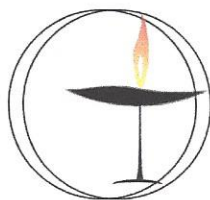


First Unitarian Universalist Church Of Essex County



Newsletter

June/Summer 2013

From Darrell's Desk

Rev. Darrell Berger

Is Baseball Some Kind of Religion?

I try not to use baseball to make points in my sermons and writings to the extent that it bores or annoys anyone. But when I finished *Baseball as a Road to God* by NYU President John Sexton in the morning and saw "42," the new movie about Jackie Robinson, in the afternoon, my resistance was futile.

Dr. Sexton has long been recognized as one of the nation's outstanding university presidents. Previously, as he writes, he was Dean of NYU Law School, a clerk for Supreme Court Justice Warren Burger following Harvard Law School, and before that received a PhD in the history of American Religion from Fordham.

The book is the result of his years of teaching an undergraduate course of the same name. He grew up in Brooklyn loving the Dodgers and hating Dodgers' owner Walter O'Malley for taking them away. As he grew up Roman Catholic and a baseball fan, he gradually recognized similarities between his two passions.

His religious thinking is dominated by two terms. Ineffable refers to that which is indescribable yet real. He says it signifies the truths known in the soul. I do not recall his saying much about what the soul is, or how we know it is real.

The second term is hierophany, or manifestation of the sacred or holy. He does say that religion has no exclusive claims to these experiences. They may be found in any number of rich human endeavors, like music, art, or a walk in the woods.

Yet baseball, for him, also lends itself to a number of other experiences that he identifies as religious, including faith, doubt, conversion, miracles, blessings, sin and community. To me, this shows that he sees baseball through the prism of his Roman Catholicism.

I don't. I see it through the prism of my own experiences and education. To me baseball, if any kind of religion at all, is pagan or earth-centered. It is a sublimated ritual representing the old herding cultures found in the northeast quadrant of North America. If you herd cattle or sheep, or play baseball, you start at home, go into the field, and return home. The team, who does this most, wins. You do this every day from early spring until late autumn, unless it rains. Like many sublimated rituals, its specific origins are lost.

Dr. Sexton's subtitle is "Seeing Beyond the Game." This is exactly what he does, though I would put it another way. He overlooks the game. Baseball is wonderful in its own self. It need not be a religion or like a religion to be wonderful. It is not enriched, nor better understood, for the comparison.

He writes that over the years he changed loyalties from the now-distant Dodgers to the Yankees. He says he did this during the 1977 World Series as a statement of solidarity with his son, a Yankees' fan. He intentionally decided his son would have this team loyalty, choosing it for him at infancy. It was best for him. It would save him the agony of being a Mets' fan. His son would root for winners.

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Sunday Services at 10:30 AM

02 June *What Lies Beyond Death?*

Rev. Darrell Berger
Musician: Bill Stafford Usher: Anne E Lang

As we know, the Supreme Court has ruled that a corporation is a person. The best response I've heard is "I'll believe a corporation is a person when Texas executes one." In any case, our church is a corporation. The word itself derives from Latin, meaning "having a body." Our church's body seems to be dwindling. We fear that death may be approaching.

Let's take our Unitarian Universalist theology seriously and apply to the church what we may believe about death, and what lies beyond.

09 June **Flower Communion: *Almost Father's Day*** Rev. Darrell Berger Musician: Bill Stafford
Usher: Paul Axel-Lute

Given the flow of Unitarian Universalist worship, I have preached dozens of Mother's Day sermons but very, very few for Father's Day. This Sunday is only one Sunday early, so I'm going to take this opportunity to preach my magnum opus of Father's Day sermons. This will also be our Flower Communion. Please bring a flower to add to our worship.

JUNE MEETINGS/EVENTS

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING, Sunday, 2 June, 12 Noon, Parish Hall
Urban Alchemy Book Release Party, Friday, 7 June, 7 PM, Parish Hall
Church Picnic, Sunday, 9 June, 12 Noon, Parish Hall
Board of Trustees, Wednesday, Tuesday, 25 June, 7:00 PM, Suzie Q's
Celebrations & Music, Tuesday, 20 August, 7:30 PM, Sonen Room



Coffee Hour Coordinator for June: Ross Miller



Please Excuse Our Appearance

We are in the process of re-evaluating the production and distribution of our newsletter, as well as the design and use of our website and Facebook page. Please bear with us during this transition. If you have skills in these areas that you could volunteer, please contact Greg Giacobe, the Church Administrator.

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

2 JUNE 2013, 12 NOON

The Annual Congregational Meeting will be held Sunday, 2 June 2013 at 12:00 PM in the Parish Hall. Among the items planned to be presented are:

- Approval of the minutes of the 2012 Annual Congregational Meeting and 2013 Special Congregational Meetings. The text is available for review on the church website, www.essexuu.org. Hardcopies will be available in limited supply at the Annual Meeting. We urge those with web access to review these minutes and send any corrections, additions or omissions to the Secretary at secretary@essexuu.org by 6:00 PM, Monday 27 May 2013.
- Reports from Officers, staff and committee chairs. These will be combined in an Annual Report that will also be available on the church website no later than 29 May 2013. Please review periodically for updates.
- Approval of the budget for the 2013/14 church year.
- Presentation of the Nominating Committee's slate for the 2013/14 Church Year.
- Election of Officers, Trustees and Nominating Committee members.



