

Horizons Journal

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix



The Difference Between Hope & Optimism

Reverend Susan Frederick-Gray

re Unitarian Universalists a hopeful people by nature? Theologically, we affirm an optimistic view of humanity and its

capacity for good, and UU theists affirm an optimistic and loving expression of the divine. The familiar joke about the difference between Unitarians and Universalists is that "Unitarians think people are too good to go to hell, while Universalists believe God is too good to send people to hell." Either way, that is optimism.

At the same time, Unitarian Universalists also are known for our critique of the ways society falls shorts of our capacity for goodness. When it comes to issues of justice and oppression, we are bold in our truth telling—willing to look at reality and challenge the world as it is. Despite our

optimistic theology, when it comes to climate change, we can even be apocalyptic in our analysis. Indeed, "despair for the world," as Wendell Berry writes, is something I myself face on a far too frequent basis. Given this, are we really a people of hope?

In one meeting of the Vision Task Force last year, we reflected on the importance of joy and hope in our spiritual community, but right alongside this we named the need to be courageous in recognizing and naming truth. There is something powerful in being able to hold this duality—the pain and heartbreak of suffering and injustice, alongside the possibility for goodness, the potential of humanity and the beauty of creation. This duality is where real hope lives.

The best lesson I have learned about hope is

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The New Congregational Vision Unfolds

J Marshall Valentine

Chair, Vision Task Force

Threads of longing, dreaming, and achieving tie us to what we aspire to become. This process, in broad terms, is vision. UUCP's

Board of Trustees called for building a fresh vision to lead us forward and created the Vision Task Force (VTF) to guide that process. Over the past 14 months, the VTF has met with and led the congregation through this Visioning process. The VTF organized 11 opportunities for members of the congregation to share their visions of the highest and best our congregation can achieve and become in the next decade, including in-person conversations, online surveys, and a dream wall for images and comments.

After a thorough review of the information obtained from various forums, the VTF noted com-

mon threads from the congregation, including dreams of justice-centered work—perhaps via a satellite location closer to downtown—and longings for a larger, more diverse and inclusive community. The overall sentiment was that we love UUCP now and want to continue doing what we do well now, only "more and better."

After several attempts at creating a vision that reflected the aspirations of UUCP and feedback from the board to be bolder and more concise, the VTF proposed the following vision statement to the board:

To be a spiritual community for our time: Theologically Diverse Radically Inclusive Justice Centered

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The Spirit of Possibility

Benjie Messer

Music Director

Sunday, March 6th is an All-Music Sunday, a morning without a sermon, in which the music

carries the message of the day. This year, our congregation's choir will be joined by the choir of Chandler's Valley Unitarian Universalist congregation, as well as many of our other musical groups. Together, we will celebrate the music of Elizabeth Alexander, one of today's most well-known and well -loved Unitarian Universalist composers. Alexander's music blends classical rigor with the flavor of her Appalachian roots, and even when writing for groups outside of Unitarian Universalism, her lyrics often reflect her gentle, universalist beliefs. As the clinician at the Arizona UU Choir Festival last month, she taught our choir the musical intricacies and personal meaning of her pieces, and I look forward to passing those on to you.

One of my favorite pieces in our upcoming service is Alexander's choral work "Go Out!" Its lyrics are from a quote sometimes attributed to universalist minister John Murray, but actually written for a 1951 history of Unitarian Universalism, which poetically suggests that a fictional "Time-Spirit" said to Murray:

Go out into the highways and by-ways of America, your new country... You may possess only a small light, but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them, not hell, but hope and courage. Do not push them deeper into their theological despair, but preach the kindness and everlasting love of God.

