

St. John's

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

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Minister's Musings

BY REV. MITRA
JAFARZADEH



Dear Church,

After last year's sabbatical, I realized how much I value church, church life and church people. I also realized that I often get tangled up in administrative and off site efforts. Thus, I have not spent the time I would like with the people I have promised to serve.

To do better in the year to come, I have promised myself that I will visit with every member of the church community. To keep myself accountable, I have assembled a "Pastoral Visit Team" comprised of a few members of the caring circle and membership team.

Being part of a church means having a minister who you can talk to about big existential questions or when life is just hard. I figure those conversations are easier if we meet in person from time to time. So I will be calling you for coffee or dinner or a walking conversation, and I hope you accept my invitation. And don't forget that you can always call me! These don't have to be big conversations, just a chance to get to know each other better.

With Love and Blessings,
Rev. Mitra

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Connection Takes Time: Blessing Our Schoolchildren, One Bead at a Time

BY ASHLEIGH RHODES

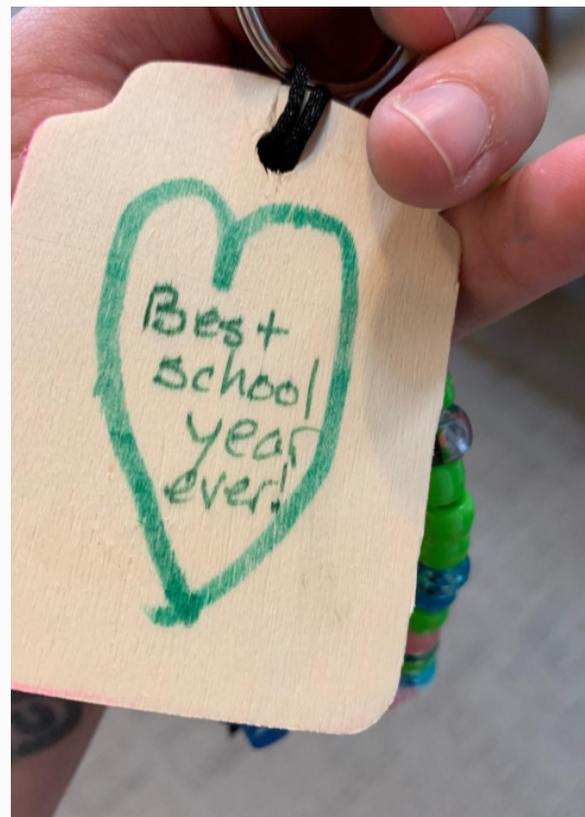
Many churches do a Blessing of the Backpacks at the beginning of the school year. I saw many Facebook photos of the lovely key chains that other UU religious educators were producing for their kids and congregations to hand out as part of their blessings this year. Some of the results were absolutely gorgeous, and being shared with pride. Other posts lamented the struggles with shrinky dink, crazy glue, or spray paint - the long hours, and final triumph.

As someone who believes connection is the core of my role, I resisted a project that involved me working alone and then simply handing out the final product. As I discussed the logistics of our own blessing with Rev. Mitra, I was insistent that there be a face to face interaction - that adults get to personally interact with a child. I suggested having beads for the adults to bless and then personally hand them to the children.

During our August 18 service, as I watched the long line of people waiting patiently to introduce themselves and chat with the children, often letting them choose their favorite bead, I'll admit that it dawned on me that I had forgotten something crucial: connection takes time! However, Rev. Mitra and the worship associate Pamela Wilz adjusted the service with grace, and everyone involved seemed to enjoy it..

Once the children were sung out, they added a tag with a chalice drawn on it (I did that much myself) and were encouraged to add their own designs and encouragement for the year. Each child went home with a unique creation that combined their own talents with the blessings from the congregation.

If you have a school aged child or teen who missed the Blessing of the Backpacks and would like a keychain, please let me know - we have blessed beads left over and can provide you one!



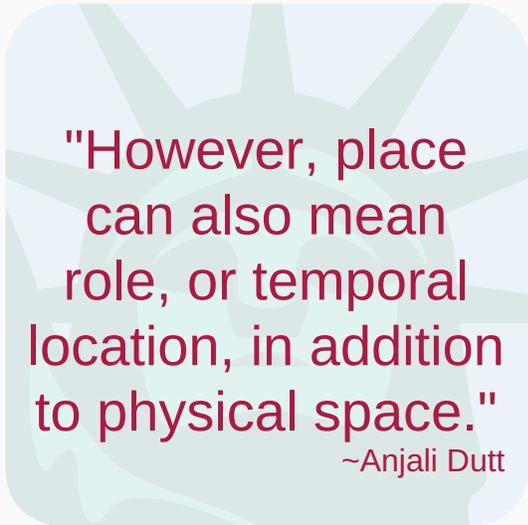


What is our place in the universe?

