

# Good Gnus

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Jonesboro, AR



Betty Stafford, editor

870-935-0007

[nestafford@sbcglobal.net](mailto:nestafford@sbcglobal.net)

December 2009

"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.  
If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

—The Dalai Lama

## Service Calendar

The Fellowship meets at Temple Israel, 203 W. Oak Ave., Jonesboro. Services 10:00 a.m. Social time 10:45 a.m. Children's Religious Education & Adult Forum 11:00 a.m.

### December 6

Make ready for our **Winter Celebration Party**, beginning at **4 pm**. **Lora Nix and Holly Bowen** are coordinating the festivities with a snowman theme. And we will be enjoying our **Christmas Pot Luck** this afternoon.

### December 13

**Arlene Dormio** will be the presenter this day.

Please remember **peanut butter** and other non-perishable foods for your neighbors at the Food Pantry.

### December 20

**Karen Brown** will organize a Reader's Theater exploring the figure of Dickens' memorable Ebenezer Scrooge. If you'd like to participate by reading a part, let Karen know.

### December 27

This year's **Fire Communion** will be coordinated by **Lora Nix**. This UU ritual permits us to "let go" of the past and start fresh for the new year. If you'd like to participate, you will be asked to write down on a slip of paper something you want to get rid of, and you will toss that slip into the fire and watch it go up in smoke.

This is **Dessert Night** for Salvation Army residents, coordinated by Rick Bowen.

## A Prayer of Hope and Peace

*We celebrate a new beginning, a new light  
shining in the dark,*

*A time of redemption and hope realized.*

*Let it be so! O, let it be so!*

*May we all, everyone of us, strive to be the  
change we want in the world, to move for-  
ward in love, to work together, to create a  
world of possibility.*

*May we allow each other the freedom to succeed  
and the comfort to fail.*

*May peace spread through our hearts and minds.*

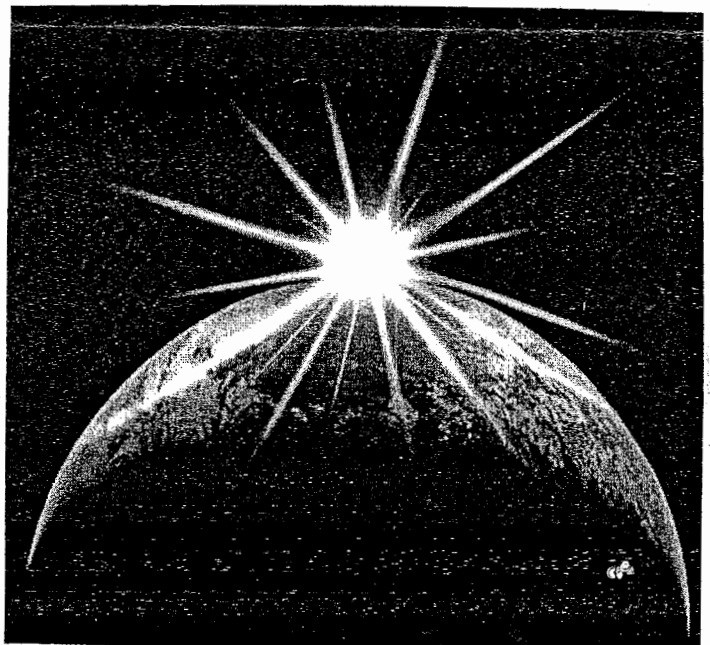
*May peace spread through our families and  
friends.*

*May peace spread through our towns and  
nations.*

*May peace spread throughout the world.*

*May we find the courage to spread this peace, to  
share this love, and to create this world anew.*

—Denis McGilvray



## Justice for All

The UU Service Committee invites a Guest to our tables this season. UUSC translates our support into tangible projects to advance human rights:

**\$30** pays for part of a multilingual brochure for Boston residents about the Color of Water campaign to adopt a human right to water there.

**\$40** buys materials for a woman in Northern Uganda to make her own groundnut sheller, which helps to reduce women's workloads and generates needed income for families, as residents return home after more than 20 years of war.

