

THE ADIRONDACK COMMUNITARIAN



A Monthly Newsletter of the Adirondack Unitarian Universalist Community

Volume 185

January 2019

Services at a Glance

January 6: Diane Fortado and Phil Newton – Raising Children of Color in the Adirondacks

January 13: Rev. Wayne Walder – Spiritual Maturing

January 20: Rev. Wayne Walder – Spiritual Community

January 27: Ginger Slater – "WHAT ABOUT TRUST" A Soul Matters Service and Group Discussion

Events

January 13th: Annual Meeting after the service.

January 19, 7:00 p.m.: Annual Celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr., focused on the Poor People's Campaign. (See article by Phyllis Magnus in this issue.) Presbyterian Church, January 19 at 7:00 p.m.

April 25-29, 2019: "Making the Invisible, Visible – An Exploration of Race and Racism in the US through a Buddhist Lens." Sponsored by the UU Buddhist Fellowship. For more details, visit www.uubf.org or www.facebook.com/uubf.org

President's Message

Hello, dear AUUC members and friends!

The new year is upon us. It's time to take in a long breath and let it out slowly. It's time to remember the lessons and good times of the past year and energize ourselves for the new days ahead.

My thoughts begin with last January and my apprehension at becoming president of the board

and the challenges of having to lead the board and membership. (I am not a born leader. It's a constant struggle. I depend so much on the strengths of others.) I was nervous, but committed to doing my part. I muddled through.

My mind wanders through the events of the spring and summer. Eight new members signed the membership book in June. In July, we were presented with the opportunity to change our location and the Site Committee sprang into action. In August, the AUUC was granted status as a Welcoming Congregation by the UUA after three years of hard work by the Welcoming Committee. We shared an afternoon at Meecham Lake with the Plattsburgh and Canton congregations at our annual HUUttenanny.

For me, there was pain and growth in dealing with the processes of interpersonal conflict and the complicated group dynamics (inherent in an organization such as ours) and of change in our congregation and membership (we've said goodbye to some dear friends!).

I think back on October, November, and December. The autumn was energizing! AUUC demonstrated its compassion with donations to Samaritan House and the local food and Grace pantries. Our commitment to social justice was made evident in the wider Saranac Lake community when quite a few of us joined in the organization of a local group of the Poor Peoples Campaign.

And now my thoughts settle on the last few weeks. I once again realize my deep gratitude to my predecessors (our founders, previous board presidents and trustees, and devoted membership) and my love and commitment to the AUUC. December was wonderful! We've welcomed some awesome new folks to Saranac Lake and the AUUC. Through socializing (drinks and meals at local establishments, chatting at knitting groups, and during our own social hour after services) and working with other members (decorating the John Black Room for the holidays, coordinating the Solstice Service, and just setting up and breaking down for our weekly services) I have come to feel such a love for our little community. Looking out at the candlelit glow on the faces of my AUUC family during our Solstice service warmed me to my core. I leave 2018 with peace and contentment in my heart.

Now begins 2019. Come join me. We'll take a deep breath together and welcome in the new year of wonderful things ahead for the Adirondack Unitarian Universalist Community that we hold so dear!

Much love to all of you!
Laura Reid, AUUC Board President

[Poor People's Campaign](#)

The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, comes to Saranac Lake.

At a meeting on December 4th, more than 20 local residents gathered to meet with Joe Paparone, a North Country organizer for the new Poor People's Campaign. The new Campaign is a revival of the original 1968 Poor People's Campaign or Poor People's March on Washington. Planning began in 2017 to carry forward Martin Luther King, Jr.'s campaign to

gain economic justice for poor people in the United States. In 1968, following Martin Luther King's assassination, the Rev. Ralph Abernathy organized to establish a 3,000-person protest camp on the Washington Mall, where protestors stayed for six weeks in the spring of 1968.

The current revival broadens the agenda from Martin Luther King's focus on jobs and racism to include poverty and economic inequality, voter disenfranchisement, ecological devastation, the war economy and militarism.

In a follow up to this initial meeting on December 4th, representatives of the Saranac Lake Ecumenical Council Peace and Justice Group decided to use its annual "Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration" to promote the local revival of the Poor People's Campaign.

This year's service is being held at the Presbyterian Church, January 19 at 7 pm. Joe Papparone, will speak at the service. Joe is a member of the Labor and Religion Coalition of New York State. Joe has also offered a training session during his visit.

