

UNIVERSALIST HERITAGE TOUR

October 11 – 17

There is still time to register for this incredibly rich tour. See the appended flyer for details and send your registrations in before September 10.

To expand just a bit on the descriptions in the flyer, several of the events will be guided by experts knowledgeable about a particular piece of Universalist history. The fascinating tour of Mount Auburn Cemetery will be led by historian Rev. Mark Harris, and the tour of the famed Ballou churches in Vermont will be guided by Rev. Paul Sawyer.

The October 17 worship service at the Universalist Memorial Church in Winchester, NH will feature Rev. Jan Bowering in her acclaimed role as the Rev. Olympia Brown.

General Assembly Workshop

“Love Saves” was the theme of our workshop at the 2010 General Assembly, which featured an amazing diversity of stories celebrating this core affirmation of the Universalist faith. The workshop was hosted by UHF president, John Sanders. Presenters included Rev. Paul Sawyer and Rev. Jeanne Nieuwejaar, UHF Board members, as well as special guests Rev. Naomi King and Rev. Barbara ten Hove, recipient of this year’s UHF sermon award.

Stories included several classics from Hosea Ballou, an excerpt from the Old Testament story of Jonah, and a short story from NPR reporter Terry Ahwal. The most moving stories, however, were personal experiences shared by the presenters. Barbara ten Hove began her story with song, and Naomi King presented hers in the unique dialect of ‘piratese,’ complete with a parrot named Hosea Ballou on her shoulder. Response from the audience was enthusiastic.

Stories of how “Love Saves” are being gathered for an anthology we hope to publish at some time in the future. The following story is fine example. It was sent to us by Andrew Tripp, a student at Boston University School of Theology, working on a PhD in Practical Theology. He is a candidate for ministry through the UUA’s Ministerial Fellowship process, and he is an avid fan of stories. *We*

hope it may prompt you to send us stories from your lives and ministries as well, helping to make this anthology a useful resource throughout our congregations.

“Love in the ICU” ~ a story by Andrew Tripp

It was a Wednesday. I was serving as a hospital chaplain. Part of my day included visiting the intensive care unit. I went to the unit, and one patient was calling out from her room, “Help me.” I checked in with the nurse station and found out the patient was an elderly woman who had dementia, but could use a pastoral visit.

This patient who was calling out “help me” was confused, and scared. From the start I knew the visit was not going to be easy. After introductions, she asked if I was a priest. I told her no, a chaplain, and asked if she’d like a visit. She grabbed my hand and asked me a question that mentally challenged me. She asked in a very scared voice, “Is your God the same as my God?”

This was a gut check for me. This was no time for eloquence, since she expected a yes or a no, and really wanted a yes. I told her yes, and she squeezed my hand and began telling me how she was afraid. She kept coming back to telling me she was afraid, afraid they would hurt her. I listened, and reassured her that the staff was there to help her get better. After spending an hour with her, she was much more calm. I told her I would visit with her the next day. She told me no, I wouldn’t come back, but I knew I would.

I visited with her again on Thursday and on Friday, both days her eyes lighting up and her body calming down when I would sit and visit with her. It meant something to her that I did come back each day.

The following Monday, I was told by the pastoral services administrator to visit with her sons when I arrived at the hospital. They had asked for me specifically. Their mother was on a ventilator in the intensive care unit, and was not going to make it.

The sons told me how she told them about the nice minister who had visited with her. They told me that she aspirated at two am that morning, and was only alive because of the ventilator. With tears in their eyes, they asked me if they were killing their mom by taking her off the ventilator. Holding back my own emotion, I did my best to be present with them and reassure them, but after a time, left them to give them space and continue my day.