Our worship theme this month is Hope, and 19th-century Christian universalism was a hopeful religious movement. It spread the idea that everyone was loved by God and no one was destined for hell. Today's Unitarian Universalism is untethered from its Christian roots, so it rarely speaks about a deity or an afterlife. But it asks that we live as universalists by affirming the inherent worth and dignity of every person, as though everyone deserves our love, and no one deserves our curses. It's a hopeful, purposeful faith that asks us to take on the world's problems and transform it into a better place. I hope that on the morning of March 6th you hear that spirit of excitement and possibility, as I do, in the music of

When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Wendell Berry



A Renewed Hope Caitlin Gaspar

Member, UUCP Board of Trustees

hen *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* was released this December, my husband's excitement was contagious. We went to a 7:00 pm

showing, and he arrived at the theater 4:00 pm to get us a spot in line. He shared his enthusiasm with others in line, making predictions and friendly conversation. During the film, we both got into the action and excitement. So much that we spent hours after the film discussing the movie. My mom gifted us *Star Wars* t-shirts. We purchased the DVDs and each night watched an episode. We are eagerly awaiting Episode 8.

When the Vision Task Force shared the new vision statement at the congregational meeting, I felt a similar enthusiasm.

To be a spiritual community of our time: Theologically diverse Radically inclusive Justice centered

I spoke about the vision with a friend who missed the congregational meeting, and she said, "I really like that!" We had a great conversation and made predictions about what this vision could bring. When the Vision Task Force presented to Small Group facilitators, I saw facilitators fully embracing the statement. Facilitators engaged with task force members, asking thoughtful questions and displaying great interest. I'm so excited about this vision, I would gladly and proudly wear it on a

t-shirt! I'm eagerly awaiting our congregational meeting on June 5th, when our beloved community will vote on this vision.

Between now and June, a lot of things will happen in our congregation. Our annual stewardship campaign will be kicking off in a few weeks. Members will be gearing up to grow as leaders and UUs at District Assembly in Santa Barbara, CA, and then General Assembly in Columbus, OH. And that's in addition to all the Community Nights, Sunday services, RE classes, and committee meetings. With all these events occurring, it is easy to get wrapped up in the details.

However, this vision is so meaningful to me, that it gives me renewed hope around all the details I attend to. As a board member, I'm committed to keeping the vision in mind. When we host our auction board game night, I'll think about how I can be radically inclusive. When the board reviews our progress towards strategic ends, I'll consider how we're working to be a spiritual community of our time. In my small group, I'll work to bring theologically diverse views to the discussion and a justice-centered mindset to the table.

In the *Star Wars* franchise, one of my favorite characters is Qui-Gon Jinn. In Episode 1, Qui-Gon Jinn tells a young Anakin Skywalker, "Always remember, your focus determines your reality." This quote speaks to me about our vision. If I spend time working towards this vision, I can help make the future it calls for real. If you've yet to feel the force from this vision, come talk to me. I'd love to get to know you and share my excitement. □

The secret is not to give up hope. It's very hard not to because if you're really doing something worthwhile I think you will be pushed to the brink of hopelessness before you come through the other side.

George Lucas



A Case Against Hope

Emrys Staton

Ministerial Intern

was on the phone with a friend a few months ago, and our conversation dove into some heavier social and political topics. Towards

the end of the call, we noted that our conversations often veer into the territory of things that feel hopeless. She asked what I, as an aspiring minister, do about hopelessness. My reply: "I try to make hopelessness fun."

This concept of hope is always fermenting in my mind, especially in the context of activism and social justice work. I keep hoping to distill something insightful out of the mash of dismal news and events—so it keeps on fermenting.

One useful thing I've heard on this topic was a talk from theologian Miguel de la Torre, who proposes we embrace a theology of hopelessness. As a liberation theologian, he always defines what he means by "we." There is the "we" who are living in conditions of oppression, on the margins of society. And the "we" who are privileged, and complicit in the systems of oppression. I belong to the latter.

De la Torre says that for those living on the margins, hope is a cruelty. Religion peddles hope as a future salvation or reward for good behavior and piety. He joins others in questioning the idea that the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice. What proof is there? Or is it an image constructed as a life support system that artificially keeps hope alive in a context that is actually hopeless?