To give us some perspective on the 50 years between 1968 and today, here are some data from the Institute of Policy Studies:

- Compared to 1968, **60 percent more Americans are living below the official poverty line today** — a total of 41 million people. And while the percentage of families in poverty has merely inched up and down, the top 1 percent's share of national income has nearly doubled.
- According to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University's law school, **23 states have adopted voter suppression laws since 2010.**
- The criminalization of poverty and racially biased sentencing and policing practices have driven **the number of prison inmates up eightfold since 1968**, with the share who are people of color increasing from less than half to 66 percent.

Even where progress has been made, there are usually significant caveats. For instance, the latest jobs reports show unemployment for African Americans at 7.7 percent. Moreover, for single black men between the ages of 25 and 54, the unemployment rate is an astonishing 10 percent.

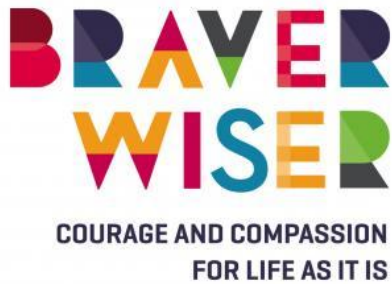
For more information, visit <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/demands/>

Phyllis Magnus

"We as a Nation Must Undergo a Radical Revolution of Values."

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Our UUA Connection – Inspiring Messages



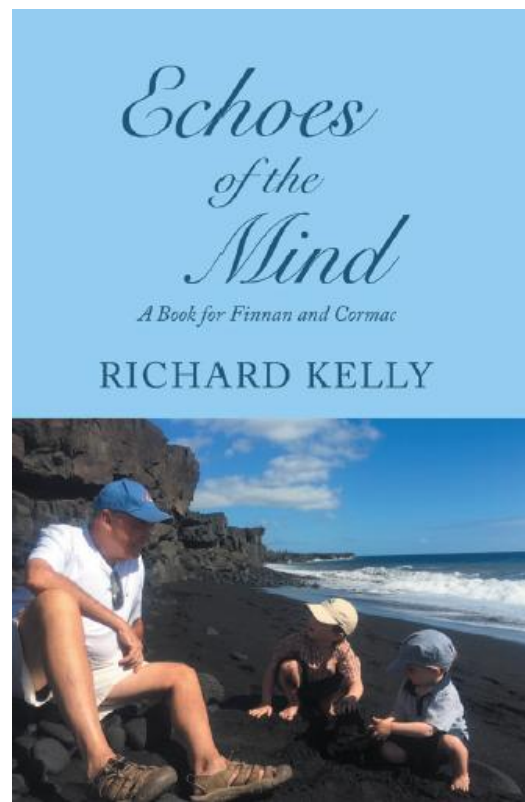
The UUA shares an original message of courage and compassion, delivered each Wednesday straight to your inbox and shared on Facebook. To sign up, click here: <https://www.uua.org/inspiration>.

Richard Kelly

Richard Kelly has finished his book called: *Echoes of the Mind, a Book for Finnan and Cormac*. As Richard says on the cover, “this book is a series of imagined conversations and advice to [my] two young grandsons who live in Alaska.”

The book covers the territory from young boys out in nature, to years at the University, to getting a job, to succeeding in the world, to a no-holds barred discussion of political opinion, economics, philosophy and spirituality.”

Richard has donated a copy to the AUUC library. If you wish to purchase a copy it is available from booksellers on iUniverse, Amazon, and Barnes and Noble.



Refreshment volunteers needed!

We need volunteers to provide simple refreshments for coffee hour after services. Many spots are open in January and February. To volunteer, contact Laura Reid at laurajeannereid@gmail.com. In addition to providing snacks, refreshment volunteers stay afterward to help with clean-up in the kitchen.

Update from the Ecumenical Council

Red Kettle Campaign: Results from the holiday campaign are in – we raised \$10,400 in donations! Most (90%) of it will be used to help people in dire need here in Saranac Lake. Thanks to all who rang the bells and who donated! You've made a big difference in the lives of people who need a helping hand.

Highlights – We send out the highlights of our monthly Council meetings. If you'd like to be on the email list to receive these highlights, contact me.

