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Sunday Services

Child care is available and all are welcome.

May Theme is Possibilities

May 3 Service Leaders: The Nominating Committee. The May 3 service will be a celebration of volunteerism and a chance to get involved in Fellowship committees for next year (Sept 2015 - June 2016). At the service participants will get the chance to match their persuasions with committees and positions within the Fellowship.

May 10 Rev. David Hutchinson, UU minister for Houlton, Maine, will be leading the Sunday Service. He will also present a workshop on Saturday afternoon, May 9.

May 17 Sylvia Hale: "Homelessness: No Safe Place to Be."

May 24 Joan McFarland on "Breaking the Silence's Solidarity Work in Guatemala: reflections from a recent visit." Breaking the Silence (BTS) celebrated twenty-five years of solidarity work in Guatemala last year and, in connection with that, I participated in an 'alumni' delegation to Guatemala this March. In the service, I will explore the meaning of BTS's 'solidarity' work and give examples of it from my recent trip including participation in a commemoration of the Rio Negro massacre and visits to the school at Rabinal that the Fellowship has supported and to

the coffee co-operative that produces our BTS Just Us coffee.

May 31 Theme-based Ministry Service: "Possibilities." To close out our May theme, this will be a multigenerational service, with many options to explore! We will have a World Café format, with youth involved as Table Hosts. People will be able to participate in two activities of their choice during Service time.

June 7 Theme-based Ministry Service: "Holding On and Letting Go." Service Leader: Jo-Anne Elder Gomes. June is a transition time for us, the end of our church year and board term, for some the end of the school year, graduation, or bridging. We will be marking some of the changes we have experienced in the 2014-15 year, some of the relationships and activities we have lost, recommitted ourselves to, or continued to cherish.



Adult and Youth Calendar

(More details elsewhere in The Touchstone)

Wednesday, May 5. 3:45-5:00 p.m. YAYAJ (Youth) Group. Co-led by Najat and Jo-Anne. Speaker will be Joan McFarland on the Guatemala Solidarity program.

Wednesday, May 5. 7:00-8:30 p.m. Theological Diversity series, session 2. Contact Jo-Anne if you did not attend April 29 session.

Saturday, May 9. Afternoon (time tbd): Workshop with Rev. David Hutchinson on the Four Agreements.

Saturday, May 9. 4:30-6:30 p.m. Buffet dinner with Rev. Hutchinson at the Imperial Pearl. RSVP Jo-Anne by May 5.

Wednesday, May 20. 7:00-8:30 p.m. Theological Diversity series, session 3. Contact Jo-Anne if you did not attend previous sessions.

Thursday, May 21. 7:00-8:30 p.m. Discussion Night: Love and Justice.

Thursday, May 28. 7:00-8:30 p.m. Theme Night: Possibilities. Spiritual reflection and exploration on our monthly theme.



Youth Activities

YAYAJ (Youth and Young Adult Justice) Group will be meeting on Wednesday, May 6, from 3:45 to 5:00. On May 6, Joan McFarland will be visiting us. She will be showing a short recent video on two ongoing legal cases of sexual violence against Mayan women in Guatemala. One, being tried in Guatemala, is a case of sexual slavery at the time of the massacres in the 1980s. The other, being tried in Canada, is the case of a 2007 gang rape of women in front their children in a community protesting a Canadian mine. Joan will give the background/context of these two cases in the history of Guatemala and there will be time for discussion and Q & A after the video. The presentation will be suitable for all ages. It will not be the same as the one to be given at the Sunday service on May 24.

Some of our youth are looking forward to going to CanUUdle, the annual youth con organized by the CUC. Anneke, Orianna and Naomi have already registered, and Najat will be going as their Youth Advisor. Thank you, Najat, for making this possible.

We're hoping some of our youth will be involved in the May 31 service, as Activity Hosts at the World Café. We'll let you know more about it at the next meeting!

Stay tuned to hear about other youth activities!



Women's Pot Luck

The next Unitarian Fellowship women's pot luck will be held Friday, May 29. Glenna Hanley will host the gathering at her home, 721 Palmer Street (off of Kings College Road). We gather at 6 PM and eat at 6:30 PM. The topic for discussion will be Success. What does the word mean to you? How do you define success in your life? Is it different at different times in your life (employed, retired, or working at home with family)? How are you feeling/thinking about success now? For further information contact Joan Brewer at 455-5169.