I've noticed that in my own life, I often use these little statements many times per day, both in spoken and written correspondence. "I hope you have good day," or "I hope that things get better." I never like how I feel when I say "I hope...." It strikes me as dismissive, somewhere between palliative and an insult. Despite being well intended, if I'm honest with myself, the impact of these statements disregards and minimizes the reality of what a person is experiencing.

It helps if I move my focus away from outcomes to process. For example, I feel better saying, "I hope you're able to take care yourself as you deal with _____." Or, "I hope you get the time you need to reflect on this experience."

Still, I ask myself, why do I frame these statements in the language of hope? I realize that I use that word in order to avoid my own discomfort with another's reality. Similarly, de la Torre says:

The hopelessness I advocate rejects quick and easy fixes that may temporarily soothe the conscience of the privileged but is no substitute for bringing about a more just social structure that is not based on the disenfranchisement of the world's abused.

Whether or not I hope that someone has a good day, or I hope that refugees from Syria are able to arrive safely to a destination in Europe—while it might help me feel better, my being hopeful has little tangible impact on the situation.

De la Torre urges Christians to embrace hopelessness. He goes right to the place of the oppression to say that, by fully recognizing the worst and scariest conditions of life, hope can be created there through acts of solidarity.

I see a link here to our Universalist roots. The idea of universal salvation had to confront the notion of where hope comes from. Countering predestination, which indeed was a hopeless position, early Universalist preachers like Hosea Ballou said that salvation is not a delayed reward for good behavior, but was a real-life experience that was possible when we bring love of self, neighbor and God into our daily lives. He also warned against a position of entitlement, saying that a thirsty person would not expect compensation after drinking water. Ballou came from a rural background, and preached mostly in the countryside, so his ideas were grounded in the harder realities of farm life.

Bringing the focus back on my own daily actions—I will continue to work on hoping less and loving more. For the world will likely not change based on my hopes, but my daily offerings of compassion, love and solidarity can generate hope.

□

Continued from "The Difference..." Rev. Susan, page 1

that it is not the same as optimism. Unitarian Universalist minister Bruce Marshall writes:

Optimism is an attitude of expectation that a particular result will occur—that a person will recover from an illness, that we will achieve a specific goal... Hope is less specific. It's an attitude that looks for possibility in whatever life deals us. Hope does not anticipate a particular outcome, but keeps before us the possibility that something useful will come from this. Hope is more resilient, more enduring, more helpful. Hope advises us to look squarely at the realities that confront us while remaining aware of the possibilities.

This definition of hope is so important because without embracing the duality—without being able to hold both the reality of things as they are, while also holding on to possibility—we run the risk of losing ourselves to either denial or despair. Denial can be a form of optimism in its stubborn refusal to acknowledge the reality of what is. We fail to see honestly the situation before us. And despair

arises when we see clearly the struggles or obstacles, but have lost the capacity to see the possibility for change or learning. The deep lesson here is that hope isn't about just looking on the bright side. In fact, to build the kind of enduring hope that leads to resilience and health, we have to confront despair, we have to learn to be with the reality or situation that life has given us. This is painful, but hope is not the absence of pain. As the author Brene Brown writes, "When you numb your pain you also numb your joy." The same is true when it comes to hope. If we are not able to confront the reality of our lives in our toughest moments, if we cannot sit with our grief, our despair, then we diminish our ability to develop the kind of hope that helps us see beauty and love even in the midst of mortality, the kind of hope that provides courage and persistence even in the face of overwhelming odds, the kind of hope that comes to us as light and joy, even if only in moments, in the midst of pain and struggle.

For this reason, our willingness to embrace suffering without compromising the possibilities and beauty present in life and creation that we truly are a people not of optimism, but of hope. \Box

Continued from "The New..." page 1

Excited by the Vision, the board introduced it to the congregation at the Midyear Congregational Meeting on January 31st with the intention that the congregation will approve this Vision at the June 5th Annual Meeting. Open meetings this spring will allow the congregation to understand the visionforming process and imagine together what it would mean to realize this vision. A good vision is not just something that collects dust in a frame on the wall. We have endeavored to create a congregational vision to be treasured by the community and to propel ideas and programs until priorities have changed and the next vision is formed. It is this concerted effort to cherish and to realize this vision that the Board and Task Force hope to share at these meetings.

