



MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

# First Unitarian Universalist Church of Essex County

November 2016

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## MARK IT DOWN

- ◆ *100 Year-Old House Conference, Saturday, 5 Nov, 9 AM—5 PM, Parish Hall*
- ◆ *125th Anniversary Luncheon, Saturday, 5 Nov, 12 Noon, Parish Hall*
- ◆ *Daylight Savings Time Ends, Sunday, 6 Nov, 2 AM*
- ◆ *Second Sunday: Spirituality Group, Sunday, 13 Nov, 5 PM, Parish Hall*
- ◆ *Board of Trustees, Monday, 21 Nov, 7 PM, So-nan Room*
- ◆ *Canvass Ends, Sunday, 11 Dec*

Where every mind is free and every soul is welcome!

## NEW MINISTRY LOOKS AT HOUSING JUSTICE

Orange is full of century old houses that are in desperate need of investment and repairs. Entire blocks of older buildings show the signs of age and deferred maintenance, getting labeled as shabby and blighted. At the same time, the city of Orange is embracing "Transit Oriented Development," increasing the cost of living and deepening the hardship of income-constrained citizens. With this in mind, the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Essex County, The HUUB and the University of Orange will host "100-Year-Old House: A Housing Justice Conference" on Saturday, 5 November from 9 AM to 5 PM at 35 Cleveland Street in Orange. Time will also be taken to celebrate First UU's 125 years in the community. [See page 3 for details.]

The HUUB is a new urban ministry project at the First Unitarian Universalist Church with the mission to bring people together to use their gifts to advance peace, economic justice, respect, and educational attainment in the city of Orange.

The 100-Year-Old House Conference will bring neighbors together to discuss the state of housing in Orange, looking at both the aging building stock and the changing affordability of the city. Featured speakers will share insights from their diverse experiences about the important role affordable housing plays in healthy communities and how to preserve and expand it. Speakers include Diane Reynolds, a lifelong Orange resident, Michele Racioppi from the NJ Historic Trust, Molly Rennie from the United Way of Northern New Jersey's ALICE Project, Ana Baptista from The New School and the Ironbound Community Corporation, and Molly Kaufman from the University of Orange. A break for lunch during the proceedings will

be a time to celebrate First UU's 125th Anniversary and an opportunity to honor three individuals who have been involved in housing rights and advancing social justice in Orange, Essex County and New Jersey. The Honorees are: Craig Hirshberg, former Executive Director of the UU Legislative Ministry of New Jersey; Andrea Lerner, Congregational Life Consultant and outgoing Metro New York UU District Executive; and Pat Morrissy, Founder and Executive Director of Housing and Neighborhood Development Services (HANDS), Inc. in Orange.



Afterwards, there will be walking tours of the neighborhood and creative workshops. Built around "Asset Based Community Development" (ABCD) practices, the tours and workshops will focus on what resources exist in Orange and how the community can build on them to address the relevant housing issues that affect Orange. A reception and cocktail hour will follow the conference's conclusion.

"The needs of our old buildings and economic pressures from new development are directly related to the quality of life in cities like Orange," said Charlie Wirene, Managing Director of the HUUB. "This conference will provide an inclusive venue to think about solutions to both. We invite all interested to join us on Saturday, 5 November." The event is being organized by the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Essex County, The HUUB, and the University of Orange. It is supported in part by the Fund for Unitarian Universalist Social Responsibility. No fee will be charge, but donations are welcome for the continuing work of First UU and the HUUB. For more information or to RSVP, contact Charlie Wirene at OrangeHUUB@gmail.com, or the First UU Church at info@essexuu.org, or 973-674-0010.

Second Sundays

Spirituality Group will meet in Parish Hall starting at 5 PM

**DATES** *SPJRTUAL GROUP*

13 Nov Presenters — Frank Barszcz & Darcy Hall

11 Dec How do our Unitarian Universalist principals define our spiritual journey?

08 Jan 2017 Where does spirituality fit for UU's as our heads and hearts work toward social and economic justice?

These are just two of the questions we hope to address over the next several months at First Church as we explore the various pathways of our respective spiritual journeys. Through the process of "Guided Group Interaction" group leaders Darcy Hall and Frank Barszcz will help create a safe space to talk about the challenges of being connected to the world around us in a meaningful way.