Theological Diversity

On April 29, we started a new series on Wednesday evenings from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. We will continue to meet on May 6 and May 20 (please note the change in date since the April Touchstone). The series will be similar in format to the "What We Choose" sessions I offered before Christmas, with a combination of information and interactive exercises.

During this series, participants will have a chance to explore their beliefs and their worldviews. We will look at

the sources of Unitarian and Universalist thought, and the sources from which U*Us draw meaning and purpose. We will look at how our ideas about the "big questions" of life and death have changed over our lifetimes. We will create a safe space to share our spiritual growth and support that of others.

The series is designed for youth and adults 14 and above, but is open to all. Whether you are new to Unitarian Universalism, have never set foot in our building before, have already done a course like "Building Your Own Theology," are a life-long U*U, or are a true "seeker" who wants to learn more about the influences on the U*U movement, I hope you will find something of value to your spiritual and personal growth.

Please let me know each time if you plan to come so I can make enough handouts. If you were unable to join us on April 29, I'd like to be able to give you the information we covered so we can build on it. I would encourage everyone to attend the first session on April 29. Since each session builds on the previous one, the second and third evenings are geared to those who have attended the earlier sessions. However, if you cannot attend one, contact me and I will try to give you as much information as I can.

Jo-Anne eldergomes@yahoo.com



Love and Justice

Many of us watched the movie Selma at UNB on April 21. The movie shown at Popcorn Theology on Sunday, April 19, included some comments on that movie. "Marching in the Arc of Justice," a video of Reverend Mark Morrison-Reed's talk at the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the March to Selma, can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WD5TkwP8GE>

On May 21, as our Discussion Night topic, I will be leading discussion on "Love and Justice," using Selma as a starting point. We will begin with a brief discussion of U*U involvement in civil rights, which will put both the movie and the commemoration into a U*U perspective. Then we will look at Mark Morrison-Reed's ideas of social justice based on love (Right belief or cause vs. Right relationships). We will talk about how U*Us build loving and compassionate relationships on the foundations of peace and justice, and what the principle of inherent worth and dignity of all people means to us.

In our workshops with Reverend Linda Thomson and Reverend Dave Hutchinson, we have been exploring healthy congregations and right relationships. Reverend Morrison-Reed's ideas emphasize, once more, that our relationship with others, whether they are different from us or our role models, influence our vision of the world and what is possible. It is our relationships that compel us to act,

that transform us as individuals, and lead us to bend the arc of our lives towards justice in the world.

We will meet at the Fellowship from 7:00-8:30 p.m. on May 21. If you would like to watch the Mark Morrison-Reed video together at the Fellowship at 6:00, please let me know. You may also view it yourself at the link provided above, but it isn't necessary to either watch it nor to have attended the presentation on April 21, before taking part in this "Love and Justice" discussion.



Discussion Night: Church and State

April's Discussion Night dealt with our purpose and mission as a religious, charitable, and justice-seeking organization. We talked about religious freedom and secular policies.

We can consider the relationship of church and state on a continuum, ranging from completely religious states to completely secular states. religious states have an official religious identified with the state and no separation between Church and state; the law, government and institutions are religious and state policy excludes other religions. An example close to a religious state would be Iran; while Iran's current Penal Code does not include provisions criminalizing apostasy (beliefs outside of Islam) and Iranian law does not provide for the death penalty for apostasy, the courts can hand down that punishment, and have done so in previous years, based on their interpretation of Sharia's law and fatwas. In these states, belonging to another religion or no religion at all can be a crime or a reason for social sanctions.