On a more personal note, many of you know

that I relocated to Charlotte, North Carolina, where I am now closer to my aging family. I left my home in Arizona after 15 1/2 years of treasuring the state. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the joy that being part of the Vision Task Force and also my short time with UUCP has given me. There are many strong voices at UUCP that came out to express their visions for our future. It was encouraging to hear from so many great minds together, working toward a common objective, and it was an honor to be selected to become part of this process. I highly encourage anyone not participating in UUCP activities to consider the healing impact of such work. We have a strong force at UUCP that is blossoming like the flowers in the garden—if only you stop for just a moment to breathe the fresh air and embolden each other to realize the vision for UUCP's future.

□



Building a Future—and a Present—Together

Katie Resendiz

Acting Director, Children's Ministries

If ope is a peculiar experience. It seems to be closely related to worry in that they are both

emotional responses to something that hasn't and may not happen. They both deeply connect to individual belief and faith. In choosing to hope or worry, we are spinning stories out of our past experiences, narratives we hold on to, and our ability to imagine.

In reflecting on hope, we look to the future. As the Director of Children's Ministry, I am a part of many conversations that focus on youth as "our hope." It is not uncommon to hear someone lay the entire burden of our future on our children and youth. That is a very heavy load and while it might be erroneously assigned, it does betray a very specific theory about change and progress.

Whether we envision progress as rolling with momentum to build and continue the status quo or a great revolution, massively shifting our path, we make certain investments to move the ball forward. One idea is that through education we can change people's behavior and therefore shape the future. The action of our hope takes the form of vast educational programming that is intended to create entire new cultures of behavior.

Maybe, as the director of an *educational* program I shouldn't disclose this, but... I struggle with the idea that education alone can form the world we envision. In fact, it is one of my pet peeves. When I hear the combined clichés of "children are our future" and "educating for change," I am reminded of so many failed overseas development projects that too often felt like "let us show you the right way."

I'm not denying the importance of sharing resources and knowledge; I'm not saying skill building isn't vital. I do think there is a piece missing; I think we are forgetting to talk about identity. When we focus on providing education as the primary avenue to support our hopes, we envision ourselves in the role of resource. We are bringing our great knowledge to, in this case,

children in hopes that they will behave in the way that seems the most logical to our precepts. This, in turn, envisions the children as lacking their own structure of logic and they exist as only future, improved versions of ourselves. This denies the identity and formation of their individual generation.

Children and youth are not small adults waiting to be filled with our knowledge. They are fully formed communities with values, energy, and assets beyond the imagining of our generational world views. We can teach structure and skill, we can mentor and guide, but we cannot decide what will be most useful and most palatable to them in the future. When we acknowledge children's power beyond their role as learners, we free ourselves to move beyond being teachers and here we find our common identity.

Similarly, this idea that educating children is our only control of the future, denies the power and presence of our oldest community members. We limit our community by thinking of elders only as storytellers, we pigeonhole them as wise and historical. We refuse them wildness, folly, and experimentation.

Children and youth are not small adults waiting to be filled with our knowledge. They are fully formed communities with values, energy, and assets beyond the imagining of our generational world views.

It is not surprising that there is more hope and more power in coming together as equals. Our investments in educational programming become less about building a distant future and more a matter of sharing a single experience. When choosing to hope or to worry, we can find strength in recognizing all the power of each individual and building an identity that embodies our shared hopes for the future in our present actions. \Box

A Spiritual Community for Our Time

Susan Morris

Member, 2016-17 Stewardship Campaign Committee

The title above is the first line of a fresh, new vision statement that was unveiled at the Congregational Meeting on Sunday, January 31st. In the way of such things in a Unitarian Universalist congregation, there will be several months of discernment and open discussion before it is finalized, but it seems fair to borrow the line as the theme for the upcoming 2016-2017 Stewardship Campaign. "A spiritual community" is a straightforward definition of who we are; I'm intrigued by the addition of "for our time."

