



MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Essex County

January 2016

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MARK IT DOWN

- ◆ Sunset Service, Sunday, 10 Jan, 6 PM
- ◆ Board of Trustees, Thursday, 28 Jan, 7 PM, Barszcz Residence

Where every mind is free and every soul is welcome!

Spiritually Speaking: Thick Stories

By Rev. Christine C Robinson & Alicia Hawkins

Society can be a better place when people know how to listen deeply to each other and care for one another. There are few places in people's lives where they are invited to share deeply and listen without judgment. The world is hungry for sharing soul to soul.

Deep listening means listening from the heart rather than the mind or ego. It grows out of silence. Deep listening happens when people listen without responding, so they don't have to worry about what to say, what the other person needs to hear, or how to heal the person or solve the problem.

In Soul to Soul groups—the name we have given to the covenant groups at our congregation, the First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque, New Mexico—we listen and breathe, holding the other in our hearts. When someone has shared deeply, our silence tells them we've given them all our attention and that we are holding their stories in our hearts. This silence connects us with one another in a way that is deeper than using words or questions.

A few years after Hurricane Katrina, a friend and I (Christine) were taking a cab to the New Orleans airport, and the driver, a native New Orleanian, began to talk about how badly people had behaved during the storm, telling stories from hyped-up news programs he'd watched, all of which we had also heard, some of which had later proved to be false. To get him off that distressing subject, I asked him about his own experience during the storm.

He quickly warmed to the task, telling us that he had, indeed, lost everything in the

flooding, but that he had held property insurance with a good insurance company. Further, he had been employed as a manager at Walmart, and when he reported to work in Baton Rouge (to which he had been evacuated), they promptly paid him and set him the task of returning to New Orleans as soon as possible, armed with the authority to give out \$2,000 checks to every employee of his old store that he could find. He remembered with pleasure the experience of being trusted in that extraordinary way and of being able to give such generous help to his co-workers.

Our ride to the airport went all too quickly as we listened, fascinated and moved by his wonderful story. That was one cab ride that ended a lot better than it started. All I had done, really, was redirect the cabbie away from oft-repeated gossip about events neither of us had experienced, and toward his own experiences of those profound weeks. As often happens when people tell their personal stories, I didn't have to prod or interpret. I hardly said a

word between my question and my thank-you as we paid him at the airport, and this wonderful story came pouring out, thick as molasses. Whenever the subject of Hurricane Katrina comes up, I remember it still.

We attempt to do two things in Soul to Soul groups. We give ourselves permission to tell thick stories, and we practice thick listening. While nearly everybody can tell a thick story when they talk about themselves, thick listening is a new skill which we have to practice.

When we speak from our hearts and talk about ourselves—saying what has happened to us,



Sunday Sunset Services

Services in Parish Hall start at 6 PM

Come join us for our **Sunday Sunset Services** beginning at **6 PM**. Services will take place in the **PARISH HALL**. Doors will be open at 5:30 PM for set up. Containing elements of Small Group Ministry and Intentional Listening Group formats, we envision Sunday Sunset Services as a spiritual practice of simple prayer, a moment of reflection, giving thanks, singing & music--all while sharing wine, cheese & the like. Each month, we will gather to celebrate a shared theme over words, song and food. The ritual is giving thanks, eating, sharing and community itself.



DATE	THEME	Coordinators & Hosts	Musician - TBA, Usher -
10 Jan	<i>Listening</i>	Darcy Hall & Greg Giacobe Wayne Eastman	Wayne Eastman
14 Feb	<i>Balance</i>	Darcy Hall & Greg Giacobe Wayne Eastman	Wayne Eastman
13 Mar	<i>Play</i>	Darcy Hall & Greg Giacobe Wayne Eastman	Wayne Eastman
10 Apr	<i>Sustainability</i>	Darcy Hall & Greg Giacobe Wayne Eastman	Wayne Eastman
15 May	<i>Parents</i>	Darcy Hall & Greg Giacobe Wayne Eastman	Wayne Eastman
12 Jun	<i>Blessings</i>	Darcy Hall & Greg Giacobe Wayne Eastman	Wayne Eastman



Spiritually Speaking [cont.]

how we believe and feel and think—we find not only that we have gained from hearing ourselves, but that our stories have been interesting to others in the group. Telling a thick story feels risky, but once we decide to take the risk, it is easy to do well. Everybody can do a good job telling their own story. Many find that knowing there will be no arguments, no probing questions, and no “helpful comments” to which they will have to respond gives them the courage to share things that they would otherwise keep to themselves. It is not at all uncommon in a Soul to Soul group to hear, after a particularly wonderful story, “I have never talked about that before.”