At the other end of the continuum are secular states, where there is complete separation between Church and state. Law, governments and institutions are secular, and policies or practices of the state may prohibit religious activity. Some would say that atheism is an official religion of this type of state, and some governments, such as Marxist-Leninist states, have promoted atheism officially. However, a secular state is actually officially neutral in matters of religion, supporting neither religion nor atheism. Along the secular part of the continuum, governments may oppose religious control or presence in institutions, or religious power and influence in all aspects of public and political life, including the involvement of religion in the everyday life of the citizen. Secularism was a major goal of the French Revolution, and the current climate in France is reflected in Québec's proposed Bill 60, which affirmed "the values of State secularism and religious neutrality." The duty of neutrality for teachers, health care workers, and other government employees would have prohibited "the wearing of 'conspicuous' religious symbols" and make it "mandatory to have one's face uncovered when providing or receiving a state service."

In the discussion, I suggested that Canada was striving to

find a middle point between the two poles: a multi-faith, multicultural state. In such a state, the law, government and institutions would protect religious freedom. State policy would be non-denominational, not dictated by any one religious group but potentially informed by many. The point was raised that Canada seems to have moved farther away from this ideal, since charitable groups are limited in their political activity. (We will discussing this more after the CUC Annual Conference and Meeting.)

Unitarians and Universalists situate themselves on different points along the spectrum. Although few of us would work towards a religious state, many of us consider active participation in citizenship an essential part of our UU faith, and that when we speak up against discrimination we are acting on our UU principles. While the participants in the April discussion agreed that when prayers were recited in Fredericton schools, in the past, the attitude towards non-Christian students was unacceptable, secular extremes are also not necessarily desirable. The congregation in Montréal worked hard to raise awareness of the need for harmonious coexistence among religions when Bill 60 was being debated, feeling that its secularism of Bill 60 would have been a denial of religious freedom.

We discussed a few examples of negotiating the church-state balance, for instance our work on same-sex marriage, when we sometimes represent our Fellowship and sometimes act as individuals. I had planned to discuss the question of prayer in different public spaces, and was fortunate enough to hold the discussion shortly after the controversy of Fredericton City Council had broken. We discussed the many options that were available, ranging from opening a meeting with a spiritual but not religious message to no message at all.

We'll be discussing our perspectives on social action a little bit in our Theological Diversity series, as well.



David Hutchinson Visit, May 9-10

Reverend David Hutchinson will be making his final visit to us this year on the weekend of May 9-10. This time, we have planned a workshop on The Four Agreements on Saturday, May 9, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Details about the topic and the workshop will be sent out soon.

After the workshop, at 4:30 p.m., we are planning an early supper with Reverend Dave Hutchinson. We are trying to get a group together to go to the Oriental Pearl Chinese Restaurant, 440 Kimble Drive. If we have ten or more people, the restaurant will offer a buffet (including vegetarian dishes) at the price of \$12.99. Please RSVP by May 4. eldergomes@yahoo.com.



I Don't Mind What Happens

Rev Dave Hutchinson
April 19

Rev. David Hutchinson from Houlton, Maine focused his Sunday service on April 19 around words of wisdom from Krishnamurti "I don't care what happens", along with fun and wisdom from Douglas Adams' book: *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and Charlie Schultz cartoons.

First he asked the child in all of us to contemplate the contents of a small box emblazoned with the motto "Keep Calm And Carry On". The box and two useful contents - air and space. The next challenge was to try holding our breath, like kids, for as long as possible - our record 64 seconds! Rather short in the history of the universe. None of us can hold on to stale air for ever. Time to breathe in again and start over.

Then the real challenge for the service. Earthlings, Douglas Adams observes, seem unhappy most of the time. They take a great deal of care over little green pieces of paper, but it isn't the paper that is unhappy. So what is the matter with earthlings? How would you react if you learned, while sitting in a pub somewhere, that planet earth would be obliterated in the next two minutes because it was in the path of an inter-galactic highway. Would you put a paper bag over your head, or just keep calm and carry on?

How can we make sense of Krishnamurti's summation of his 15 books of philosophy" with the five-word phrase: "I don't mind what happens"?

If you can remain perfectly calm when there is a financial meltdown; you can hear about other people visiting fantastic places without being the least bit jealous, if you can happily eat anything for one meal after you have been running around all day; if you can find contentment just where you are - you are probably a dog!

