



Our winter forsythia.

Winter Journal

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork



We are a spiritual community.

Teaching our Children

We invite the children of our East End community to the UU's RE discovery program! Our group, staffed by two long-experienced teachers, meets each Sunday during the UU service. Just come with your children by 10:30, and while you attend the service, learning more deeply about yourself, your community and your world, the children will be learning in their own way. A child's play is his or her work, and as we approach some of the deep questions of human life, we don't lose sight of having fun.

Our tools and methods work with the children's own creativity, their love of movement, song, rhythm, art, and story. Outdoors we have the woods and the garden. We have the UU thoughtfully-developed curricula to draw upon, and we have our own life and teaching experience as well.

Our program aims to bring the children again and again to the awareness they are born with: of the interconnectedness and unity of all life, and of their own ability to be active and creative even as they are grounded and at rest in their own center. We encourage the good qualities: tolerance, patience, compassion, respect, courage and honesty; an open approach to the mystery that surrounds and fills us all.

We'd love to have a group of parents to discuss with us their needs and aspirations for their children. We wish to allow a space for community to grow – among children and parents and others who care about children, here in the midst of our larger community by the sea.

We teach because we love children. We don't press dogma onto kids; our teaching style allows children to explore their moral truths. It's about parting the curtains and letting the light shine on common issues children face. There is a beauty and a joy to learning about life lessons within a group. The children learn that they are not alone, and can build relationships with each other based on kindness and a moral fun. They also learn that they may

face challenges similar to those of their young neighbors, and can unite in a positive way.

Life lessons are important at every age. They're where we gain our moral backbone to give us strength throughout life. They also give us a sense of place within humanity as a whole. There are some universal truths, and these we explore within the children's classes. Sometimes lessons are about empathy and compassion for other beings. Other times, they are about respecting the world around us and the rights of others, remembering what is important to us, or finding the courage to be different or stand up for what we think is right. And if the day calls for it, sometimes a lesson is about appreciating the earth with a discovery walk or outdoor exercise, or becoming grounded within ourselves.

We encourage you to bring your children, nieces and nephews and grandchildren to help build a positive kid community. We strive to make our lessons enjoyable, and adapt them to fit the personality of the group.



**Tina Curran holds a Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education and taught preschoolers for many years, as well as running daycare in NYC high schools for teen mothers and their infant and toddler children. She has been a teacher of Tai*

Chi and Qigong (including for children) for more than thirty years.

Christine Giordano is a former high school teacher, and is certified to teach K-12.



From our Minister

**“Dance is the hidden language of the soul”
— Martha Graham**



Lately, my life has been presenting me with the theme of dancing. Email reminders that it is Alvin Ailey dance season; Facebook posts of little children dancing in all their little-children-adorableness; and this morning, a video that I have seen before, of the Mistake Waltz.* I wonder if you have seen it? The clip is a short excerpt from Jerome Robbins' comedy ballet, *The Concert*. Six dancers perform a ballet with mistake after mistake. First one dancer is out of place. Another goes right when she should be going left. One dancer seems to be dancing in her own little show. One misses her cue altogether. It's hilarious—but also beautiful, in part because it's obvious that this is all part of the show. But sometimes in life it can seem as if we are dancing out of step, and that doesn't feel hilarious. It can feel frustrating and maybe a little humiliating. My goal for this winter is to embrace the dance: to embrace the dance of life, and especially to embrace the dance of church life.

Our Sunday morning experience can be like a finely choreographed dance. We all have a role to play. On Sunday morning, our *Worship Associates* set up our sanctuary, working with Hilda to set up chairs and arranging our pulpit, chalice, candles, and sound system. Our *greeters* welcome everyone with a friendly smile. Our *welcome table volunteers* orient newcomers to the service with a name-tag, an invitation to sign our guest book, and an-

swer any questions they might have. Our *hospitality team* prepares coffee and sets out snacks—staying late to wash dishes and to tidy the kitchen—making sure that it is as clean when they leave as it was when they arrived. Our *religious educators* are prepared each week to lead our children in their own activities for spiritual growth and development. It is a dance that involves lots of people. Hopefully, we are all flowing together to the same music, so that the Sunday morning experience is seamlessly choreographed. For things to work, we each have to do our part. We may all have different roles—that's fine. Some of us are called to work in the kitchen, while others have no idea how to set a table. Some of us are called to welcome old friends and newcomers alike, while others cringe at the idea of having to smile and shake hands. The point is that we each are important to the dance; even if, occasionally, that means stepping into a role that is unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable at first.