BY ANJALI DUTT

Last night a friend and I were watching an episode of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Those of you who have seen the show may agree it's not one to watch alone. In this episode there was a scene where a main character was mourning the death of her country – her arms outstretched, embracing a beheaded Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. As was intended, the image struck me. Though I have visited several times, Washington D.C. is not a place I consciously think about often in connection to my own identity as an American. Yet, I felt a twinge in my heart seeing this symbol of freedom defaced. Perhaps this feeling was in connection to the visceral reaction I had the day before, hearing about US lawmakers' defacing edits to Emma Lazarus's poem inscribed on the State of Liberty. Even if I know freedom and liberty have always been more theoretical and aspirational than a reality for the majority since the start of the United States, I so deeply wanted to believe that the words “give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” were too sacred to mar.

As one of the many of us who cares so deeply about social justice, it's a complicated, but perhaps particularly important time to ponder “our place in the universe”. The place I call home, the country of my birth, is fostering hostility in our part of the universe and allowing pain and harm to flourish elsewhere. However, place can also mean role, or temporal location, in addition to physical space. In these domains it is clear to me: right now it is our role to learn, reflect, and act. We should be seeking to develop and nurture peaceful, welcoming, sustainable and affirming places in ourselves, our communities, and well beyond. It is as important as ever to create places in the universe where commitment to these values is unwavering. But of course, this is no small or simple task.



"However, place can also mean role, or temporal location, in addition to physical space."
~Anjali Dutt

Earlier this month I spent a week in Sinsinawa, Wisconsin volunteering on the farm at the Mother house of a group of Catholic sisters I have known for several years. It's a place I've come to love very dearly, in a way that continuously surprises me. Each time I visit I feel as though I can tap into a culture of radical care, that leaves me refreshed, energized, and hopeful. The location is not without complication. However, there are few places that I think can serve as a better model for what I hope to cultivate in whatever place in the universe I can refer to as mine.



Connecting Every Which Way: Connections Fair Sept. 29

BY GAYLE LINKLETTER

You go to church most Sundays, and leave feeling uplifted and inspired. Maybe you attend our Friday night movies or you're part of a monthly Chalice Group gathering. With all that activity, why would you need to volunteer or get more involved?

For starters, volunteering is a way to grow closer and make connections with others who share your interests. When you get more deeply involved, you begin to learn more about the people you're working alongside. And you start to care more – about the church, its mission and beliefs, and the difference we can make in the world

That's why St. John's is holding a special "Connecting Every Which Way" fair for members and friends on Sunday, Sept. 29, immediately following the service. St. John's offers so many ways for the congregation to connect – this is the perfect opportunity to see all the possibilities we offer in one friendly place. You'll find tables staffed by church members who are active in the many groups that serve St. John's. They're eager to introduce you to the teams that make our church run smoothly and provide the varied opportunities that enrich our fellowship.

Stroll among the gaily decorated tables, talk to team members and savor tasty treats. Vote on your favorites, which will qualify you for the grand prize drawing. Along the way, you'll discover so much more about St. John's and the many paths we take to contribute to the world around us, to strengthen our relationships with each other and to share our talents with the community and the church.

Sample our rich menu of offerings while learning what best matches your interests and talents, and what will most enrich your St. John's experience. Best of all, make the connections that mean more fun and friendship at St. John's. See you at the "Connecting Every Which Way" fair!

Coming Events

"Your Place in the Universe"

A First Hour Program

BY NATHAN De LEE

Have you ever wondered how you fit into the grander scheme of the Universe? If so, then our First Hour series "Your Place in the Universe" may be right for you. Over the course of a several sessions we will discuss a variety of topics about the universe: an overview of the universe, exoplanets, the life of stars, black holes, how the solar system formed, what Venus and Mars can tell us about climate change etc.