Ann Mullen

Soul Matters Submitted by Ginger Slater

“When God Had a Body.”

By Rev. Gretchen Haley of Foothills Unitarian Church in Fort Collins, Colorado

“New Testament scholar, and sometimes-skeptic, Bart Ehrman, tells the story of one special person who lived about 2000 years ago. Just before this person was born, “a heavenly figure appeared to his mother, telling her that her son would be not just human but also divine. His birth was surrounded by all sorts of supernatural signs, and as a child he taught those who were much older than he, about religious insights and ideas. This person went town to town with his message, gathered around him disciples who witnessed his teachings, flawless character, and multiple miracles. At the end of his life, however, his enemies made up charges and he was placed on trial before the Roman authorities and put to death. After he died, some claimed he had ascended bodily into heaven; others said he appeared to them, that they had talked with, and touched him. A number of followers, spread the good news about this man, recounting what they had seen him say and do.” Unfortunately, however, this news never made it much further than his own time, so it's unlikely you have ever heard of the neo-Pythagorean teacher, pagan, and holy man known as Apollonius of Tyana – who is the special man that Ehrman describes. I start with this story because my plan for today is to go full-on Jesus....for us to explore not just the story of Jesus as human – something we do with some degree of comfort as Unitarians – but, less

traditionally for us, the story of Jesus as the embodiment of the Infinite Mystery that some call God....and I know that for some of us, this idea brings up some resistance, annoyance, and injury. And, I understand.

When I first started attending a Unitarian Universalist church, I told some friends, with great passion, that one of the best things about my new religion was that they barely ever said Jesus. Jesus had been used as a weapon against me, and my wounds were still pretty fresh.

Over time, however, I have become even more passionate that we should no more allow a profound perversion of the story of Jesus to be represented as the truth than we would allow the perversion of science to stand as the central truth about the earth, or our climate, or our place in this universe.

Both of these, if left unopposed, are equally capable of destroying human life. And so, we need to be just as willing to engage the Jesus story, as we are any of our other sources for truth – especially when the perversion of the story of the “prince of peace” has never felt more pervasive, or dangerous.

...I hope that Apollonius of Tyana helps. Apollonius, and the many other stories of the divine becoming human, circulating around the 1st century, remind us that there is something here, that has captured the imagination of many different sorts of people for millennia, in ways that may, or may not be, related to what we now call the Christian religion.

And so, my question is why - what is it about this story of God as a person, and the divine as flesh – what is it about this that speaks to people? that keeps speaking to people? powerfully? resiliently?

Many of us today feel liberated by the opposite, actually. If we engage with a concept of God at all, it's usually by way of “Spirit of Life,” or Infinite Love, Great Mystery, or even simply, the Universe. No body, no being.

But here we have this story that proclaims the eternal has been given form, and gender and skin, - a particular, living, breathing existence. What liberation might be found here? What piece of the truth, and what good news might this story offer us, and our world?

The good news, of course, starts with a baby, which is always good news....except...not entirely. Because babies are beautiful, and awe-inspiring, and smell really good....but also can be (*hmmm...for example*) They wake you up at all hours of the night, and demand you feed them, change their diapers, and just hang out and pay attention to them.

These human realities are some of the many reasons why scholar Cynthia Rigby describes the idea of God becoming “one of us,” as the song would have it, *scandalous*. How could something infinite be contained in something so profoundly limited? And how could the perfectly good, and entirely powerful, square with something so messy, selfish, dependent, and demanding? Also, it's actually wrong to say that this starts with a baby. It starts with a woman who grew that baby, which is to say a woman who created God, formed God, a woman who was pregnant with God, and who gave birth to God with all the mess and blood and curse words that come with labor and birth. And no one ever seems to talk about the fact that this God necessarily was a teenager – awkward and pimply, eager and even....horny...Scandalous.

This is the mystery of the incarnation, and in the earliest days, no one thought to try to solve it. This paradox of God in a human body sought no explanation, no clarification, no resolution, no absolutely sinless life, no doctrine of the virgin birth. The hard lines of orthodoxy came later, along with the organizing, the power struggles, the boundaries of who's wrong, who's right, who's in,

who's out. But before all of this, there was only the allure of this impossible possibility: that the eternal would know the mortal, and perhaps more importantly, that the mortal would know the eternal. That the two seeming opposites, would fully co-exist, in a great intimacy and partnership, between human life, and the universal source. God doesn't just walk among humans, God *is* human. God doesn't just shape human life, but is subject to that shaping. God is not residing in some celestial heaven, God abides here, fully present with us, in us.