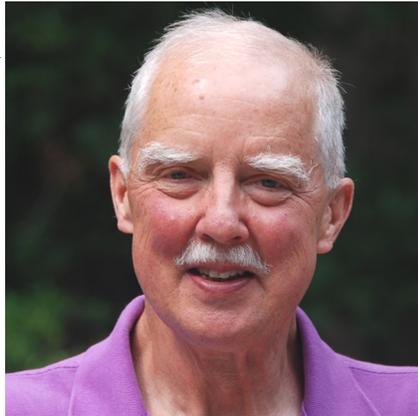
This is the other thing about dancing. When it's joyous, it doesn't really matter if we miss a step, as long as we keep dancing. The thing about dance is that, at some point, it involves letting go. It entails handing over some control to a partner, or a team so that we can dance together. It requires trying something that might make us look or feel weird or silly. It demands opening up to the music—the rhythm of the world around us—so that we can go with the flow. The joy of dancing is not in the perfect ballet. The joy of dancing is in the letting go and opening up to the world around us—on Sunday morning and beyond. *This, from someone who loves to dance, but who does not dance in public—lest I look silly or ridiculous.*

My resolution this year is to enjoy the dance: to be open to the music around me; to move my wallflower self closer to the center; to engage more fully with the world around me. And to, maybe, try something a little bit different this year.

*You can find this video on the UUCSF Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Unitarian-Universalist-Congregation-of-the-South-Fork>

The Ties that Bind

In our Winter issue of *UU World*, Cheryl M. Walker, a UU minister in Wilmington, North Carolina, describes why she left the Muslim community of her youth to join a Unitarian Universalist congregation. She tells us that the strength of her Muslim community in Harlem stemmed from their willingness to act as a collective whole in their dress, their ritual and their institutions.



However, it was that very conformity, an intolerance for breaking the rules that drove her to search for a community which gave more respect to a member's individuality. Ultimately and not surprisingly, she found Unitarian Universalism. What other religion maintains as a principle the "respect for each individual's search for truth and meaning?"

In the many years since then she has flourished as a UU. However, as a UU minister she has come to see that the very principle which attracted her to us contains a subtle risk. When carried too far we can become "merely a group of individuals sharing a common space." Each of us needs to be "willing to give up some of their identity as an individual."

The point of her article was to ask us for more room in our predominately white community for people of color, but the comparison of the Muslim community she remembers to Unitarian Universalism helped me understand the importance of the rituals and behavior that bind UUs together.

Not infrequently friends have told me they are spiritual, but they choose not to join us because they are not religious. What makes us religious? Are they balking at lighting the chalice, the call to worship, joys and concerns, the hymns we enjoy singing together, or perhaps our coffee hour? Those of us who were raised in a different church would argue that the Christian communion, the Doxology and the Apostles' Creed are far more religious than the simple practices of our service. But perhaps for

someone raised with little or no religion our rituals could seem as religious as incense, smoke and mirrors.

What I understand now, thanks to Walker's article, is the *function* these rituals play. For me they bind us together emotionally as a community. Rather than diluting my sense of personal identity, they fortify it. In these words and actions I say, "I am not alone in this universe. I stand together with this community, in this country, in this world of humanity."

We are more than good friends, or a self-improvement meeting, or a social action organization. We are a spiritual community, and surely our rituals help to make the experience work.

Mark Potter

At The Airport

Veiled, secured in the grip of her world
even in the airport,
an oasis of time
in her black shroud.

Against the will of history,
a furtive glimmer sparks her eye
when she sees me
in my
black stretch dance pants
and my high-heeled strut,

and as I pause with my carry-on bag
and my unimaginable choices,
I wonder what tidal waters stir in her
sitting there so still,
a secret pool,
surrounded by a universe
of desert.