12 Feb

12 Mar

09 Apr

Continuing on Sunday, 13 November from 5:00 PM to 6:30 PM and each month following through June 2017, we will gather in a circle of meditation and sharing as we separate ourselves from daily activities and go to a peaceful inner place for spiritual exploration.

14 May

11 Jun

Our Unitarian Universalist chalice will be the centering point for the journey. Meditation and readings will help direct the exchange of thoughts, feelings and ideas about our individual journey. Come ready to share, to listen and to discover the things that make our existence unique in this world.

**Please note that we will not be having the traditional UU coffee hour for these gatherings. Juice and water will be available. Group meetings will take place on the second Sunday of the month through June 2017. Sessions will start promptly at 5:00pm and will run no later than 6:30 pm. We ask that if you decide to participate after the first meeting that you make a commitment to attend each session.**

**Spiritually Speaking: Universalism: A Theology for the 21st Century [Part 2]**  
by Rev. Forrest Church

A HOLOGRAPHIC GOD

It is impossible to speak of Universalism without addressing the subject of God. Early Universalists believed that everyone was born to be saved because God was too good to damn his own children. To practice and proclaim a 21st-century Universalism, we need not believe in the old Universalist God — or even employ the word God — but we must have an equally affectionate relationship with the ground of our being. Otherwise, we will succumb to the temptation to divide it between our own and others' feet.

Today, when people boast to me that they don't believe in God, I ask them to tell me a little about the God they don't believe in. Almost surely, I don't believe in "Him" either. As the ancient Hebrews recognized, God is not even God's name. God is our name for a power that is greater than all and yet present in each: the life force, the Holy, Being itself. God doesn't exist only because we need God; we exist because the universe was pregnant with us when it was born. In miracle and fact, our gestation traces to the beginning of time. Accidents abound, of course. One amino lapse or missed coupling and we would not be in the position to wonder why we are here. Yet, in my experience, only by positing the existence of a power beyond our comprehension can we begin to account for the miracle of being with an appropriate measure of humility and awe.

I recognize that for many people the word God has shrunk from repeated use, but we can always stretch it again. If you can't manage to do this — the "G word" fitting your mind more like a straightjacket

than a divine garment — then simply substitute another. Spirit may work for you, or the sacred, or higher power. As long as the object of your reverence is large enough, it doesn't really matter, not at all.

I will say, however, that a new Universalism may be ill served by the creation of a more private and thereby exclusive theological vocabulary. In a country where more than 90 percent of the people claim to believe in God, it may prove easier to inculcate faith in a larger God than to displace familiar affections. This aside, there is nothing novel, and certainly nothing blasphemous, about redesigning or renaming God. Responding to life-and-death questions, seekers have reinvented and thereby rediscovered the holy throughout the centuries.

Consider our ancestors, the searchers who came before us. Begin with the cave dwellers, the hunters and gatherers, for whom the greatest imaginable powers were the forces of nature. "God" was manifest in fire; therefore, in lightning and in thunder — perhaps even in the game they hunted to provide sustenance. When agriculture replaced hunting and gathering, these gods turned into goddesses. Power now lay in reaping and sowing, in the turning of the seasons. Fecundity determined survival. God became goddess; procreation, creation; birth, life.

Later, with the city-state, power came wrapped in the robes of authority. God was now Lord or king, protector, enforcer, and judge. A breakthrough in this view of divine nature arrived with the Hebrews, who believed their God and king was the only God and king. This development, less imperialistic than ethical, led them to attribute their failures not to



# 100 Year - Old House

Join us for a Housing Justice Conference  
to celebrate First Church's  
125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

*How do we integrate new and existing  
housing to meet the needs of the  
community and at the same time allow  
those who have lived and thrived here  
to remain and prosper?*

Saturday, November 5th, 2016  
The HUUB and the 1st UU of the Oranges  
35 Cleveland St Orange, NJ 07050