I returned to them in the afternoon, and waited with them. After a time, the nurse came to get them so they would have the last moments with their mom. They returned with tear-stained faces. I asked if they would like me to go in and say a prayer for her, and they could only nod. I went in, touched her still warm hand, said a few prayers, shed a few tears of my own as I looked down on the body of this woman I’d spent only a few days with but had cared for so deeply, and I left her room, and returned to the sons. I gave each a hug, told them I was

so sorry, and left for the day. That day taught me much about ministry. Ministry is being saved by the love I have for those I minister to. I was redeemed when that frightened, demented woman held my hand for those few hours. 🐦

Unitarian Universalist History Convocation

The Partners in Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage (PUUHH), of which we are a member, is sponsoring a resource-filled Convocation on October 7-10 in Waltham, MA. For details go to the Unitarian Universalist Historical Society website www.uuhs.org. The Convocation is conveniently scheduled just prior to our Heritage Tour to make it easy for folks from afar to attend both of these.

Summer Services

Once again the UHF organized a series of five summer services at the beautiful Universalist Memorial Church in Winchester, NH. We are grateful to our guest speakers, Rev. Lee Page, Rev. Richard Trudeau, Rev. Bill Baughan, and Rev. Hope and Janice Marie Johnson. The fifth service featured the reading of the 2010 award-winning Universalist Heritage Sermon. (See following story) As its author Rev. Barbara ten Hove was unable to be with us, UHF Board member Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Strong presented the sermon. Musician for the summer was Charles Butterfield of the All Souls Church in Brattleboro, VT.



Twin sisters, Janice Marie Johnson and Rev. Hope Johnson, speakers at the final summer service for 2010. Janice is Director of the Unitarian Universalist Association's Office of Racial and Ethnic Concerns, Identity-Based Ministries. Hope is Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Central Nassau, Garden City, Long Island, New York

2010 UHF Sermon Award

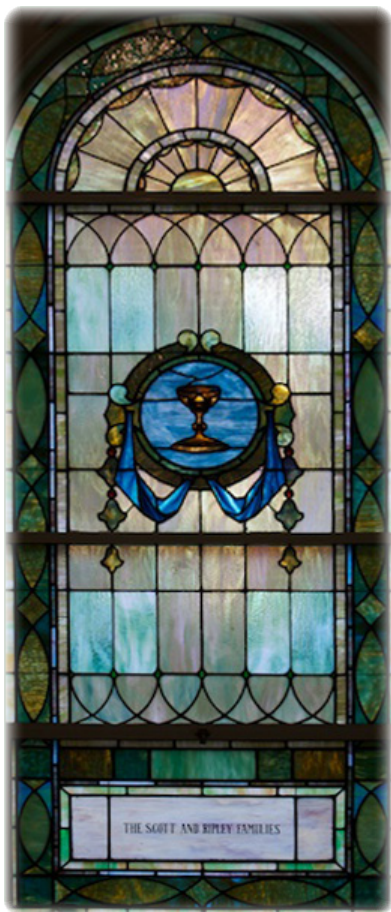
Congratulations to the winner of the Third Annual Universalist Heritage Sermon Award, Rev. Barbara ten Hove, of the Cedars Unitarian Universalist Church in Bainbridge Island, WA, for her sermon “The Heart of Universalism.” Excerpts from this sermon can be found elsewhere in this Newsletter. The sermon in its entirety is posted on our website.

We were heartened by the more than twenty fine submissions to this award process, and particularly heartened to find that the Universalist message is being preached across the country with passion and with grace. Our panel of sermon readers, drawn from our UHF Advisory Board, struggled to select the one sermon that rose above the others.

Our Building

The Universalist Memorial Church is looking fresh and well cared for. Although there is much work still needed, the entryways, foyer and general meeting room have a fresh coat of paint. One of the stained glass windows (*left*), damaged by a rock and BB shot, has been fully repaired, with renewed leading and a new sash. It is bright and inviting. We were able to fund this repair from generous contributions over the past several years and are eager to continue with other repairs and improvements.

To that end a Mini Capital Campaign is underway with a goal of \$70,000 for repair of the remaining windows as well as replacement of rotting wood around the front columns. We desire to be good stewards of this historic site and invite you all to join with us in this commitment. For more information about the capital campaign, please be in touch with our vice president, Rev. Elizabeth Strong at estrong110@comcast.net.