"For our time" speaks of immediacy, of focus on what is happening right now, in the world at large, in our own community and within ourselves. My heart feels heavy when I reflect on the enormity of suffering on this planet. My husband and I earnestly make donations to food banks, political campaigns, medical research and social service agencies in an attempt to help ameliorate the wounds of the world. Although I hope that our contributions make some difference to someone somewhere, we rarely have the opportunity to observe positive results directly.

One of the ways I center myself is by tending my own garden, both literally and figuratively. Since becoming a member of UUCP, my garden has expanded to include this community. The time and treasure we give to UUCP energizes us and keeps us engaged; it gives us purpose, a sense of belonging and a feeling of reaching beyond our own lives. Because of this, we have chosen in the past few years to direct a larger percentage of our charitable donations to our pledge to UUCP, which I admit fills a selfish need: it allows us the opportunity to observe before our eyes the positive changes that member donations make possible.

I was excited to learn at our first Stewardship Committee meeting that one goal for the coming year is to better "walk the walk" of truly being "justice centered" (which happens to be the last line of the newly proposed vision for the congregation). So even more than before, the money we give here will not only spiritually nourish our members and friends, but also go beyond these walls to help effect much-needed change in the world. Together in community, we can be a larger positive public presence than all of us as individuals.

The Kickoff Service will be Sunday, March 20th and the campaign continues until Celebration Sunday, April 24th. That day, we will share a luncheon together, basking in the generosity of our community and excitement about what our donations will allow us to accomplish in the coming year. \square

Hope is the thing with feathers That perches in the soul... Emily Dickinson

You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep Spring from coming. Pablo Neruda

Memorial Garden



friends whose ashes were interred in the Memorial Garden this season in past years are still remembered

January:

Frances Johnson Bishop
John Connair Cummings
Joanlynne Davis
Thomas Roberts Foltz, Jr.
Gertrude Posner Ganseberg
Hubert L. Gay, Jr.
Edwin Paul Grobe
Jane E. Horswell
Robert Albert Klaus
Gladys Welters Klaus
James Thomas Lynch, Jr.
Wendell Charles Manker
Gordon Woods
James Francis Bauman
Jack Cummings

February:

Lorry A. Blanksma
Thomas R. Fritts
Warren Hastings
Margaret Ann Herrick
Audrey Ames Kaslo
Franklin Anthony Klumpe
Majorie Spear Klumpe
Robert E. Morris
Stephen S. Osder
Muriel Osder
Dorothy Pollack
Patricia Maureen Shannon
Everett Eller Warner
Margaret G. Harding

March:

Lenore Caroline Bendheim
Jeremy E. Butler
Penelope Wells Butler
Christine Albrecht Campbell
Helen Dycus Lane
Marti Teresa McDermott
Orval Floyd McVey
Nicole Fiala Murphy
Catherine Bird Olsen
Lloyd Dewitt Oxley
Jacquard H. Rothschild
Phyllis Mills Rothschild
Terry Nielsen Simmons

MARCH COMMUNITY NIGHTS

Every Thursday, 6:00 PM
Prepared meals, vegetarian options

Suggested donation: \$5/adult, \$2/child under 10, \$10/family or bring your own sack supper or potluck dishes

6:30 PM

Chalice Kids (supervised activities for children)
Great conversation and community building every Thursday, plus:

March 10: **Thoughtful Leadership Forum** with Kim St. Clair
March 17: **Open (Drop-in) Small Group** with Mike Sheffer
March 24: **Immigration Small Group Justice Ministry** with Bill Lace
March 24: **Young Adult Small Group** with Caitlin Gaspar & Sarah Moore



Unicare News

In Remembrance:

• Jayne Cassleman, a talented singer and teacher who graced UUCP with her musical talents, died in early February. Her friends wish her energy is passed to all who knew her.