It is a bit risky to talk personally in a group, especially when we don’t know the other people, and that is one reason we so often resort to chitchat or tell stories about other people. No doubt the cabbie started with his thin story of other people’s misdeeds during Katrina because he didn’t know us, his riders. He didn’t know our politics, our attitudes about race, our feeling about his hometown. It was safe to tell a story everybody had already heard. Nor was he a

bragging sort of man. He had to be invited to tell his thick story about what happened to him during Katrina. He had to feel like we were really interested in what he had to say. He had to feel safe. And that means we had to listen as thickly as he was speaking.

We could have blown it at any moment. We could have launched into our own experiences during storms. We could have made a remark that sounded condescending. We could have argued about the politics of Walmart. We sidestepped all of these possibilities because we invited him to talk and then we just listened, encouraging him mostly with meaningless sounds that showed him we were on the same emotional wavelength. That’s all we did. It may not sound like much, but it is crucial. Most people find it difficult to just listen.

Our culture teaches us thin listening skills. We quickly pick up that we should show we’ve been paying attention by asking pointed questions or giving wise advice. Neither strategy, it turns out, feels very good to the person who

SUNSET SERVICE HOLIDAY CARDS



These Holiday cards were colored by participants at our 13 December 2015 Sunset Service. We like to thank all who attended for participating.



Spiritually Speaking [cont.]

just spoke. Often our advice is ill-fitting, or the person to whom it is addressed—who is, after all, different from us—is not ready to hear it. Almost all of us are more likely to follow up on our own good ideas than someone else's! And even the most well-meant and gently spoken questions can feel like criticism. As for launching into our own story that we were reminded of, well, that's a fine ploy for conversation, but when our intention is to simply listen, we need to restrain ourselves. The healing power of this kind of listening is attested to by Parker Palmer in *A Hidden Wholeness*:

When you speak to me about your deepest questions, you do not want to be fixed or saved: you want to be seen and heard, to have your truth acknowledged and honored. If your problem is soul-deep, your soul alone knows what you need to do about it, and my presumptuous advice will only drive your soul back into the woods. So the best service I can render when you speak to me about such a struggle is to hold you faithfully in a space where you can listen to your inner teacher. Most of us, so carefully schooled in our need to be actively helpful to people, are very surprised to discover the healing power of this kind of listening.

Even therapists and ministers in training commonly imagine that they have to "do something" to be helpful to the person who is speaking to them and are surprised to hear that they were very helpful even though they couldn't think of a thing to say! "But all I did was listen!" they protest, and their teachers say knowingly, "Precisely!"

So while we might say, "Hmm!" or "Wow!" or make other encouraging noises at appropriate points, we will mostly remain

silent, not only outwardly, by not talking much, but inwardly, by attending to what is being said. Since we don't have to probe or give advice, we don't have to be thinking ahead to what we will say. We can simply listen and offer the speaker the gift of silence. Rachel Naomi Remen writes in *My Grandfather's Blessing*:

Perhaps the most important thing we bring to another person is the silence in us. Not the sort of silence that is filled with unspoken criticism or hard withdrawal. The sort of silence that is a place of refuge, of rest, of acceptance of someone as they are. We are all hungry for this other silence. It is hard to find. In its presence we can remember something beyond the moment, a strength on which to build a life. Silence is a place of great power and healing.

Our cabbie's story ended when we arrived at the airport and had to part company. We thanked him for sharing, paid him, and went inside. But after a story is told in a Soul to Soul group, it is less clear how to end the interaction. People ask what they can do after someone has shared—particularly early on in the group's life.

Silence can feel awkward and even uncaring at first. It takes some experience in speaking and listening for people to understand how powerful and appreciative simple silence can be, and how knowing that there will be no questions, comments, or side conversations bolsters the sharing. So, at first, some groups adopt a small ritual of response. Sometimes the leader simply says thank you. In some groups everyone smiles at the speaker, and some use hands in prayer-mode with a little bow. Even after these responses, we suggest that there be some silence, perhaps

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January 2016

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 NEW YEARS DAY	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10 SUNSET SERVICE: Listening 6 PM Canvass Ends	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28 Board of Trustees Barszcz Residence 7 PM	29	30
31						

Spiritually Speaking [cont.]

half a minute or so, before the next person starts sharing. This silence gives space for everyone to finish listening and to appreciate having been allowed into the recesses of the speaker's life. The sense of intimacy is rich and sacred.

When the heart is speaking and the heart is listening, silence becomes fulfilling. After some practice at this, the early awkwardness is gone and the silence becomes as rich as a river of love flowing to and from the listener. That's the magic of Soul to Soul groups.

Rev. Christine Robinson is senior minister of the First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque, NM. Robinson delivered the 2008 Berry Street Essay, "Imagineering Soul," to the UU Ministers Association and speaks regularly at the UUA's General Assembly. Alicia Hawkins is the co-author (with the Rev. Christine Robinson) of Heart to Heart: Fourteen Gatherings for Reflection and Sharing and Soul to Soul: Fourteen Gatherings for Reflection and Sharing. Hawkins helped develop and lead the small group ministry program at the First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque, New Mexico. This essay appeared in the Summer 2012 issue of the UU World, and is adapted with permission from Soul to Soul: Fourteen Gatherings for Reflection and Sharing by Christine Robinson and Alicia Hawkins (Skinner House Books, 2012).