Our purpose is two-fold. First, we want to familiarize ourselves with basic facts about how the universe is put together. Second, we want to discuss how these facts have impact on bigger questions like: "What is the future of the Earth?" "What do we mean by the flow of time?" "What are the possibilities for life on other planets?" If any of these ideas sound interesting to you, we would love for you to join us on our scientific journey.

Please stay tuned for talk schedules, as well as opportunities to visit the Northern Kentucky University planetarium and observatory this fall.



The Interruptions Were the Most Valuable Part

BY BILL GORDON

A long time ago, I taught Sunday School at St. John's: I taught the 5th & 6th grade classes for two years, continued with the same kids in the 7th and 8th grade classes, and repeated a second time, again with grades 5 – 8.

During those 8 years with two different groups of kids, I and my co-teachers planned lessons on topics we thought were important and would be interesting to the kids, like reading and interpreting stories from the Bible, learning what other religions believed, and visiting different churches, temples, and synagogues. As the kids came to know us better they would often interrupt our planned lessons to talk about issues currently important in their lives. I came to realize that these interruptions – where trusted adults were listening and talking with them, from a UU religious context, about things that mattered to them – were the most valuable part of Sunday School for the kids.

The new “quarterly” framework means adults will be present regularly for several weeks so the kids and adults can get to know and trust each other. The kids will have adults who will listen and talk with them about their current concerns and help them see how they can use the current theme and UU principles and traditions to approach their issues with confidence. Having the program before the service lets the kids be part of the service if they want, as part of the larger church community, rather than just being put off to the side.

Dr. Gordon will be facilitating the middle school and high school First Hour group this fall.



Welcome our new Music Director

St. John's is pleased to welcome our new Music Director, Josh Dufford.

A graduate of Otterbein University in 2016 and Bowling Green State University in 2019, Josh holds a Bachelors in Music Education and a Masters in Choral Conducting. Upon graduating from Otterbein, Josh taught general music and choir, grades K-8, in Westerville., Ohio. Most recently, he finished his studies at Bowling Green where he held a choral assistantship. Outside of his studies, Josh served as the Assistant Director for the Toledo Choral Society, as the Chancel Choir Director at the First Presbyterian Church of Bowling Green, and remotely as the Director of Music for All Shepherds Lutheran Church. Josh continues to serve on staff for The Cardinal Chorale, a touring ensemble comprised of high school and college singers. In August, Josh moved to Cincinnati to serve as the Director of Music at St. John's Unitarian Universalist Church in Clifton, and as the Associate Choral Director at Winton Woods High School.

Josh is extremely excited to form relationships and make music with the members of St. John's. Please introduce yourself to him, and be sure to mention whether or not you have any musical interests or talents!

Exploring my place in the universe

BY JOETTA PROST



When I sat down to write this article, my curiosity about the theme of “your place in the universe” prompted me to do a Google search. Believe it or not, the first thing to show up in my search results was a Survey Monkey webpage which begins with this introduction:

This is the "My Place in the Universe" survey that asks you to consider your existence, how you came to be, where you are going, your role in the scheme of things, the "Who am I," and the "Where am I?" as questions that exist for some of us if not all of us.

Wow...no wonder Rev. Mitra selected this theme. Lots to ponder! It is that “where am I?” question that has been most on my mind recently, as Kathy and I continue to settle into our new surroundings in Northern Kentucky. I try to view things through a social justice lens, and that question of “where am I?” – combined with some fortuitous nudges from the universe – has led me to study the racial history of our county.

Hearing Bryan Stephenson of the Equal Justice Institute speak at the 2017 UUA General Assembly was one of the events that sparked my recent examination of my place in the universe. Urging us to learn the national and local history of lynching and other racial violence against African Americans, Stevenson reminds us of the words of the poet Maya Angelou:

*History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, but if faced,
With courage, need not be lived again.*

Inspired by Stevenson, I decided to do something uncomfortable – I began studying the history of slavery and lynching in Northern Kentucky where I live. I have learned about many difficult topics.

First, of course, there is the reality of generations of enslavement of men, women and children. Then the years after the Civil War were rife with oppression, including lynching, other physical attacks, property theft and Jim Crow laws.

Experts say that racial violence was rampant in Northern Kentucky in the years following the War. In “my place in the universe” (Boone County, Kentucky) there were seven documented lynchings of African American men between 1876 and 1885, along with many other incidents of racially motivated violence against members of the African American community.