## -SCHEDULE-

- 9am: coffee & tours
- 10a-12pm: Planning for Justice
- 12-1pm: 125th Anniversary luncheon & Honoree Awards
- 1-4pm: Connecting & Creating
- 4-5pm: Reception & Cocktail Hour

# November 2016

| Sun   | Mon                                       | Tue | Wed | Thu                | Fri | Sat   |
|---|---|-----|-----|--------------------|-----|---|
|   |   | 1   | 2   | 3                  | 4   | 5<br>100 YEAR-OLD HOUSE, Parish Hall, 9 AM-5 PM |
| 6<br>Daylight Savings Time Ends, 2 AM       | 7   | 8   | 9   | 10                 | 11  | 12<br>125TH ANNIVERSARY, Parish Hall, 12 Noon   |
| 13<br>SPIRITUALITY GROUP, Parish Hall, 5 PM | 14  | 15  | 16  | 17                 | 18  | 19  |
| 20  | 21<br>Board of Trustees, Sonen Room, 7 PM | 22  | 23  | 24<br>THANKSGIVING | 25  | 26  |
| 27  | 28  | 29  | 30  |                    |     |   |



**JOIN US FOR FIRST UU'S 125<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON  
SATURDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2016**



**2016 Canvass  
Continues**

In conjunction with the 100 Year-old House Conference (see page 3), First UU will be celebrating its 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on Saturday, 5 November 2016. We will be honoring Andrea Lerner, Congregational Life Consultant and outgoing Metro New York UU District Executive, Craig Hirshberg, former Executive Director of the UU Legislative Ministry of New Jersey, and Pat Morrissy, Executive Director of Housing And Neighborhood Development Services (HANDS), Inc. A hot lunch will be provided with cocktails to follow the conference. No fee will be charged but donations are welcomed for the continuing work of First UU and the HUUB. For more information and RSVP, email [info@essexuu.org](mailto:info@essexuu.org) or call 973-674-0010.

The First UU Church of Essex County's 2016 Annual Canvass continues through November. The pledges of financial support from our members and friends provide a significant portion of our total income. Pledge cards have been mailed out to Members and Friends. Please fill out your pledge card, and return it to the Church Treasurer Bill Slezak by Sunday, 11 December 2016. An email version is available from the church office. This year, we ask that you be especially be generous as the HUUB, our urban ministry outreach program, applied for — and received — a generous matching grant of \$5000 from the UU Fund for Social Responsibility. If you have any further questions, please contact Church Treasurer Bill Slezak at [treasurer@essexuu.org](mailto:treasurer@essexuu.org). Thank you.



**Spiritually Speaking [cont.]**

another, stronger God, but to their own shortcomings. With Jesus, God became Father (in fact, Daddy, or Abba), a far more intimate authority figure.

In Western society, the God most unbelievers reject is the traditional Judeo-Christian God: omniscient, omnipotent, just, demanding, capricious on occasion, sometimes even cruel. For many thoughtful people this God was overthrown centuries ago, aided by the Copernican revolution. As has happened many times before, God was not therefore dead; God was re-imagined. For instance, after Copernicus had displaced us from the center of the universe, one group of scientists and theologians, in their efforts to re-imagine God, seized upon a metaphor better suited to their new worldview. Enter God the watchmaker, who created the world and set it ticking, then withdrew to another corner of the cosmos. This is the God of the deists, a God icy and remote, still transcendent but no longer personal.

Today, we are witnesses to another scientific revolution, one as profound as that initiated by Copernicus and Galileo half a millennium ago. on our path to a 21st-century theology, we encounter what might best be called a reflexive God, a co-creator with us in an unfolding, intricate drama of hitherto unimaginable complexity. This God is not immutable but ever changing, reaching and growing, even as we change, reach, and grow. No longer merely actors on God's stage, we may also be participants in the scripting of God's drama.

Among the metaphors most promising to a 21st-century Universalist theology is the holograph, which offers both a reflexive and a transcendent image for God. Lasers record images on a photo-plate made up of thousands of tiny lenses, resulting in a three-dimensional hologram, like those in the haunted house at Disneyland or on many credit cards. Mysteriously, if the photo-plate is

broken to bits and only a single shard is employed for projection, the entire image, however faint, will be replicated.