If you have any questions, please the church office at 973-674-0010, or e-mail at office@essexuu.org. Thank you.



Church Picnic

Sunday, 9 June, 12 Noon

All Members & Friends Invited!

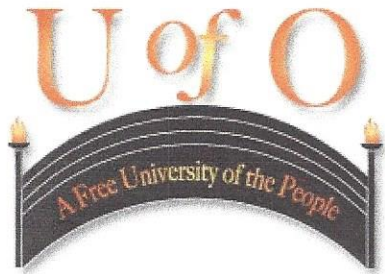
Our annual church picnic will be held in the Parish Hall following our Flower Communion service. We are asking those of you coming to bring a covered dish. In this case, normal picnic fare - a cold dish, salad or desert. We'll also take dishes that can be served cold or are easily re-heated. If you intend to attend and bring a dish or drinks, please contact Darcy Hall at darcyhall@aol.com or 973-763-5552.

HELP OUT @ LUNA STAGE

16 June, 10 AM

Our partners at Luna Stage are looking for volunteers to help in painting their rehearsal room. They will need between 4 and 8 able-bodied people who are not afraid to get a little messy. Please come dressed to paint. Luna Stage will provide everything else. Meet at Luna Stage, 555 Valley Rd, West Orange, NJ at 10 AM, Sunday, 16 June. Contact Cheryl Katz at cheryl.katz@lunastage.org.

LUNA STAGE
THEATRE COMPANY



THE UNIVERSITY OF ORANGE

The Urbanism University

EXPLORE THE URBAN LANDSCAPE - PARTY @ 1st UU

Placemaking V: Urban Alchemy

7 June 2013
Orange NJ

This fifth annual placemaking event will celebrate the launch of Mindy Fullilove's book, *Urban Alchemy: Restoring Joy in America's Sorted-Out Cities*, which

features Orange and its University.

On the occasion of **Placemaking V**, we will be joined by the French urbanist whose work inspired the book, Michel Cantal-Dupart. Cantal, as he is known, was recently elevated in the Legion of Honor and the medal was awarded by the Prime Minister of France, Jean-Marc Ayrault. Cantal visited Orange in 2009. He assisted in the analysis of the city for the Heart of Orange redevelopment plan. That plan has now been adopted by the State of New Jersey's Neighborhood Tax Credit Revitalization Program.

Placemaking V: Urban Alchemy is an all-day adventure in urbanism, including tours, workshops and fabulous ethnic food. It is free and all are welcome.

Schedule:

10 AM: *Everything You Want To Know About The American City, You Can See In Orange NJ* Tour, starting on the Westbound side of Orange Train Station (NJ Transit Morris & Essex line runs from Penn Station New York to Orange) Orange, NJ, is a 2.2 square mile majority-black, working class city. It has a rich history that dates back to the 1600s. Its buildings, monuments and neighborhoods are full of meaning and interest and fun.

Noon: All Ethnicities Lunch, Ironworks, 406 Tompkins Street, Orange NJ

1 to 5 PM: Workshops and Films, Place TBD

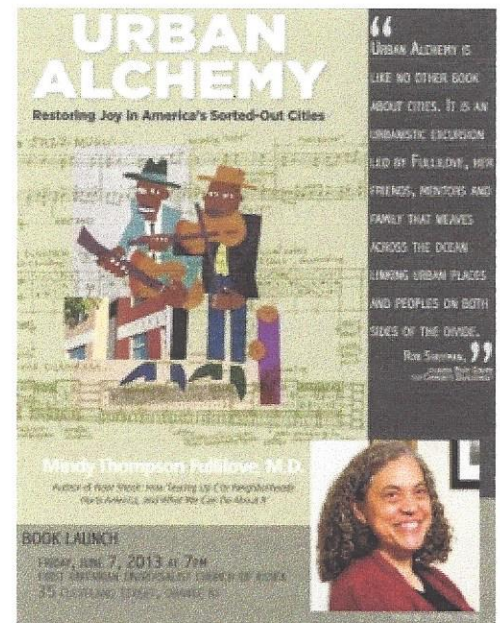
7 PM: Urban Alchemy BIG BOOK PARTY, First Unitarian Universalist Church of Essex County, 35 Cleveland Street, Orange NJ

For more information, contact the University of Orange

E: universityoforange@gmail.com

T: 973-678-3110 x 24

W: www.universityoforange.org



The fact that he believed that he could, and ought to, choose this for his son instead of giving the boy the tools to choose for himself, might be the single most telling value that separates Dr. Sexton's view on baseball and religion from my own.

Later, he describes George Steinbrenner as having spurred the Yankees' salvation, his free-spending having returned their winning ways. This indicates that Dr. Sexton may have trouble discerning salvation from a Faustian bargain.