The story of God becoming human, lifts up God's immanence instead of an untouchable transcendence, that occasionally comes over us in a great and rare sacred shiver, this story says that the holy knows human life intimately that the universe knows what it means to want what you cannot have, and also the pleasure of getting everything you hoped for, and more. *Strong mother God, working night and day;*

This story says the spirit of life gets why you're losing your temper, and knows how much you long to be forgiven; it says the Ultimate knows what it is, to be betrayed, by those you love, and also to die too soon, and to long for more life. *Warm Father God, feeling all the strains of human living.*

This story says that Life at its very essence understands when things fall apart, the helplessness of realizing there is no fixing this, and the reasons why you'd decide to show up and love anyway. *Old, aching God, grey with endless care.*

There is something deeply comforting and consoling, about imagining the vast infinite, ... that this aging body, this stumbling spirit, this doubting, suffering, hopeful, imperfect person; that every boring, embarrassing, gorgeous corner of our lives; every melting glacier and bullied child, every relapsing addict and terrified soldier – all of it, and all of us is known and held in divinity, known entirely by the infinite universe.

We speak about an infinite love, that will not let us go, a love that has not broken faith with us, and never will. This *is* the promise of this story. Emmanuel – God With Us.

Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said this was the *real* scandal of this story – not what it implies about the divine, but what it says about humans – and how much we are loved. This infinite, unconditional love is too much for us – it's an embarrassment of love, an unfathomable abundance, a scandal.

We should have to earn love like that, we think, only some could deserve love like that – not everyone; only some parts of ourselves should be loved like that....not all the parts....not the pimply parts...The co-existence of God with flesh, however, refuses such a division. All are worthy, all are loved; every part of you is worthy, every part of you is known, accepted, and loved.

Despite all this talk of scandal, it was not new, or radical, to imagine that God is changed or changeable, or even that the source of that change, is human interaction. Much of the Hebrew scriptures tell stories of God learning, messing up, trying again, and as the hymn goes, "being changed by what God started."

The new part of this story is the body. It was the fact that God had a body, the story goes, that changed everything – for humans, and for God, from then on. Which I think makes sense.

It reminds me of the Dorothy Monroe poem, it goes:

*"Death is not too high a price to pay for having lived.
Mountains never die, nor do the seas or rocks or endless sky....
they stay eternal, deathless.*

*Yet they never live!
If choice there were, I would not hesitate to choose mortality.
Whatever Fate demanded in return for life I'd give,
for, never to have seen the fertile plains
nor heard the winds
nor felt the warm sun on sands beside the salty sea,
nor touched the hands of those I love—
without these,
all the gains of timelessness would not be worth one day of living and of loving.”*

We idealize the possibility of immortality, omniscience, omnipotence, but there is something particularly beautiful, and transformative, about our simple, limited, vulnerable human life. Once God had a body, the idea of living forever, like the rocks and the sky, of remaining at a distance, from everything and everyone it just wouldn't have had the same appeal. We so often, curse our unknowing, imperfect existence – but when you think about it – how beautiful this stumbling, and sometimes surrender, can be – you too might understand, how it might persuade divinity, to abide with us, forever.

Unitarian Universalist minister Galen Guengerich says that in our world today, “each of us *are* the face of God in this world, and God's voice and hands.”

And so, it may be true, that there is no all-knowing, all-controlling force, but rather God is that which is present in all, the presence which remains, that abides – that presence that chooses to stay, within and among humankind, and that power that knows how to love – that presence that loves abundantly, scandalously.

Such an idea would mean, that we are all the saviors of the world, or we could be, which is terrifying, especially right now, but only scandalous if we fail to take our responsibility seriously. If we fail to see in every person, a possible partner, an image, of God. And so, in this dark time, let us pray by way of persistent kindness, worship through a practice of relentless compassion, and restore our beloved creation, and ourselves, through the tender task of seeing one another, in all our humanity, holy, and abundantly loved.”

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We the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person.*
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.*
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.*
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.*
- The right of conscience and the use of democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.*
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.*
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.*



From the "Church of the open mind, loving heart, and helping hand" to

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