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TO THE GLORY OF LIFE

Dear Friends,

Christmas comes with every ending of the year. And with Christmas comes the stories of how something begins in the midst of an end. A star shines through the darkness. Some people without hope find some. Something extraordinary emerges within some very ordinary lives. People who had no room in their world find some. The poor with nothing for themselves find something to give others. Christmas comes. With its reminders how to prepare for something new. Something forgotten. Something unexpected.

Christmas comes. With the message that hope and wonder are never lost—simply laying unnoticed under distractions and desires. We must simply be willing to stand amidst the mundane—even the pain—and listen for joy’s proclamation.

What does joy’s proclamation sound like? How will we know when we hear it?

It’s hard in our times to hold out for hope—to buck the trend of cynicism which abounds in hard times. Especially for any of us who have been disappointed before. Especially for any of us who recognize the footprints of disappointment.

For some of us, it becomes hard to don the whimsy and wonder of a child every December just because the calendar says it’s Christmas and we should be happy. The shine is off the holiday hoopla. We’ve become accustomed to the decking of the halls, dawning of the gay apparel and we’re not always ready to join in step with the season to be jolly.

I try to remember not to feel guilty if the joy and hope are not always obvious. For millions of people it isn’t. It wasn’t for our Puritan forebears who started this country (who didn’t celebrate Christmas). It wasn’t always obvious for early Christians. It certainly wasn’t obvious to

Mary and Joseph who, like the rest of us, were simply working as hard as they could, doing their best to make things work out. It’s just not always easy to notice hope when we are wading through our holiday to-do list.

When I recognize this feeling in others—or myself—I remember back to a story told along time ago by Unitarian minister, Clarke Wells, about what helped him hear joy’s proclamation. This is what he says:

“Several years ago and shortly after twilight our 3½-year-old tried to gain his parents, attention to a shining star. The parents were busy with time and schedules, the irritabilities of the day and other worthy preoccupations. ‘Yes, yes, we see the star—now I’m busy! Don’t bother me.’

“On hearing this, the young one launched through the porch door, fixed us with a fiery gaze and said, ‘You be glad at that star!’

“I will not forget the incident or his perfect words. It was one of those rare moments when you get everything you need for the good of your soul - reprimand, disclosure and blessing. It was especially good for me, that surprising moment, because I am one who responds automatically and negatively to the usual exhortations to pause-and-be-more-appreciative-of-life-unquote. Fortunately, I was caught grandly off guard.

“There is a notion, with some truth in it, that we cannot command joy, happiness, appreciation, fulfillment. We do not engineer the seasons of the soul or enjoy the quality of mood on another, and yet I do believe there is right and wisdom in that imperative declaration—you be glad at that star!”

In every person, through every time in every place there is an ‘un-sure-ness’ about how everything will work out. And our penchant to work harder to make sure it will sometimes keeps us from seeing how it will. But this season is all about coming across



Happenings

COOL YULE BAKE SALE FUNDRAISER:

On December 17th there will be a bake sale fund raiser before and after service for the air conditioner needed for UUMAN. Please contact Julie Lepp at jclepp@comcast.net or 678-612-4296 if you'd like to contribute baked goods or volunteer at the table.

Happenings

Thursday Evening Potluck

Thursday evenings at around 6-6:30 people have been arriving at UUMAN for a weekly pot luck, fun and fellowship. Quite often there are gatherings that happen afterward which give people a chance to talk, learn, think, grow or experience something new. Add to that the kind of culinary diversity you'd expect from our sometimes far-flung pot-luckers, and you just never know what kind of delights you'll be able to sample. So come and indulge!

the child whose ability to see things anew changes our world. The child who asks us to stop and LOOK.

Remember the old Dick and Jane books from so long ago? And the biggest word: LOOK. May we take that chance this year. LOOK up at the sky. LOOK at each other. LOOK into our heart. And if the stories are true, we may find hope and wonder and joy in where we are headed.

To the Glory of Life.

From the (new) Editor

A funny thing happened when I started editing my first-ever edition of the UUMAN Times (that'd be the one you're reading now). As a template for the new issue, I happened to open a prior month that had a "Message from the Editor" authored by my predecessor, who has a real name but will be referred to hereafter as "That Guy."

That Guy knew what he was doing, I could tell. He'd given a great deal of thought to the various information delivery systems available to UUMANites—this message board, that email list, our website, the Order of Worship—and he contrasted those media with the newsletter. That Guy knew where the newsletter fit into the great scheme of things.

Whereas, I don't really pretend to know what That Guy knows. All I know is I've done a bunch of newsletters of one sort or another in my personal and professional life and I figured, what's one more? It's what my schedule allows me to volunteer to the greater glory that is UUMAN, and as such, I'll make this modest pledge:

I'll try to get these puppies to bed in a timely fashion. Generally, so long as you've sent your submissions to me by the 20th of the month preceding, I'll do my level best to include your announcements, stories, confessionals, advertisements, columns, or poetry.

Email is the same as before: newsletter@uuman.org – or, just pull me aside next time you see me in service, or at a potluck, or some other event. Thanks!

–Dirk Bender

Dear Friends

As my time at UUMAN comes to an end I find myself saddened with the parting, but, nonetheless, grateful to all of you who have made my work at UUMAN so rewarding. You are an incredibly warm and generous congregation and it has been my utmost pleasure to work with you and serve among you. Thank you for all you have given me. I look forward to hearing great things about UUMAN in the years to come.

Again, thank you! Please keep in touch. My personal e-mail is joanarmstrong@mindspring.com. My last official day is Friday, December 8, 2006.