However, during my journey to understand this hideous history, I have encountered something else... the deep and loving message of Universalism was also present in Boone County! The First Universalist Church of Boone County began in 1847. By reading documents from 170 years ago, I came to understand that the Universalists in Boone County were proclaiming their message of the UNIVERSAL Love of God for all, at a time when predestination and salvation for only the chosen was the norm in other Christian faiths.

The belief in universal love explains why most Universalists were opposed to slavery and why Boone County church members served as conductors on the Underground Railroad, helping enslaved people escape across the Ohio River. From 1850-1852, the Boone County Universalist congregation was served by the Rev. Absalom Graves Gaines, a young minister who was opposed to slavery, despite having been born in a wealthy Boone County family that enslaved others. His beliefs led him to leave Kentucky and move to Maine and New York, where he had a long career serving Universalist congregations and teaching at a Universalist seminary.

In 1876, just as Reconstruction was ending, a second Universalist congregation was launched in the county seat, calling itself First Universalist Church of Burlington. That church was active until the early 1950's. During the late 1800's, members of the Universalist church resisted involvement in mob racial violence and were sometimes the target of violence themselves because of their beliefs. From historical documents, the location of the so-called “Hangman's Tree” in Boone County can be identified. This spot where multiple murders by lynching took place is at a corner I drive by every week. I learned from my local history librarian that the mobs intentionally converged at this tree because it stood on the property of Noah and Louisa Cravens – members of the Universalist Church who opposed lynching.

Bryan Stephenson says: “Avoiding honest conversation about this history has undermined our ability to build a nation where racial justice can be achieved.” I believe that understanding my place in the universe, no matter how complex, helps me be more centered in my faith and better prepared to take action to achieve racial justice.

First Hour is for Everyone!

BY ASHLEIGH
RHODES



As hopefully most of you know, we are adding a First Hour this fall, 9:30am to 10:30am. Our overall goal is that folks with a variety of needs, with or without children, can come to First Hour to learn, connect, and grow.

- **Nursery care:** The nursery area in Krolfifer will be open to ages 0-5 and staffed starting at 9:15.
- **Elementary class:** For approximately kindergarteners through 5th grade, Amy Monson and Ann Schuur will teach a class focused on our theme of Your Place in the Universe, starting September 8.
- **Teen class:** For middle and high school students, we will have a discussion and connection based group focused on our theme of Your Place in the Universe. See Dr. Bill Gordon's note in this newsletter on his approach and experience. Starts September 8.
- **For all ages - skill sharing and socializing:** Anyone of any age is encouraged to bring skills to teach or practice to the kitchen and Krolfifer: chess, board games, knitting, crochet, sewing, role playing games, puppet making... the sky's the limit. We will use the kitchen to share cooking skills and bake. Note: coordinate kitchen projects through Ashleigh Rhodes. All other projects can be drop in. If you need support or supplies, let us know!
- **For all ages - meditation and quiet space:** Gandhi downstairs will be open for meditation, yoga, and quiet contemplation.
- **For adults:** The Split-the-Plate partner presentation will happen on the first Sunday in the chapel. Other workshops will be scheduled throughout the church, both one-time and ongoing. For more information about programming, watch the E-News, or contact Ashleigh Rhodes or Marie Inanli.

IN BETWEEN

by Marc
Baskind



In between, the past, the future, is the now
We take deep breathes, the past is gone
Take deep breathes the future is the past
In between is not predictable
The future has begun and gone
Before we know what comes, it's passed

In between we live the new
But read the memories
Create the now as if it were the past
Nothing new can happen
In between can't last

In between is where we live
We fudge, we fake
We try to make it Life
In our minds—ain't so, can't see
In between is where we are
In between, and it will be





"Children's Worship": The Only Worship Some Parents Experience

BY ASHLEIGH RHODES

I was on official leave for four weeks this summer. I took advantage of my "break" (is it vacation while responsible for three children under 8?) to visit four other churches - two in Cincinnati, and two in Philadelphia.

I didn't listen to a single sermon - at best I got a few words here and there. That's part of the reality of being a parent of a two year old in a new place. She didn't want to be left alone in the nursery, even when there was one. Given that situation, my most enjoyable visit was to the church which was doing an all ages program very similar to what St. John's has been doing for the past year. My youngest was able to participate in the activities with my supervision, and I was able to watch what my older children were doing. I was also able to connect with other parents - one was also visiting and wanted to stay close to his child; another was a long time member, but also had a small one who wouldn't stay in the nursery.