Carolyn Bistran
East End Poetry Reading at the UUCSF

Stumbling into the conference on Syria: A synopsis from your Sag Harbor Man on the Ground

The hotel I normally stay at in Riyadh, the Intercontinental, was fully booked for my first several days here. When I moved in last night I found out why: Most of the Syrian delegates in the conference are lodged here. When I arrived at the hotel I found the most stringent security I have ever seen, with police cars stopping traffic a block away. I had to walk partly to the hotel since taxis were not allowed in. I could enter the lobby, via intensive physical screening, only after hotel staff had vouched for me. I was given a special pass to move around. Room service is delayed so security can check it. Presumably I have no poison or bombs in my tray of lamb kebbs. I am apparently one of very few non-conference guests, since I've been staying here on and off since the 1980s. I guess the hotel trusted me.

Of course, yours truly wasn't going to miss this opportunity to meet and greet: *The Accidental Correspondent*. After I dropped off my bags I went back to the lobby. It was buzzing with delegates sitting at various tables drinking coffee and schmoozing, post-conference. I strategically plopped myself in an empty chair next to some clearly Syrian men and waited for a break to ask them how it was going. I then introduced myself as an American who had studied at the University of Damascus.

As it turned out, I was sitting next to Nizar Al-Haraki, the opposition leader who's been recognized as the Syrian Ambassador by the Gulf States. He was with two members of the National Coalition of Revolution and Opposition Forces (a mouthful). We shared stories of Syria. I asked them how the conference had gone. I sensed the same tone from most people I spoke with, that progress had been made uniting the various opposition forces but

that the real work lay ahead.

I introduced myself to the Norwegian Ambassador, Rolf Hansen, when I heard who he was, sharing how proud I was, Son of Odin, on Norway's tireless efforts to bring peace to the region. He, like the other non-Syrians, did not participate in the conference but was pumping delegates for their views. Rolf said that he was most impressed by the diversity of the assembled. Such a coalition would give the Syrian government a real counterpart to negotiate with.

I had read criticism of the conference for ignoring Assad's supporters, who are backed by Russia and Iran, as well as the absence of a key Sunni Islamist group, Ahrar Ash-Sham. But then a Syrian journalist I was chatting with pointed out a representative from the Islamist group, so at least some of them showed up.

I ended up meeting the American representative, Mike Ratney, by accident, and he thought I was photographing him speaking with some Syrians (it was the opposite direction). He asked me to stop. I pointed out that

no one had mentioned photography but I apologized nonetheless. I realized that I recognized him from somewhere – Jerusalem it turned out – and struck up a conversation. He turned out to be quite nice, perhaps once he realized I wasn't some shifty journalist. He also seemed optimistic but clearly concerned about Russia's intentions. The next step is to seek UN recognition of this group as a legitimate partner, which would have GCC, US, and European support, and then schedule a meeting with the Syrian government, or regime as the folks here would say. The delegates seemed hopeful for a meeting in February.

One gentleman from Hamas said that a solution might be to start on a regional basis, from the ground up, to create limited cease fires and islands of peace. This is essentially what we were working with in Libya on our project to strengthen the municipalities, before things fell apart. Another pointed out that a key reason for Syria's collapse is that



the domestic struggles that emerged during the Arab Spring evolved into a proxy war among international powers. If we cannot get the Russians, Iranians, Americans, Europeans, Saudis, and Turks to agree to a solution that satisfies each of their respective interests, peace will be elusive.

Meanwhile, poor Syria suffers in the middle, its survivors fleeing in droves as if from a burning building.

In any case it is always good to talk, and most seemed happy that at least this subset of the Syrian puzzle pieces were able to coalesce. I am pretty unhappy with the Saudis for their military intervention in Yemen (funded and armed by the Americans) but at least this is a step toward peace in their neighbor to the north.

At one point I sat next to an older gentleman who had also studied at the University of Damascus, several years before I had (so a really old man). He was from Aleppo (Halab), the fabled Ottoman city on the Silk Road in northern Syria. I asked him how Old Aleppo was doing – it is one of the most beautiful cities in the Middle East. He started to say, so much has been destroyed but his voice choked and his eyes filled with tears. I could only think of responding with the expression, *'Rabbina yasahhalkum'*, *May our Lord make things easier for you.*

I felt heartbroken. I needed no reminder of how important it is for the angry men to put away their violent toys and learn to use their words.

May it be so.

Ken Dorph

Committee on Ministry

Recently, our Committee on Ministry has been reimagined. Our recent bylaws expand the purpose of the Committee on Ministry to attend to all of the congregation's shared ministries. The members are Ken Dorph, Pat Gorman, and Martha Potter

The committee's guide is the congregation Mission Statement. They act as advisory group, whose goal is to generate an overview of the life and health of the congregation based on our Mission Statement. They will work with existing committees to determine what is working, and what changes can better serve the needs of the congregation and the greater community. They work in consultation with our Minister.