With my sincere best wishes and respect,
Joan



Making Someone's Day, One Letter at a Time: UU Prison Pen Pal Ministry

I hate it when I do volunteer work and I'm not really needed.

Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF) advertised their Prison Pen Pal Ministry in UU World magazine. "Easy," I thought, "I'll email the minister who runs the program and wait for my first letter." But the application stumped me; would I rule out a pen pal with certain offenses? Which ones? It wasn't so simple to answer.

Did I want a relationship with a person convicted or murder? Rape? Child abuse?

Eventually, I completed the application and got a pen pal. Steve is a young white man incarcerated in Iowa. He has not told me his offense because he's concerned I might judge him. He sends me drawings and cards and tells me a bit about his life, and I am absolutely thrilled when I get a letter from him.

Writing to Steve is challenging. At first I had to ask: How much do I really want him to know about my life? Do I want him to know where I live, about my children, my age, how I look, what I do for a living? These are inconsequential questions when writing to someone known, but since I am, at least initially, writing to a stranger with a felony conviction, the CLF encourages me to think carefully about how much I want to divulge. And if those topics are off limits (at least for now), what the heck do I write about?

Note: Prisoners mail their letters to the CLF office, then CLF mails them to free-world pen pals so addresses are kept confidential.

Second, should I rave about the football game I attended, great restaurant meals, the exciting vacation I took when I know that he is locked in a cell? It makes you think.

Third, how do I handle it when he asks me to visit, for my phone number and money to make phone calls, if I know any women in their 20s who would write to him? Do I ignore the requests or honestly tell him no? (I've done both.)

I thought I became a pen pal to do a good deed; act for someone else's benefit not my own. But I'm finding myself challenged to grow all along the way. How do I balance caution with open-heartedness? How do I stay positive and sane while becoming personally aware of awful realities? Writing to Steve requires me to stay awake, make clear choices, and tell the truth with compassion.

It is the *most satisfying* volunteering I've ever done. It makes my heart feel good. It moves me beyond my comfort zone. I know the difference my letters make in his life because he tells me, and writes back immediately.

There are always more prisoners than free-world pen-pals so I encourage you to apply to CLF Prison Letter Writing Ministry. You will never wonder if you are really needed. You will know you are making a difference.....in someone else's life and your own.

To learn more, contact: Chaplain Pat (Rev. Patty Franz), Ministries for CLF prisoner members, UU Church of the Larger Fellowship, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108, phone 617.948.6167; fax 617-523-4123; email PrisMin@clfuu.org.

UUMAN TIMES

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We welcome all types of
newsletter submissions.
Please send us your articles,
editorials, announcements,
poetry, creative writing, or
anything else! Please send an
email to our newsletter
editor, at
newsletter@uuman.org with
any questions.



UUMANTIMES is the monthly newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Metro Atlanta North Congregation.

Minister's Office Hours

Greg wants a chance to speak with everyone at UUMAN. Although he doesn't have specific office hours, he is available to meet with people every day of the week, except Fridays, at a wide variety of times. You are welcome to call him between 8 a.m. and 10 p.m. at 770.754.5848 to make an appointment. (In case of emergency, you are encouraged to call 678.849.4844 any time of day or night).

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.uuman.org



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11420 Crabapple Road
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Get up-to-date information!
Sign up now and
join UUMAN
@ www.uuman.org.

Worship Schedule

December 3, 2006

Ghosts of Religions Past

Speaker: Randy Blasch; Worship Associate: Suzanne Rezelman

As Christmas approaches, we explore our (sometimes mixed) relationship with religion past, present, and future.

December 10, 2006

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Bethlehem

Speaker: Rev. Greg Ward; Worship Associate: Dave Hudson

Have you ever been part of something where it was trouble from the word, 'god?' Where it seemed like every step of the way you were running into angels, shepherds, innkeepers, kings, wise men, etc, all with no regard for your needs? When we want to understand why we feel conflict around Christmas, the story of Mary and Joseph's journey is our story as well.

December 17, 2006

Winter Solstice: A Celebration of Light

Speaker: Julie Lepp; Worship Associate: Don Rizzo

Our winter solstice celebration explores a variety of sacred traditions, allowing us to participate and learn about other ways of approaching this holiday season..

December 24, 2006

For Unto You a Child is Born

Speaker: Rev. Greg Ward; Worship Associate: Suzanne Rezelman

Spiritual awakening is something we have all tried to avoid or dismiss, but is also undeniable. It comes down to a contest of wills between our need for stability and the world's need to unfold and reveal truths in new ways—and we lose every time. How is the world born new in us and how do we play a role in announcing to the world?

December 24, 2006

Christmas Eve Family Service (4:30 pm)

Speaker: Rev. Greg Ward; Worship Associate: Randy Blasch

Please join us in a family-friendly celebration of the Christmas songs and stories we love.

December 24, 2006

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service (7:00 pm)

Speaker: Rev. Greg Ward; Worship Associate: Cliff Brown

This service combines lessons and carols, our Six Sources of Wisdom as UUs, and the understanding that Christmas is the celebration of the realization that something profound can be born in us. Each of us are different and may look at the world through a different lens – but the idea that we still have something new we are called to learn and discover is something we can rely on.

December 31, 2006

Beyond Guilt and Shame – New Life for a New Year

Speaker: Dave Hudson; Worship Associate: Cliff Brown

As we prepare for the New Year, we resolve to eat less, to exercise more, to spend more time with our children or spouses or parents, to be more thoughtful, to be more organized. We struggle to meet these objectives and we berate ourselves for our failures. Perhaps we might have more success—and find more satisfaction—in examining our lives in bigger, or deeper, ways.