In other churches I either spent my time trying to convince my child to stay in the nursery, or wandering around at loose ends basically waiting for my other children to finish doing "Sunday school." I realized that this is a common experience for parents, and an isolating one.

The reality is that for some first time visitors with children, attending the children's program may not only be the introduction to the church for their kids, but for the adults. Other parents have children who need ongoing support from a parent, so that the children's program is not just their first time experience: this is their main experience of church.

Before I went on leave I was starting to talk about what the children do during the service as "children's worship." I

wanted to stress that children need worshipful experiences appropriate to their needs - ritual, an opportunity for wonder, moments of calm and meditation, not just classes.

My visits also convinced me that we need to be thoughtful about meeting the needs for worship of those adults joining us, as well - both volunteers and parents who are attached to a child in the program. We have stressed that children of any age are welcome in the sanctuary, and have made efforts to create a child friendly space in the chapel. The other half of those efforts is to recognize that some adults will be joining our children's program, and they need to feel welcomed, comfortable, and valuable, and *also* that they are experiencing worship - while we provide a worship experience appropriate to the needs of children.



On working with the kids at St. John's

by Alicia Rosselot

I was taught that gratitude is an action word, and the best way to practice gratitude is by actively giving back so it is a way for me to share my talent and feel a part of my church.

Getting to know the children and families better is an additional bonus - it helps me feel a part of a community and widens my community circle.

I really like the flexibility of first hour and how it can morph into different things for different people. I love cooking with kids and think it would be fun to have them be a part of preparing the 'snacks' for after church. Making cinnamon rolls or cookies for coffee hour would be a hoot!



Begin with Theology, End with Team Meetings

BY REV. MITRA JAFARZADEH

In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, we welcome a great diversity of beliefs and ways of being in the world. This is not a passive welcoming, but an active affirmation that the only way to be whole and holy is to embrace the unending diversity of humanity for all of life's experiences point us towards what is real and good.

We say things like, "No truth emerges, except in dialog."

And, "We need not think alike to love alike."

We put together teams of people to work on projects that realize our values in the world.

How does any of this work in the way we do church together?

The program team at St. John's consists of me, Marie, and Ashleigh. Together we share the work of programming for Religious Life. This is a new-ish staff team model. Yes, we have had two people in the role of Director of Religious Education before, but now we are opening the position to a wider understanding of what goes into inviting people into community and nurturing each other in faith. All of us have a joyful obligation to support one another along our spiritual paths. Having a full team of professionals help with the journey models the collaboration we hope to empower throughout the congregation.

The team meets together on Tuesday mornings and we share an email address. If you have a program idea for the church, please send it to:
programming@stjohnsuu.org

This helps all of us to stay on the same page. We all share the work, though we have different primary responsibilities.

Ashleigh is primarily responsible for children and youth while Marie has responsibilities for adult programs and OWL. These walls between these categories are permeable. I expect Ashleigh to help with adult programs from time to time and Marie to help with the kids. And I am available to help where needed. You can help us by using the "programming" email and understanding that sometimes a question may need to wait until after the next Tuesday meeting before being answered.

Music is an essential part of life in church. Our Music Director, Josh, cannot meet on Tuesday mornings. Once a month we meet on the weekend, typically after church on Sunday, to work on integrating music into all our offerings. Josh was hired to help with music for all the church. Over the coming year, we will be looking for ways to integrate music into the life of our church and the wider community.

We are a people who say that it matters THAT we are together and it matters HOW we are together. Your staff team endeavors to work collaboratively and efficiently with respect for each other's time and natural inclinations. If we all bring our joy to the task, find more joy in the task, we will better serve the church and together, we will serve the world.

See you Sunday!-
Rev. Mitra



Where to Find the Minister?

Rev. Mitra is available by appointment and for emergency pastoral care.

Please contact her as follows:

Call the office: **513-961-1938**

Call or text **513-503-8600**

Email: minister@stjohnsuu.org

Office Hours:

Monday is by appointment.

Tuesday: 10:00 – 2:00

Wednesday: 1:00 – 7:00

Thursday: 10:00 – 2:00

Friday is off for reading and writing.

Saturday is by appointment.

Sunday First Hour I will be offering an informal “Minister’s round table” and an occasional book / bible study.

(I encourage you to attend the information sessions about our split the plate partners held on the first Sunday of each month in the chapel.)

With Love and Blessings,
Rev. Mitra