Our bodies are holographic too. Each of our cells contains the full genetic coding or DNA for our whole being, perhaps an even more telling metaphor for the reflexive nature of divinity. The same idea echoes throughout ancient scriptures. The realm of God is in a mustard seed. The Father and I are one. Atman (individual consciousness) and brahman (universal consciousness) are one. The realm of God is within you. As with Paul's image of the cosmic Christ (one body, many members, each with the same signature of divinity), the holograph suggests God's reflexive nature in a way that transforms our relationship not only with the divine, but with one another as well. Spun out of star-stuff, illumined by God, we participate in the miracle we ponder.

A like image from contemporary theology underlies the Gaia hypothesis, with Mother Earth reprising the goddess in a new way. Just as every organism is a colony of cells and organs each marked with the same DNA, might not everything that lives be said to create a larger organism marked with the DNA of God? Another approach, that of process theology, responds to such horrors as the Holocaust by tempering the claims of God's omnipotence and omniscience. By this reading — as co-creator of a reality we share — God suffers with us when we suffer and rejoices when we experience honest joy. This is a view shared by many liberation theologians as well.

As for the discovery of God, we find evidence first within ordinary things and in daily encounters. The surest way to find the sacred is to decode our own experiences, not only of beauty ("heaven in a wildflower") but also in sacraments of pain by which we commune with one another. This represents a third pillar for Universalism. We all suffer. We are broken and in need of healing. We struggle to accept ourselves and forgive others. To adopt the old language, we are all sinners. Aware of our imperfections, we seek more perfect faith, hope, love, and justice. At our best, we empathize with one another's pain and rise together in answer to a

## Guest At Your Table 2015 Kicks Off on 13 November



This fall, Unitarian Universalists of all ages nationwide will come together to give thanks by giving back. Through the **Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's Guest at Your Table** program, Unitarian Universalist communities celebrate the worth and dignity of all people and learn how to put these values into action. And the experience of families learning together has built lasting connections to UU values for generations of UU youth.

Focusing on four major program areas - advancing economic justice, defending civil liberties & the access to democratic processes, promoting environmental justice, and protecting rights in humanitarian crises - UUSC carries out efforts to advance human rights and social justice by working in partnership with local grassroots organizations in the United States and around the world, and standing with grassroots communities as they confront unjust power structures and challenge oppressive policies. Each program area has a special focus on issues around race, class, and gender as well as how these oppressions perpetuate injustice and human rights abuses. UUSC also provides unique opportunities for social justice activists to translate their values into action by participating in on-the-ground projects.

Guest at Your Table has been an important part of UUSC, and of UU culture, for thirty-five years with more than 700 congregations participated. **This year there will be no donation envelopes distributed or any callbacks.** Donations can be made online at [www.uusc.org/givetoguest](http://www.uusc.org/givetoguest). Please credit your connection with the First UU Church of Essex County.

If you have any questions about the UUSC or Guest at Your Table, please speak with Gregory Giacobe at [ggiacobe@optonline.net](mailto:ggiacobe@optonline.net) or 201-823-2459. You can learn more about UUSC's work or support UUSC directly at [www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org). To learn more about this year's Guest At Your Table, including *Stories of Hope*, go to [www.uusc.org/guest\\_at\\_your\\_table](http://www.uusc.org/guest_at_your_table). Your gift to Guest at Your Table is tax deductible — be sure to complete the form on your envelope. And remember, gifts of \$125 are eligible to be matched by the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock, to double the impact of your support!

### Spiritually Speaking [cont.]

higher law. Illumination shines from heart to heart. We discover the healing and saving power of the holy within the ordinary. For instance, anyone who embraces the most familiar Universalist definition, that "God is love," discovers God's nature in his or her own experience of love. This may not mean that God is love actually, but it certainly suggests that love is divine.