Other News:

- Teri Talbot had back surgery in February and, as of this writing, is recovering from a second surgery and complications. We hold Teri, her wife Donna and daughter Julie in our healing thoughts and wishes for a full recovery.
- We celebrate with Lois Fisher who had successful eye surgery—it's good to see and be seen!

What Is Unicare?

Unicare is a way we take care of each other. There are three Unicare programs which allow volunteers to support our UUCP community:

Join the Unicare email list: In times of need or joy, Unicare volunteers send cards, notes, emails, make calls or visits, or assist with other needs as able. If you wish to be on the Unicare distribution list please email Vicki Myers at unicare@phoenixuu.org.

Be a Friendship Partner: By making monthly visits, placing phone calls or staying in contact with a caregiver, a new parent, or someone with mobility issues, you extend the ties of community to friends unable to participate fully in UUCP activities. If you wish to volunteer to be a Friendship Partner, email Vicki Myers at Friendship@phoenixuu.org.

This program is currently looking for a coordinator; please email if interested.

Be a Memorial Services volunteer: These volunteers are called upon when a UUCP memorial service is requested. They assist with set up, ushering, programs and reception support. If interested in volunteering for Memorial Services support, please email Vicki Myers at unicare@phoenixuu.org.

It is difficult to say what is impossible, for the dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow.

Robert H. Goddard



2016 District Assembly & Annual Meeting

Theme: Draw the Circle Wider: The Prophethood of All Believers

Dates: Friday, April 29 & Saturday, April 30, 2016 Location: Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara, CA

Registration: www.pswduua.org

Join 300+ Unitarian Universalists for our annual celebratory gathering. Worship, workshops, awards, business meeting, bridging ceremony for high school seniors—and conversations with UUs from all over the Pacific Southwest District. Bring your congregational banner!



UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

General Assembly 2016

Theme: Heart Land: Where Faiths Connect

Dates: June 22-26, 2016 Location: Columbus, OH Registration: <u>www.uua.org</u>

The faith world is increasingly multifaith. People are crossing borders of religion and spiritual practice to create wholeness in their lives individually and

collectively. The labels—Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, theist and non-theist—no longer define who or what we love, or how spirit moves in our lives. General Assembly 2016 in Columbus, Ohio will assemble leaders and communities of many faiths to worship together, learn from one another, and create a new vision of faith that no longer divides us, but connects us to an interdependent future that works for all.

You can represent UUCP as a Delegate at General Assembly! It is an opportunity to grow as a leader, connect with other UUs, and deepen your spirit. Delegate application deadlines: March 15th for scholarships and April 15th for early registration. To apply, visit PhoenixUU.org/delegate.

March Worship Theme:

Hope

Services bring our community together at 9:30 AM & 11:15 AM

March 6: Music Sunday: The Music of Elizabeth Alexander

Service Leader: Benjie Messer

Elizabeth Alexander is one of Unitarian Universalism's most performed and well-known contemporary composers. The combined choirs of UUCP and Valley Unitarian Universalist Congregation (VUU), as well as many other UUCP groups will feature her music, which illustrates many aspects of our faith.

March 13: *Give It Up for Hope* Service Leader: Emrys Staton

How do we help create the conditions for hope? In the realm of social justice, there are concrete proposals for how things need to change, but these are often held up because of a desire to hold onto certain things the way they are. Challenging this clinging opens a path towards hope. Lynne Haeseler on piano.

March 20: Multigenerational Flower Communion Service

Service Lseader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

The Flower Communion is a traditional Unitarian Universalist celebration of life, equality and freedom. Everyone is invited to bring a flower to this service. Celebrate Spring in the desert, UU history and a compelling vision of Unitarian Universalism today.

March 27: Easter Sunday: Hope Without Resurrection

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Unitarian Universalists have long celebrated Easter without believing in the resurrection. How do we find meaning in this story without the critical ending? Music from the UUCP Choir.

Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all.

Dale Carnegie

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