whom were new. These persons represented families including 243 children, 219 adults, and 53 seniors, totaling 515.



Many congregants have been donating bags or items of food, and these have been an important addition to resources we receive from Greater Berks Food Bank. Thank you. And thanks also to regulars and sometimers, who enhance the Food Pantry with their time and effort.

By being present to implement the monthly Pantry, volunteers from the congregation communicate the spirits of diversity and humanity which are basic to our UU traditions. See if you can find time within your schedule, be it for an hour or the whole morning, to join in and be part of the Church's interaction with the local community. The next Food Pantry Thursdays, 9am to 12pm, will be Jan. 7, Feb. 4, and Mar. 4.

For further information contact Walter Axsmith, w2axsmith@comcast.net.

History Revealed

By: Ruth N. Epler

Over the years we have used commentary and information from the history files to present many programs. This being the Church's 180th anniversary, I thought it would be a good time to share some of that history with the congregation.

In 1991, the upstairs addition for RE classes was added, the Gerber room lost its stage, the Food Pantry gained a storage room, and offices for the minister and RE directors were made. I also discovered Mrs. Irene Gerber was a very active member, and helped to create a senior center which would become Horizon, and is now Encore.

In 1987, the kitchen was renovated to its present size, modernized, and dedicated to Helen Green and Sophie Mahler, both active church members and members of the Ladies Auxiliary.

In 1953, excerpts from the spring and summer church meetings showed: Emergency roof repairs for \$366.34 were the most expensive expenditure in spring. There was a vote against storm insurance at \$28 for three years. (Go Figure?) Approval was given to remove the lighted red cross above the west entrance due to weather damage. Finally, a suggestion to rent or sell the Church failed due to insufficient positive votes. Then for a year the Church waited to see if financial conditions improved.

Through our history, we have learned that even with a rocky start we have continued to grow and improve. From 1953, when there was a debate on whether or not the church would be sold, until our current additions, the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Berks County continues to thrive. Past and present members continue to support the Church and our mission.

Some Great Gift Ideas

By: Gene Goodwin

Our Building Keepers Committee has issued a new list of building improvement projects all but one of which that members can finance with a gift of \$2,000 or less.

Committee chair Frank Wilder distributed this special gift list at the congregational meeting Dec. 6:

1. Resurface pitted concrete entrance ramp. \$2,000
2. Paint iron gate and fence in front of church. \$1,000
3. New hearing aid devices to add to the two Telex Sound Mate SR50 units now in service. \$80 each.
4. Remove radiator pipes in rear of Gerber room and replace with wainscot. \$2,000
5. Resurface concrete on front stairs of outside entrance to Chalice House. \$1,500
6. Add acoustic panels in Gerber room. \$2,000
7. Replace flat roof of Chalice House. \$5,000
8. Install hand railings on steps to pulpit. \$500.



January 2010



Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
					1 New Years Day	2
3	4 Heart to Heart 7:30-9pm	5	6 Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	7 Food Pantry 8am-Noon	8	9
10 UU Books 9-10am	11	12 Board Meeting 7-9pm	13 Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	14	15	16
17 Building Keep- ers Meeting 12-1pm	18	19 Lunch Bunch Noon	20 Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	21	22	23
24/31 31st Town hall meeting 11:45am(see page 3.)	25	26	27 Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	28	29 Vince Chiles 6-10pm	30

Guest At Your Table

We will be wrapping up this year's Guest At Your Table campaign in the first two weeks of January so don't forget to get that donation in. We will be collecting donations during coffee hour. See either Mike Szajna or Elizabeth Kauffman. Checks should be made out to UUSC with GAYT on the memo line. Those who wish to use the boxes can either count their own change then write a check or hand them in and we will count the money and write a check. If you do the latter you should fill out the info on the box so you will be credited for the donation by the UUSC. You may also put your check into the regular plate collections at Sunday Service, but make it payable to UUSC with Gayt on the memo line. Those who donate \$100.00 or more will be eligible to have their donations matched by the UU Church of Shelter Rock. Thank You.

Sunday Service Schedule

10:30am every Sunday

January 3 “The Neuro-Dharma of Happiness”
Joanna Groebel; Speaker, Becca Glenn-Dinwoodie, Lay Liturgist and Dan Matz, Music Director

The emerging integration of modern neuroscience and ancient contemplative wisdom offers skillful means for activating positive mind states. Isn't this really what we all share in common, no matter who we are--the desire to be happy? It's easier than we think!

January 10 “The Mind Gap”
Jane Palmer; Speaker, Doug Dinwoodie, Lay Liturgist, and Dan Matz, Music Director

The gap between our reality and our ideal of what it should have been like attracts our attention like a magnet. But to focus on the gap is to miss most of reality. Lesson 3,423,196 in appreciating the glories of what is. Or: the glass is at least half full, and may be running over.

January 17 “You're the Message”
Rev. Sandra Fees; Becca Glenn-Dinwoodie; Worship Associate, Dan Matz, Music Director and the First UU Choir

Join us for our annual celebration of the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. We'll consider King's message to the world and how we ourselves can become the message we want to convey.



January 24 “A Whack on the Side of the Head”
Rev. Sandra Fees; Judd Bortz, Worship Associate, and Dan Matz, Music Director

We tend to keep going at a problem from the same direction. To get unstuck, we need to change our viewpoint and assault the problem differently. Today we'll reflect on creative strategies to do that.

January 31 “Shaking Things Up”
Rev. Sandra Fees and Tracy Blunt, piano

Controversy shakes things up in our personal lives, in the nation, even, and maybe especially, in religion. This morning we will take a look at how controversy has helped shape us and our Unitarian theology.



Printed on recycled paper

Address Service Requested

www.uubks.org

(610) 372 0928

Reading, PA 19602

416 Franklin Street

of Berks County

Church

First Unitarian Universalist



Non-Profit
Organization
US Postage
PAID
Reading, PA
Permit No. 743