The state of not minding how things turn out, does not mean that you necessarily like how things turned out, only that you face whatever it happens with equanimity, that you accept and are at peace with the reality of the moment. You still have your opinions. Not minding how things turn out does not imply that the situation cannot change. It implies that you do the best you can. Then, whatever happens, happens. Yield to the moment. Adjust as you go. Stop, yield, go. Sit, shut up, yield, then make adjustments, move on and do something. The outcome is what it is.

Let go of the sense that you have control over what is going on and seek instead the sense of grace to find resolution, peace, understanding with life as it is. Allow it to be.

This is the core of what Don Miguel Riuz' identifies as the fourth agreement "Under any circumstances, simply

do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse, and regret".

As Ralph Waldo Emerson observed, what is most sacred in life is self-integrity, the integrity of your own mind, where you have full control over your own process. You cannot control what happens. You can control the integrity of your own mind. Find peace and contentment in that.

Rev. Dave elaborated on the motto on his wife's favourite mango-passion teabag: "To be calm is the highest achievement of the self". To be calm is to achieve enlightened equanimity. Have your opinions, but be open to other opinions. Let the breath out, exhale, change the topic.

A third meaning that Rev. Dave read into Krishnamurti's maxim "I don't mind what happens" links with Rev. Martha Neuman's advice to neophyte Unitarian ministers. Be present to your congregation and to individuals. Offer a calm, non-anxious presence, especially to others who need it most. Take the long view. Remember that space is big - mind-bogglingly big. Stretch your mind to see the infinite and the details of wonderful life. Take time. Adjust to situations that do not go as expected. Whatever happens - take it in and let go. Embrace fully the joys and the sorrows of the world. It is part of us and we of that.

Do your best, and then don't mind what happens. Adjust to what is. If a monkey moves the golf ball, play the ball where the monkey drops it. Stay calm. Don't panic. To be calm is the highest achievement of the self. Strive to be an embodied, non-anxious presence. Amen.

In the workshop that followed, we explored further the relevance of these ideas for our Fellowship.

Dance with life experiences. Covenant to be guided by the four agreements in difficult and charged situations:

- Be impeccable with your word.
- Don't take anything personally.
- Don't make assumptions.
- Always do your best.

Allow enough time for the group to come up with fresh answers. Strong willed, opinionated, forceful, articulate, deeply invested in situations - these are all apt descriptors for many of us Unitarians. The challenge is to accept this, to participate joyfully in the joy, the conflict, and the sorrow of the world and our particular corner of it, for they are part of us. This calls us to strive to practice the four agreements in the heat of debate, to do our best and to hope that when we listen to each other, and allow enough time for bad ideas to work themselves out, the outcome will be OK. Outcomes will not always be OK. Some decisions will play out badly. This is when Krishnamurti's observation "I don't mind what happens" really matters. Adjust to whatever happens and move on from there.

A sadness came across the group as we remembered events of two years ago. It was a large crowd of sorrows that swept through our guest house. The outcome was not

what anyone wanted. Yet we ended on a note of hope. We have adjusted. Together we affirmed new ways for Board and members to share information and participate in decisions, ways that we anticipate will lighten the load on future Board members and enable all of us to hear and to support one another more fully than before. We are still here, in Fellowship, far from perfect but still working on it. No one is dispensable here, in this very small place that we share in a cosmos that is mind-bogglingly large. Come yet again come, especially to the Nominating Committee's shindig on the first Sunday in May and choose a place for yourself.

Summary by Sylvia Hale



Thoughts to share

from Rev. David Hutchinson's
service and workshop, March 29 2015

Rev. David Hutchinson began his talk by reading the poem "The Guest House" by Jelaluddin Rumi, (translated by Coleman Barks)

This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honourably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight. The dark thought, the shame, the malice. Meet them at the door laughing and invite them in. Be grateful for whatever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

Dave shared with the kids in all of us his "Easy button" with its 5 directions for use. 1) identify the situation 2) press the easy button "Well that was easy", 3) reassess the message, 4) smile and get on with your day 5) repeat the first four steps as often as necessary!

The challenge is to avoid the avoidance of bad stuff, not to freeze up, but rather to start working on it, to do your best, and let the rest take care of itself. Try to find others who will help, for trouble shared is trouble halved, while joy shared is joy doubled.