#### THE CATHEDRAL OF THE WORLD

By whatever name one chooses to call "the One," Universalism offers a clear epistemology for reconciling the one and the many. With this in mind, let me turn to the elements that might constitute a Universalist theology for the 21st century. Regardless of the specifics of our various beliefs, to proclaim Universalism more persuasively we must establish a firmer theological platform, one we can affirm with shared clarity and conviction. I offer the following thoughts in this spirit.

To the Universalist, truth in religion is like truth in poetry. Our common text is the creation. Though limited by the depth and field of our vision, we are driven to make sense of it as best we can. So we tell stories, formulate hypotheses, develop schools of thought and worship, and pass our partial wisdom down from generation to generation. Not only every religion, but every philosophy, ideology, and scientific worldview is a critical school with creation as its text. By whatever name we call its

author or co-creator, we are all interpreters of the poetry of God.

Compare this with literary criticism. How various are the ways in which we read a masterpiece. A great piece of literature admits to many levels of interpretation: literal, metaphorical, symbolic, political, structural, moral. Two critics may arrive at radically different interpretations of the same passage, both founding their views on carefully reasoned logic and demonstrating impressive erudition in the course of their proof. Within any given school of criticism, a continuing discussion takes place, sharpening perspectives, issuing new and relevant discoveries. There exists as well the possibility of dialogue between schools, promoting a new, more dynamic view from each of two distinctive perspectives.

The same thing holds for distinctive theologies, with our common text the creation, the greatest masterpiece of them all. Interpreters with differing approaches, methodologies, and tools struggle to discover who we are, where we have come from, how we got here, where we are heading, and why and how. Each works from a set of basic presuppositions. Each has its trusted tools, such as the Bible or the Hubble telescope. As among literary critics, there is a continuing discussion within each school and an occasional dialogue between schools. Religions adapt to new discoveries in science. Scientists sometimes reach the point of farthest penetration and adopt the mystical language of reverence and adoration. The stakes are high. Of

Spiritually Speaking [cont.]

all intellectual contests, none is more charged or dangerous. Each side reckons the score in a different fashion, and there is no mutually accepted guideline for who is winning, even for how to play. Viewed as competition, the only way to secure a final victory is to discount or eliminate one's opponents.

And yet, if there can be many arguable interpretations of a poem, what should this tell us about the cosmos itself? Nothing is more mysterious or more veiled than the secret of the cosmos. No dogma can begin to comprehend it. Even as a scientific investigator cannot measure the velocity and position of a particle at the same time, the moment we begin to parse the creation we change its apparent nature. Gestalt psychology suggests a like point in object-and-field studies: that well-known optical illusion of two faces in profile that also outline the shape of a vase. It is possible to go back and forth from one focus to another, but — though both are before our very eyes — we can't see the faces and the vase at once. In each instance, the investigator becomes part of the experiment, affecting the very data he or she is attempting objectively to collect. Not only are we the interpreters of God's poetry, we are the poem itself.

This doesn't mean that the search for truth or knowledge is in vain. In fact, discoveries such as Heisenberg's uncertainty principle — pointing out that the experimenter affects the data — are breakthroughs in knowledge. Nor does it mean that all truths are relative (and therefore functionally interchangeable), only that no truth within the compass of human knowledge is absolute or final. That ultimate Truth is not privileged to any one particular religious, philosophical, or scientific system in no way rules out the possible existence of such a Truth (or God). It simply underscores the natural limits of every human truth claim.

History and our neighbors teach that there are many ways to write and a myriad more to interpret the masterpiece of creation. This too is a principle of Universalism, indeed its guiding principle: to affirm the discrete beauty of many windows even as Unitarianism (as a doctrine, not a sect) proclaims the one Light. In this spirit — and to assist in constructing a 21st-century Universalist theology — let me suggest a metaphor that helps me to understand and proclaim my Universalist faith, one I introduced in *A Chosen Faith* and develop in my most recent book, *Lifecraft*.

Imagine the world as a vast cathedral. This cathedral is as ancient as humankind; its cornerstone is the first altar, marked with the tincture of blood and blessed by tears. Search for a lifetime — which is all we are given — and we shall never know its limits, visit all its transepts, worship at its myriad shrines, nor span its celestial ceiling with our gaze.