**\$65** pays for a small business loan for a displaced woman in Kenya. Kakamega Grassroots Initiative organizes women displaced by the 2008 electoral violence into groups of 20 and provides them with training and small business loans. The repayment rate is very high, and the first group of recipients is now on their second loans.

**\$66** pays for door-to-door campaigning in Soweto, South Africa, to educate people about their human right to water, as guaranteed by their constitution, and helps to carry out inspections by residents of municipal water services.

Service Committee membership awards appear in the current issue of *The World*. The Jonesboro Fellowship was recognized as a **Vision of Justice Banner Society**, honoring congregations in which 50-75% of congregants are UUSC members.

Our Guests will be gathered in January 10<sup>th</sup>. Please be generous.

## Some Eco-Friendly Holiday Tips

- Look for new LED lights; they use less electricity, burn brighter, and are more durable. A timer on those lights gives additional savings.
- Look for holiday cards printed on re-cycled paper, or purchase cards that raise awareness about causes you support, such as UUSC, UNICEF, the National Wildlife Federation.
- Wrapping paper often cannot be recycled. Make your own by stenciling or decorating plain recyclable paper. Use evergreen or holly instead of ribbon.
- Choose a real tree over an artificial one. Artificial trees are made from PVC, plastic, and other nonbiodegradable materials. If convenient, buy the tree from a tree farm.

We can all help the environment, a gift everyone appreciates.



## The Search for Meaning

I am often asked what UUs do about the Christmas holidays. We aren't Christians, but we also aren't not Christian. What do we do with traditional carols, the nativity story, the Christ child? Like so many people in our modern times, we take parts of the past and parts of the present, and we make of Christmas something that is meaningful in the here and now.

Some see the Christmas story as only a myth. Others believe the story has true elements, but we can't be sure what is literally true. And some don't care whether the story is literally true. But the Christmas story does contain a deep religious, mythical, or metaphorical truth. It's about a promise, about hope, about the power of vulnerability. It's about patience and perseverance and the ability to see a miracle when one presents itself to you. A child is born in difficult circumstances, and that child changes the world forever. It's a story of hope and possibility, a story our battered world needs so badly. That child isn't superhuman, nor can he cure the world. But that child carries a message to help others live better lives in service.

The message of Christmas is not that some grand king or hero saves the world from its ills, rather that each of us has the Christ child inside us and we can give birth to it; we can be reborn into it, day by day. We do this when we live beyond ourselves. We do this when we live for the world and its people.

So what do we do about Christmas? We sing the carols and the words mean something different to each of us. We read the Scriptures, and each of us hears them in a different way.

The biggest truth is that anyone can live out the promise of that child. No one ever expected anything to come out of Nazareth, but that's where the promise came from. We're all in Nazareth, which means we all have the same possibilities and the same promise.

—Rev. Krista Taves, Emerson Chapel  
Ellisville, MO

## Acceptance of One Another

The chestnut tree that diarist Anne Frank viewed daily from her Amsterdam hiding place during WW II will take root in Little Rock. Two Little Rock entities participated in a contest held by the Anne Frank Center USA for homes for saplings from the tree. Both were successful. One will go to the William J. Clinton Foundation for planting at the presidential center. The Foundation was cited by the Frank Center for its work for social justice. The other will go to Central High School for planting near trees on campus that bore witness to the school's historic desegregation in 1957. Eleven sites were chosen for symbolism in the fight against intolerance.

The saplings are currently in a Dutch nursery and will be shipped to the U.S. by the end of the year, after which they will be quarantined for two years before transplanting.

—Arkansas Times, 10/22/09

This is a path of letting go  
So there will be room to live.

If we hold on to our opinions,  
Our minds will become dull and useless.  
Let go of opinions.

If we hold on to possessions,  
We will always be at risk.  
Let go of possessions.

If we hold on to ego,  
We will continue to suffer.  
Let go of ego.

Working without thought of praise or blame  
is the way of true contentment.

This is a path of letting go  
So there will be room to live.