Committee on Ministry, continued

Our congregation was formed by a passionate and committed group of people, who supported each other in building our community and this Meetinghouse. They were active both within and beyond our walls. Now many of our wonderful members are aging out, moving, and passing away. Their legacy is our vision and mission, through all the wonderful things we continue to offer our congregation as well as the larger community.

To be of service we must grow, to connect to those around us, letting them get to know us in the new language of Internet and Facebook, in addition to more traditional radio and personal contact.

We have wonderful programs that could both bring in new members and serve the community. Our Religious Exploration program can be of great value as an outreach to teenagers and parents in Coming of Age, and in Life Lessons for the young ones. Finding out what parents in the larger community need and building on that, can allow us to serve the world around us and help us to grow.

Our Health and Wellness Days have offered free treatments such as acupuncture, massage, and stress management activities, and were well attended and appreciated by many, not just our members. Within our congregation, the help, support and love we offer each other starts with activities such as circle dinners and sharing circles, but these have fallen away with our decreasing population.

Surely, you will have lots of ideas that we want to hear. We can't implement these ourselves - that's not our role, but we will work with you and our committees, to generate ideas and offer support.

Let's be inspired by the love we have for each other, this place, and the work we can do for the community and the larger world around us. Help us to grow and renew ourselves.

Please share your ideas with the members of the committee:

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Sunsets and Death

Each of us knows, more or less, in different ways, that we are eventually going to die. Perhaps this awareness has been brought home to us by the recent loss of a loved one. Perhaps we have been assaulted by a near fatal attack from within, like a heart attack or, externally, like a car crash. Or perhaps this awareness has grown from a lifelong meditation on our mortality.

For myself, I never had a problem with dying in theory. I was not afraid of dying. And until January 5 of 2015, when I was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer, I never had the opportunity to look at the possibility of my own death up close. This encounter has not engendered fear but rather an enhanced love of this life. Visits from family and friends, food, sunny skies... have all taken on greater intensity.

My oncologists make no promises and I am left to my own devices in evaluating my CT reports, treatment results and prospects. Thanks to a couple of stents in my digestive tract, I am fortunately able to eat normally.

In July we sold our house in Sag Harbor, near Little Peconic Bay. Whenever we were down there, we would regularly walk to the beach to watch the sunset. Before the sun begins its descent, when it is still fully above this horizon, the sky lights up in red, orange or gold. As it descends, its light becomes more concentrated. Time seems to stand still as it slowly nears the horizon. As viewers we are drawn into a single-minded attention to it. Eventually it sinks below the horizon and disappears, but then there is the surprise of its light lingering in the sky and in the clouds above the horizon. When even this refracted light of the now unseen sun disappears, we are alone with the night sky.

I have been searching for metaphors to understand the horizon of my own life. I identify with that point in the sunset when the sun disappears be-

hind and underneath the horizon. At one level we know it is there although we can no longer see it directly. On another level it has disappeared forever, never to return. I am consoled by the beauty and daily occurrence of the setting sun. While I remain painfully aware that I don't know the answers to my mortality questions, the beauty and physicality of the setting sun gives me plenty of food for thought and contemplation.

These days I look at the setting sun from the picture window of my living room in Toronto. I have come to see this experience as a rich metaphor and goal of my present life. In the past months of limited capacities, my love of eating and good company has deepened. I appreciate good food and while I am waking up in bed, I already look forward

to eating my breakfast oatmeal. Is there not transcendence in so many ordinary experiences?

Enjoying sunsets and lunches with friends, and letting their enchanting meanings sink in are important to me at this time. I understand these experiences as prayerful. I have had life-long conversations with some of my non-believing friends trying to convince them that you don't have to be a believer to pray. All you have to do is realize that you are not in control of the most important things in life, take a deep breath, feel grateful for all that has been given to you, rest there and not be afraid to ask for help for yourself, or others, or the earth itself.

The heart of my prayer life these days is to catch that still point and ask God to help me to be a good person and to remove this cancer from my body. When I am too distracted by my ailments, it is hard to pray and then I try to remember those people who are praying for me. And when I am able to pray, I always immediately remember all those who are praying for me and sending their love and care my way.