FREE HEATING OIL!!!

FUUCE has approximately 200 gallons of home heating oil that we need to give away as soon as possible. There is no limit on the amount you can take. If you need oil for your home, or any appliance that needs it, please make arrangements for pick-up with HUUB Managing Director, Charlie Wirene. He can be reached at OrangeHUUB@gmail.com or 315-525-2773.



Guest At Your Table 2015 Call Back

Starting 10 January 2016, we ask that you return your Guest At Your Table envelopes or notify that you have mailed it directly. Please hand in or notify by 14 February. If you misplaced or lost your envelope and still wish to make a donation before we close our *Guest* program for this church year, please speak with Gregory Giacobe, UUSC Local Representative, at office@essexuu.org or 201-823-2459.

For those of you who took a *Guest* envelope and are planning to return it through the church, write a check payable to the "UUSC" with "Guest At Your Table 2015" in the memo line. Also, **don't forget to fill out the donation form located on the flap of your donation envelope.**

If your donation is close to or above one of the membership levels, **please consider joining UUSC.** General membership is \$40, and **Dual Adult** membership is \$75. All unrestricted donations (those not designated for any specific UUSC program or activity) of \$125 or more is matched by the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset NY.

You can now also give online. Go to www.uusc.org/givetoguest. Please be sure to list the First UU Church of Essex County as your congregation. Also, please notify us of the amount and if you decided to become a UUSC member. Thank you.



NCJW/Essex Lunch and Learn

**“Living in the Crosshairs:
The Untold Stories of Anti-Abortion Terrorism”**
Commemorating the Anniversary of Roe v. Wade



Featuring:

**Law professor David S. Cohen
& attorney Krysten Connon**

*Authors of
“Living in the Crosshairs:
The Untold Stories of
Anti-Abortion Terrorism”*

Panel discussion led by Janice Kovach, Mayor of Clinton, NJ and
former Director, NJ Division on Women
with Eric Boehlert, Senior Fellow at Media Matters

Thursday, January 21, 2016

(snow date January 28, 2016)

12:00 Noon - 2:00 pm

Congregation B'nai Jeshurun

1025 South Orange Avenue, Short Hills, NJ

Cost: \$20; includes a buffet lunch.

Pre-registration required by Friday, January 15, 2016. Space is limited.

Co-sponsored by agencies supporting a woman's right to choose.



Pre-registration required by Jan. 15, 2016. Call 973.740.0588 or visit www.ncjwessex.org.



WhaleCoast Alaska 2016

WHAT: Four Unitarian Universalist Fellowships in Alaska invite you to our unforgettable, 23rd annual Alaska tour program.

TOUR #1: National Park Tour, June 11 to 20 -- \$2,879

TOUR #2: All-Alaska Tour, July 15 to 27 -- \$3,711

WHERE: From the coastal waters to the sunny Interior, from wilderness to modern cities. We experience the best of Alaska: Fairbanks, Denali Park, Anchorage, Juneau, Sitka, Seward

SEE:

- Wildlife: whales, seals, bears, moose, caribou, & more.
- Glaciers, islands, fjords, and mountain ranges.
- Native American artists and dancers.
- Alaska's finest museums.
- Spectacular travel by train and plane.

STAY: Real Alaska! UU homestays, meals, & dinner parties with Alaska UUs who treat you like company.



Director: Dave Frey, longtime Fairbanks UU

More information: www.WhaleCoastAK.org

Email: dfrey@WhaleCoastAK.org

Address: 675 Gold Vein Road, Fairbanks, AK 99712

Telephone: 907-322-4966

Deadline: March 1 or until 36 guests register

We are on the web: essexuu.org

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

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**Acting President: Mindy
Thompson Fullilove**

**Vice President Pro Temp:
Frank Barszcz**

Treasurer: Bill Slezak

Secretary: Greg Giacobe

Administrator: Greg Giacobe

Sexton: Tony A Jones



WE VALUE: Community...
Exploration... Fellowship...
Spirituality... Liberal Religious
Education... Diversity... Freedom...
and Action.

OUR VISION: To be a life-
affirming liberal religious
community where people of
diverse beliefs, ideas and
background come together to
provide spiritual and intellectual
growth to one another and to work
together in Orange, New Jersey
for a greater good in the world.

OUR MISSION: To study and
practice religion in freedom and
fellowship. To provide support
and care for our community and
the community at large.

Founded in Orange in 1890 as
the First Unitarian Church of
Essex County, the congregation
has worshipped in the present
Sanctuary since its construction
in 1892-3. The Church continues
the ministry of the Union
Universalist Society (also known
as the Church of the Redeemer),
founded as the First Universalist
Society of Newark in 1834.



**First Unitarian Universalist
Church of Essex County**

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Making the connections