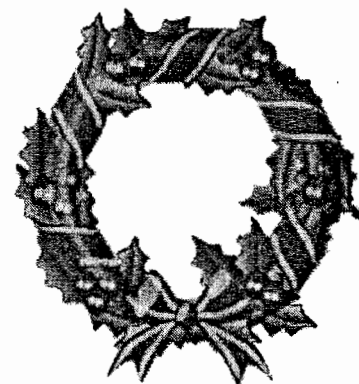
—from the Tao Te Ching

## World Community

Marjorie Rosen, in her book *Boom Town: How Wal-Mart Transformed an All-American Town into an International Community* (2009), describes Bentonville, AR, as a microcosm of America's social, political and cultural changes. Rosen found an initial influx of Jews, who migrated to the Benton County area to work in Wal-Mart's home office, followed by growing groups of Hindus, Muslims, Laotians, Hispanics, and Marshall Islanders. In a single generation "these newcomers have transformed Bentonville from a rural town of 2,900 white Christians to a metropolis of 30,000 people of every color and faith."

Not that resentment to this transformation isn't also present. The mayor of Rogers has been openly hostile toward undocumented workers and is quoted in the book as saying "If you're trying to get away from something, then why are you so adamant about re-creating that culture here?" Stories of resistance toward the influx of other cultures exist alongside stories of success, such as Fadil Bayyari, a Palestinian immigrant who became a multimillionaire contractor. Bayyari is helping build Temple Shalom, the first synagogue in Fayetteville, by contributing free labor and materials. A ground blessing for the Temple took place in October 2007. The author concludes that without Wal-Mart, Bentonville "would most likely be a white, Christian, emphatically homogenous Ozarks town of little distinction."

—Susannah Patton, *Arkansas Business*, 10/26/09



# Happy Holidays

## A Responsible Search for Truth

*E.T. phone Rome.* Four hundred years after it locked up Galileo for challenging the view that the Earth was the center of the universe, the Vatican in November hosted a conference of experts to study the possibility of extraterrestrial alien life and its implications for the Catholic Church. Thirty scientists (including non-Catholics) gathered for the five-day meeting. Among them were astronomers, physicists, biologists, and other experts from the U.S., France, Britain, Switzerland, Italy, and Chile, discussing the budding field of “astrobiology,” the study of the origin of life and its existence elsewhere in the cosmos, “whether sentient life forms exist on other worlds.” The views of the Church of Rome have shifted radically through the centuries since 1600, when Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake as a heretic for speculating, among other ideas, that other worlds could be inhabited.

Associated Press, 11/11/09

## Our Interdependent Web

Tom Tomich, agricultural economist and director of the Agricultural Sustainability Institute at the University of California, Davis, believes global sustainability begins with food. Sustainability involves providing basic needs for healthy living for billions of people on the planet now, and in the future as the population grows. Tomich views agriculture as a “tangible lens” for sustainability issues because we all eat food. Meeting the food needs of our whole planet is a matter of economics, environmental impacts, and food distribution.

What does it take to make a slice of the bread you find in a store? —fertilizing the growing wheat, cultivating the fields, transporting the wheat, processing it into flour, and distributing it to stores. Each step takes lots of fossil energy, a major driver of climate change. Agriculture, through production and related deforestation, is believed responsible for a third of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions. Besides its environmental impact, food sustainability presents economic challenges. In percentage of income, Americans spend less on food than anyone on the planet, ever — only \$10 of every \$100 earned. But, even in the U.S., large numbers of people, including children, don’t have the means to eat well, lacking access to enough healthy food. Why? Partly because of poverty and partly because of the relationship between poverty and communities —e.g., whether neighborhoods have grocery stores, whether those stores stock healthy food, and whether there’s public transportation to get to those grocery stores.

Globally the billion or so people who are not getting enough to eat don’t have enough income, or they’re producing only enough food to have the minimum threshold of a healthy life. This is a sustainability challenge as well.

Tomich is also concerned about the amount of food, and therefore the amount of energy, wasted by wasting food. We throw out that energy and overlook our fossil fuel dependence and the greenhouse gases we emit. The food puzzle is made up of many pieces, and the puzzle must be broken down through the whole cycle.

—from Lindsay Patterson  
*Earth & Sky*, 11/23/09

## DOONESBURY