There is further evidence of this lack of discernment. While the author often mentions his university presidency, legal and religious academic backgrounds, he never once mentions other activities on his resume. From 2003 to 2007 he was Chairman of the Board of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. One will recall this was the time of the run up to what is now called The Great Recession. Dr. Sexton is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

While he has been wildly successful at increasing NYU's endowment and prestige, he has also been busy opposing graduate teaching assistants' efforts at obtaining higher levels of compensation and working conditions, though his compensation is in excess of one million dollars per year.

He has also spearheaded NYU's manifest destiny, as it continues its attempt to swallow several blocks of its neighbors' land, supported by the mayor and city council, with opposition coming only from the people whose homes and communities will be destroyed. He has recently received a vote of no confidence from the NYU faculty. Has it occurred to Dr. Sexton that he has become Walter O'Malley? If Dr. Sexton ever seeks to speak the truth to power, he need only talk to himself. One wonders what this conversation is like.

While stressing the manifestations of the ineffably sacred, he also includes a brief disparagement of deism, which is as close to theology as eighteenth century Unitarianism gets. Thomas Jefferson constructed his own Bible, pasting together the teachings of Jesus, eliminating references to miracles and other affronts to natural law. "The result," Dr. Sexton writes, "many scholars have since agreed, was a rehash of garden-variety moral philosophizing that is missing any spark, much less a sign or a wonder."

While I'm sure he can find many scholars to agree with him, many practicing ministers of many faiths regard that "garden-variety philosophizing" to be the very core of their ministry, far more useful in living that anything ineffable or miraculous. Which brings me to Jackie Robinson.

Go see "42." It will be shown to Americans long after all of us are gone. It captures the history of the time adequately, but captures the moral tone of the time exquisitely. There was nothing about what Robinson faced that was ineffable or transcendent. While God may often be hidden, evil is far too often in plain sight for all to see.

For me, religion is not so much about what I can't see, but what to do about what I can see, but which too many choose NOT to see, or to do nothing about it they do.

If baseball has a religious aspect for me, it comes not from miracles or conversions or faith, but from a garden-variety moral philosophizing that says everybody gets a chance to play.





Introducing **THIRD SUNDAY** series

In the coming year, First UU Church will be trying an experiment. On the third Sunday of each month, starting in September, instead of our standard service, we will have global spirituality worship aimed at younger individuals and families. The content and the leadership for the worship will be developed over the summer. The hope is to create worship that blends different world spiritual traditions and that has appeal to spiritual but not religious younger people who are not attracted to our current services. If there is sufficient interest and volunteer support, there will also be childcare and children's global spirituality education. Please contact Wayne Eastman at weastman@business.rutgers.edu or 973-494-6082 if you know of people who might be interested in Third Sunday worship. For members, Third Sundays will feature discussions in the Sonen Room of projects for outreach and engagement in Orange.

THIRD SUNDAY Summer planning meeting

Are you spiritual but not religious? Might you have an interest in being a leader or participant in a group that develops a new form of worship in Orange that blends different world spiritual traditions? If the answer to these questions is yes, please contact Wayne Eastman at weastman@business.rutgers.edu or 973-494-6082 about a summer planning meeting for a global spirituality group aimed at younger individuals and families who are not attracted to any of the many organized religions in Orange and our neighboring towns. We have a home for worship in 2013-2014 on the third Sunday of each month, starting this September. Now all we need is you and your friends!

UUA Southern Region Oklahoma Emergency Relief Fund

On 20 May 2013, a devastating tornado tore through Oklahoma, causing widespread destruction, injury, and death. Stories of the devastation are still pouring in - the full extent of the damage is yet to be learned.

To aid the individuals whose lives have been so disrupted, the Southern Region of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) has established a relief fund to help the people of Oklahoma with immediate assistance and long-term aid.

Please consider giving to this fund or encouraging your congregations to take a collection earmarked for the Southern Region's Oklahoma Emergency Relief Fund. Please make out any checks to "UU Oklahoma Relief Fund" and send them to:

UU Oklahoma Relief Fund
PO Box 560246
Orlando FL 32856-0246

You can also donate online and learn more about this fund at <http://uusouthland.org/uuokrelief.html>

We can make the world a better place by caring for one another, near and far. Thank you for helping our UU congregations and individuals in Oklahoma.



The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Essex County

A church where every mind is free and every soul is welcome!

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, founded as the First Universalist Society of Newark in 1834.

Darcy Hall
President

The Rev. Darrell E. Berger
Minister

Greg Giacobe – Church Administrator
Lawrence Turner – Building Superintendent
Anisha Sanders – Assistant Superintendent
Melanie Axel-Lute – Choir Coordinator

Rev. Berger is normally available Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays during business hours.
Call 973-674-0010. Minister's email: minister@essexuu.org

Church Office is open Fridays 9 AM to 2 PM • Church Telephone: 973-674-0010
Church E-mail: office@essexuu.org • Church Website: <http://essexuu.org/>
Sanctuary, Parish Hall & Church Office: 35 Cleveland Street
Mailing Address: PO Box 998, Orange NJ 07051-0998

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.

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The Church continues the ministry of
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The First Unitarian Universalist Church
of Essex County
PO Box 998
Orange, NJ 07051-0998