The builders have labored in this cathedral from time immemorial. Daily, work begins that shall not be finished in the lifetime of the architects who planned it, the patrons who paid for it, the builders who construct it, or the expectant worshipers. Nonetheless, throughout human history, one generation after another has labored lovingly, sometimes fearfully, crafting memorials and consecrating shrines. Untold numbers of these today collect dust in long-undisturbed chambers; others, cast centuries or millennia ago from their once respected places, lie shattered on the cathedral floor. Not a moment passes without the dreams of long-dead dreamers being outstripped, crushed, or abandoned, giving way to new visions, each immortal in reach, ephemeral in grasp.

Above all else, contemplate the windows. In the Cathedral of the World there are windows beyond number — some long forgotten, covered with many patinas of dust, others revered by millions, the most sacred of shrines. Each in its own way is beautiful. Some are abstract, others representational, some dark and meditative, others bright and dazzling. Each tells a story about the creation of the world, the meaning of history, the purpose of life, the nature of humankind, the mystery of death. The windows of the cathedral are

where the Light shines through.

As with all extended metaphors, this one is imperfect. The Light of God (or Truth or Being itself) shines not only upon us, but out from within us as well. Together with the windows, we are part of the cathedral, not apart from it. Together we comprise an interdependent web of being. The cathedral is constructed out of star-stuff and so are we. We are that part (or known part) of creation that contemplates itself. Because the cathedral is so vast, our life so short, and our vision so dim, we are able to contemplate only a tiny part of the whole creation. We can explore but a handful of its many chambers. Our allotted span permits us to reflect on the play of darkness and light through remarkably few of its myriad windows. Yet, since the whole is contained in each of its parts, as we ponder and act on insights derived from even a single reflection, we may experience self-illumination. We may also discover or invent meanings that invest both the creation and our lives with coherence and meaning.

A 21st-century theology based on the concept of one light (Unitarianism) and many windows (Universalism) offers to its adherents both breadth and focus. Honoring many different religious approaches, it excludes only the truth-claims of absolutists. This is because fundamentalists — whether on the right or left — claim that the light shines through their window only. Skeptics draw the opposite conclusion. Seeing the bewildering variety of windows and observing the folly of the worshipers, they conclude that there is no Light. But the windows are not the Light, only where the light shines through.

ONE LIGHT, MANY WINDOWS

One cautionary note: Universalism itself can be perverted in two ways. One is to elevate one truth into a universal truth: "My church is the one true church." The other is to reduce distinctive truths to a lowest common denominator: "All religion is merely a set of variations upon the golden rule." The Universalism I embrace does neither. It holds that the same Light shines through all our windows, but that each window is different. The windows modify the Light, refracting it in various patterns that suggest discrete meanings. Just as one cannot believe in "everything," to find meaningful expression Universalism must be modified or refracted through the glass of individual and group experience (which by definition would be less than universal). One can be a Buddhist Universalist, a pagan Universalist, a humanist Universalist, a Jewish Universalist, a Christian Universalist. On the other hand, one cannot in any meaningful sense be a Universalist Universalist; it is impossible to look out every window. Neither can one be, say, a Universalist Christian; when the modifier of one's faith becomes its nominative, primary allegiance is relegated to but one part of the whole that encompasses it.

Religion can be dangerous, especially on a shrinking globe where, with discrete backyards a thing of the past, conflicting faith positions contest one another in almost every human precinct. Yet every generation has had its holy warriors, hard-bitten zealots for whom the world is large enough for only one true faith. Terrorists for "Truth" and "God," they have not only been taught to worship at a single window, but also been incited to demonstrate their faith by throwing stones through other peoples' windows. Tightly drawn, their logic makes a demonic kind of sense:

1. Religious answers respond to life and death questions, which happen to be the most important questions of all.
2. You and I may come up with different answers.
3. If you are right, I must be wrong.
4. But I can't be wrong, because my salvation hinges on being right.
5. Therefore, short of abandoning my faith and embracing yours, in order to secure my salvation I am driven to ignore, convert, or destroy you.