My formal prayer community these days is my Saturday meditation group inspired by the Buddhist



teacher Thic Nhat Hanh. The care and affection expressed to me has been a great consolation, and a source of health and energy. We have a practice of "hugging meditation," which involves a long hug and paying attention to our breathing and each other. I love this. It has often been a challenge for me to receive affection, and this practice has been transformative.

I also regularly seem to have impulse or spontaneous prayers, like when I am struck by the plight of the refugees from the Middle East or Africa: their suffering and precariousness sink in, and I hope for a good outcome for them. But I don't want to give a maudlin impression of my prayer life. There is also another key component and that involves laughing at myself or ourselves with my friends. This is a great pastime. Interesting word--perhaps not too different from 'still point'. Both expressions imply an escape from the pressures of day-to-day responsibilities, which is key to prayer.

That still point when the sun has disappeared behind or underneath the horizon or, when in the company of friends, we linger beyond the pressures of every day and enjoy each other's company, is both a gateway to prayer and prayer itself. The set sun as an invisible source of light is a metaphor for both prayer and grace.

When I worry about how long I have left to live, the image of sunlight emanating above a horizon without a visible sun illuminates my experience. Yes, I want more than this, but perhaps this is more than enough.

Walter Jarsky

Our Green Sanctuary Program

A lot has been accomplished in a short time. In the past three months we have outlined eleven projects that will compose our Green Sanctuary program. Most of these projects are well into their scoping phase, in which we are more precisely defining what each project will try to accomplish. Here's a quick summary:

1. *Environmental Justice*: We're considering collecting and repairing bicycles for use by day laborers and other deserving people for whom a bicycle would make a difference in their lives.

2. *Green Themes in Worship*: The Worship Associates are identifying possible speakers for future services devoted to environmental topics.

3. *Green Solstice*: Our 2015 Winter Solstice celebration will include a ceremony of recognition of the good things that are happening on environmental matters. We're also thinking of adding a Summer Solstice celebration.

4. *Environmental Lessons*: Our project for children's environmental education is on hold for the moment, as our overall RE program is under examination.

5. *Adult Programs on the Environment*: This project envisions three educational forums on environmental justice, good science vs. voodoo science, and an update on world energy and carbon emissions.

6. *Recycling the Hard-to-Recycle*: We've discussed the display we'll have in our fellowship room—a set of drawers for small items to be recycled, with a poster telling what can be recycled here and how to recycle larger or more toxic materials.

7. *Water Quality Protection*: This project will focus on ground water quality protection. We'll connect with Suffolk County's effort to find the best new technologies for waste treatment, and per-

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Green Sanctuary, continued from page 7.

haps become a demonstration site. We will also become a center for information on how to minimize pesticide and fertilizer issues in our lawns and gardens.

8. *Green Transportation:* We will facilitate carpooling to services and other events in our Meetinghouse, as well as to environmental events up-Island or in New York City.

We also want to encourage the use of public transportation where possible.

9. *Butterflies and Honeybees:* We will promote plantings that will nurture beneficial insects. We'll also work with local beekeepers and environmental groups to pursue similar goals.

10. *Reducing our Carbon Footprint:* An energy audit of our Meetinghouse has been done. We'll use the results to find ways to improve our energy efficiency. We'll also provide means for members and friends to have energy audits in their homes, and will encourage the use of solar energy.

11. *Climate Change Activism:* We'll work with the Citizens' Climate Lobby as well as UU groups to promote public policy changes that will help to mitigate climate change and its effects.

In addition to scoping the individual projects and doing the energy audit of our Meetinghouse, we need to conduct a congregational assessment on environmental practices. Once all this is done, we will be ready to apply to the Unitarian Universalist Association for acceptance into Candidate Status. We'll then conduct the projects over the next two to three years, after which it is hoped we will be able

to obtain certification as a Green Sanctuary.

It's important to remember, though, that the journey is what's most important. The certification process is valuable mainly to help us to evaluate how much of a difference these projects have made.

Please mark your calendar for Sunday, January 17, at noon after the service, when all are invited to discuss the next steps. The results of this meeting will largely determine the future direction of our environmental efforts.

John Andrews



We say goodbye to Eileen McCabe and Tom Murphy after many good years. We all wish them well in their new lives.



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Congregation of the South Fork

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