“The Heart of Universalism”

by Rev. Barbara ten Hove

Love is one of those words that has come to mean so many things that it is almost meaningless. Yet I would venture that it is still one of the most important words in any language. ... I believe, with the Gospel writer John, that God is love. And it is about that loving God that I want to talk today.

... all Universalists believed that you mattered to God. What kind of God, they asked, would not love all people? Certainly not the God of Christ. For our early Universalist ancestors were clearly Christian. In fact, as one missionary, Quillen Shinn, was to say, Universalists "believe more than any other Christians. We [believe] the whole is greater than the part. We stand for the whole."

As Universalism matured into the late 19th and early 20th century, it began to focus more on the importance of bringing God's love to bear in the world than worrying about what would happen after. Universalism began to remind people that they and all others were already saved, already part and parcel of the holy. De-emphasizing the role of heaven, they continued to stress the importance of caring for one another in this life.



Reverend Barbara ten Hove, speaking to the congregation of Cedars Unitarian Universalist Church, Bainbridge Island, WA, where she serves with her husband, Reverend Jaco ten Hove, as co-minister.

Universalism is still a powerful message. Particularly, this message of Universalism has found itself a part of some very conservative churches. ... Many of these churches have become what are called "mega-churches," meaning that they have thousands of members and huge physical plants. They creatively use music and drama to get across the message that "You matter to God."

... what disturbs me the most about these mega-churches (is that) far too many of them bring you in with the message that "God loves you just as you are," and then they tell you in the fine print that you will go to a "Christless eternity" – their euphemism for hell – if you don't believe in their particular version of Christianity. You matter to God up to a point. When you reach that point, and don't qualify, off to hell you go.

This idea that all of us matter to God, portrayed so vividly in a church so different from our own, caused me to sit up and reflect on my own faith. ... When I saw my beliefs used to entice people into a fundamentalist church of thousands, I wondered why we weren't shouting out to the rooftops that this message is Universalism!!! And what they are preaching sounds like Universalism but it isn't. Then I

realized that perhaps we are not willing to preach this radical message because we are reluctant to use language that carries weight in the religious culture we live in. In other words, we are unwilling or unable to say that our faith carries the powerful message that all people matter, to God.

Now I know that the word God brings up lots of challenging and often negative stuff for UUs. ...But I am far too aware that when we choose not to use religious language in places beyond these doors, we are frequently written off as irrelevant, or as a group of people who are not religious at all. And I am unwilling to let that happen. I want to preach the good news of Universalism (and Unitarianism, too!) to people who need to hear that they matter – not just to other people, but to God as well.

... Fundamentalism of all stripes tends to teach that God is something far apart from humanity, and that this God is all about anger and fear (not to mention reward and punishment). We see this kind of belief embodied in acts of terror all across the globe, including here at home. Most of the people who commit these dreadful acts have been taught and truly believe that God wants them to do what God will do eventually: punish sinners. If you believe in the idea of everlasting punishment and the concept of God as a person who delivers that punishment, then it is an easy step from belief to action. The terrorist might think that he or she is acting for God and that God would certainly approve.

Our faith promotes something radically different. Universalism teaches that love is at the heart of humankind. Universalism says that if God is love, then we must act out of that love to make the world a better place.

Clearly, Universalism is a message that our world is desperate to hear. Why aren't we preaching it more strongly?

... Why don't we? I think one reason may be that we, not surprisingly, choose to distance ourselves from those who have usurped the name of God and made it into something even Jesus wouldn't recognize. But in so doing, we have – inadvertently perhaps – given the religious right the bully pulpit, and have walked away instead of engaging them. And because we resist speaking out in the common language of the religious world, our voices are not heard above the din of religious righteousness.

... I do not know what the Gospel writer meant when he said that God is love. I do know that love is the most holy thing in all the world, whether we call its source God or not. And that radical love for all people and all life is at the heart of Universalism, our saving and life transforming faith.

The preceding sermon was excerpted from the original. The full sermon may be found on our website, universalistheritage.org.