Spiritually Speaking [cont.]

Aristotle coined something called the Law of the Excluded Middle. As a logical certainty, he asserted that A and not-A cannot both be true at one and the same time. By the light of my cathedral metaphor (and also by that of quantum uncertainty), Aristotle is wrong, at least with respect to theology. His logical certitude oversteps the law of experience. Contrast one stained-glass window (its dark center bordered by more translucent panes) with another (configured in the opposite fashion). Though the same light shines through both, they will cast diametrically opposite shadow images on the cathedral floor (A and not-A, if you will). Just as we cannot gaze directly at the sun, we cannot stare directly into the light of God. All the world's great scriptures make this point. No one can look God in the eye. Truth emerges only indirectly, as refracted through the windows of tradition and experience. To a modern Universalist such as myself, this suggests that — since the same light can be refracted in many different ways (including A and not-A) — the only religious truth claims we can discount completely are those that dismiss all other claims for failing to conform to their own understanding of the creation.

One presumably impartial response to the war of theological passions is to reject religion entirely, to distance ourselves from those who attempt — always imperfectly — to interpret the Light's meaning. There are two problems with this approach. One is that it deprives us of a potentially deep encounter with the mysterious forces that impel our being, thereby limiting our ability to invent and discover meaning. The second is that none of us actually is able to resist interpreting the Light. Whether we choose the windows that enlighten existence for us or inherit them, for each individual the light and darkness mingle more or less persuasively as refracted through one set of windows or another. Attracted to the partial clarification of reality that emerges in patterns of light and the play of shadows, even people who reject religion are worshipers of truth as they perceive it. Their windows too become shrines.

Because none of us is able fully to comprehend the truth that shines through another person's window, nor to apprehend the falsehood that we ourselves may perceive as truth, we can easily mistake an-

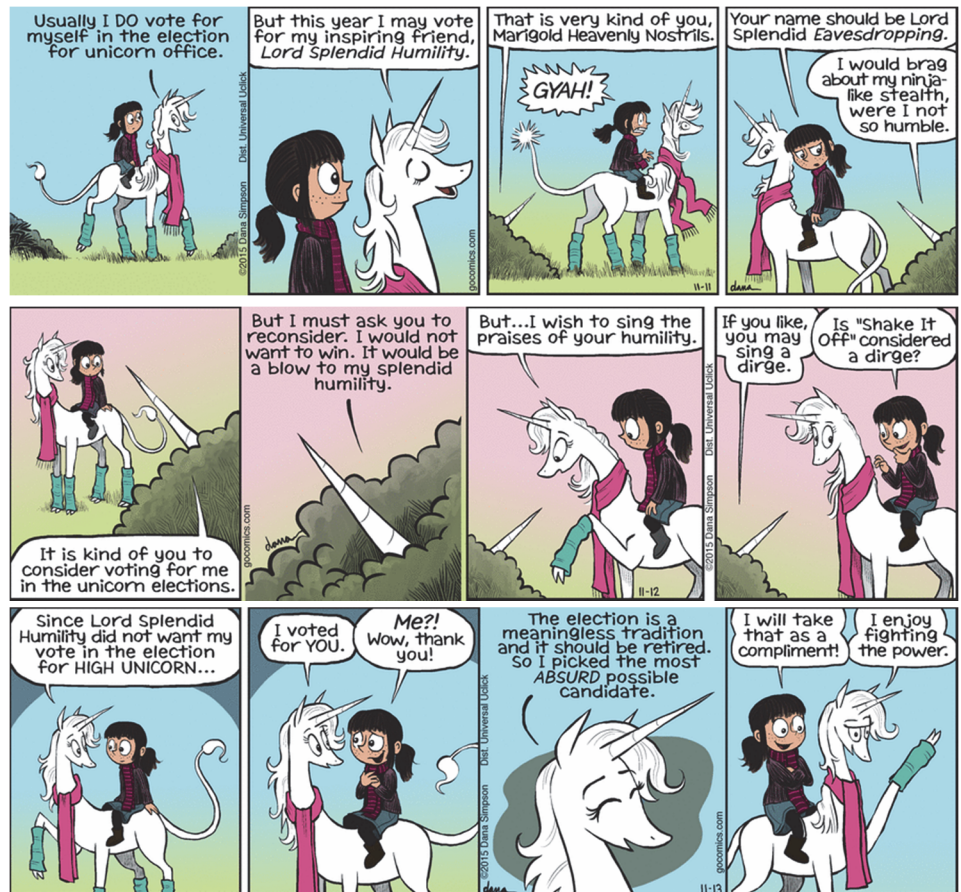
other's good for evil, and our own evil for good. A Universalist theology tempers the consequences of our inevitable ignorance while addressing the overarching crisis of our times: dogmatic division in an ever more intimate, fractious, and yet interdependent world. It posits the following fundamental principles:

1. There is one Power, one Truth, one God, one Light.
2. This Light shines through every window in the cathedral.
3. No one can perceive it directly, the mystery being forever veiled.
4. Yet, on the cathedral floor and in the eyes of each beholder, refracted and reflected through different windows in differing ways, it plays in patterns that suggest meanings, challenging us to interpret and live by these meanings as best we can.
5. Each window illumines Truth in a unique way, leading to various truths, and these in differing measure according to the insight, receptivity, and behavior of the beholder.

I am certain that others will refine and improve upon these principles. I offer them as much to promote a dialogue about the integrity and intelligibility of Universalism for our time as I do to answer the many questions Universalism poses to the inquiring mind. Yet I offer them with complete conviction. If we Unitarian Universalists are unable to recognize the ground that we share, we shall remain only marginally effective in helping to articulate grounds on which all might stand as children of a mystery that unites far more profoundly than it distinguishes one child of life from any other. To the extent that we fail in this mission, we betray our Universalist inheritance.

*Rev. Dr. F. Forrester Church was senior minister of the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City. This essay is adapted from his address, "Our Universalist Mission: Proclaiming a Theology for the 21st Century," which he delivered at the UUA General Assembly in Cleveland, Ohio, in June 2001. An expanded version is in his book, Bringing God Home: A Traveler's Guide (St. Martin's Press, May 2002). This essay appeared in the November/December 2001 issue of the UU World.*

Phoebe & Her Unicorn  
By Dana Simpson







Part of the National Peace Action Network

**NEW JERSEY PEACE ACTION** ➔

Join Us for Our 59th Fall Peace Gathering with Internationally  
Renowned Ret. Colonel ANN WRIGHT to hear her stories:  
**GLOBAL FLASHPOINTS: THE COURAGE TO RESIST**



**Colonel (Ret.) ANN WRIGHT**

During the run-up to war in Iraq, Army Colonel (Ret.) and diplomat Ann Wright resigned her State Department post in protest. She was one among dozens of government insiders and active-duty military personnel who spoke out in protest of government actions they felt were illegal.

Ann Wright is a 29-year US Army/Army Reserves veteran, a retired United States Army colonel and retired U.S. State Department official, known for her outspoken opposition to the Iraq War. She received the State Department Award for Heroism in 1997, after helping to evacuate several thousand people during the civil war in Sierra Leone. She is most noted for having been one of three State Department officials to publicly resign in direct protest of the 2003 Invasion of Iraq. She served in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia and Mongolia. In December, 2001 she was on the small team that reopened the US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. She is the co-author of the book "[Dissent: Voices of Conscience](#)." Wright was also a passenger on the Challenger 1, which along with the Mavi Marmara, was part of the Gaza flotilla in 2010.

**Wright's Recent Courage to Resist continues in Global Flashpoint areas below...**

Most recently, Ann Wright spent time in **North Dakota** with the Native Americans opposing the pipeline. She participated in a peace mission to **Moscow**. She was on the October 2016 [Women's Boat to Gaza](#) part of a [continued mission](#) against the Israeli embargo on Gaza. Ann Wright traveled to Japan to protest an expanded U.S. military base in **Okinawa, Japan** and participated in the **Women's Walk to End the Korean War**.

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**First Unitarian Universalist  
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PO Box 998.

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## Making the connections



**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.