Sometimes the hardest part is to recognize that we may not always have the best take on whatever is going wrong. Rev. Dave drew on the parable of the husband who wanted to test how hard-of-hearing his wife had become. Four times he asked the question "What's for dinner?", each time moving closer as he heard no reply, until finally he was right behind her. She replied in exasperation "For the fourth time, I'm telling you it's chicken".

Dave also quoted extensively from the book by Shawn Achor (2010) "The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology that Fuels Success in Performance at Work"

The essential message is that we need a ratio of positive to negative feedback of about 3:1 to counter the debilitating effects of negative feedback and move forward. Criticism and negative feedback is inevitable and necessary at times, but groups work way better when negativity is embedded in a broader atmosphere of affirmative recognition.

The four points that Rev. Dave drew from the book echoes the four agreements from Don Miguel Ruiz:

- Offer as high a ratio of positive reinforcement as you can before focussing on retraining and improvement.
- Self-reinforcement. Draw on basic self-esteem from your own experience and spiritual practice to create a stable core in a spinning world
- Group reinforcement. Accept and encourage spiritual growth in others. This is ultimately the primary reason who people come to Unitarians - to find support from others who both listen, and offer support.
- Universal reinforcement. Connect with the interrelated whole - nature, the planet from which you receive support with every step you take, and breathe in the sky that sustains us.

In evaluating a Unitarian service, the coffee-hour afterwards is equally as important as the service itself, with the conversation, the food, the networking, the sharing and connection. This is what keep us coming back.

Each of us is a lonely soul on a journey. Holding in common something with another soul is precious. It involves love, respect, patience, commitment to work together to improve ourselves in the world, and recognition that we cannot do something alone as well as we can do it with another.

In conclusion, Rev. Dave drew on two poems from Billy Collins - one a parable of how to respond to a neighbour's incessantly-barking dog, by playing a Beethoven orchestral piece until the dog's barking merges into the oboe section in the orchestra of life.

Rev. Dave's concluding message: You cannot over-compliment another, but you can overlook and under-appreciate another. Work with both - there will be plenty of each, but strive to keep the ratio of positive to negative feedback about 3;1 or better.

In the following Workshop Rev. Dave returned to the theme of buoyancy, or bouncing back, and the importance of regularly checking in to evaluate the ratio of positivity in group activities.

He shared the "Bulletin Blurb" or Mission Statement from Houlton, Maine congregation, which reads as follows: We welcome and celebrate the participation of all people in the full life and ministry of our liberal congregation, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, family configuration, sex, race, ethnicity, past religious affiliation, physical circumstances or financial well being. We value and promote

diversity as we encourage spiritual and intellectual growth in every individual. You are welcome here. Come again and often!

Houlton's welcoming letter to new members: We would like to welcome you as a member of our religious community. This is not a perfect place, but we're trying to make it a good place to be. We all need the consistent love and support that we can offer to each other.

The central emphasis of the message is inclusion, well beyond the regular meaning of a 'welcoming congregation'. We are a volunteer congregation, in which all contributions are equally important - financial, social, spiritual. Above all, we need to covenant together to create a safe place. This involves agreements to be mindful of our speech, to strive to be in right relations with each other in meetings, to be aware and conscious of others in the group, to recognize when negative relationships are happening and not to let fear or avoidance shut down the meeting, but rather to strive to ride with it, to recognize negative emotions and help to shift and direct it in more positive ways. If no one is willing to do this work, then the group is doomed. If one or more of us is willing to shift and re-direct negative energy, we can move forward.

People join Unitarians not because of our website, or the quality of entertainment we can offer. They seek connection to people, a sense of a welcoming group, a functional family, a supportive and yet challenging religious community. People come to be in relationship with others, to find love and justice.

The Covenant IS relationship. That is what it means - to be in right relationship with each other. No one is expendable. All of us have the need to feel part of a community, to feel a sense of being involved, of our presence being valued.

Rev. Dave elaborated on four warning signs of a Fellowship that is not functioning well - fragmentation, fatigue, disil-

lusionment, irrelevancy. Nagging questions come up: Why are we doing this? When everyone has an opinion and we try to listen to everything and do too much, people start to feel classic burnout. Frustration and confusion follow, and a sense that maybe what we are doing isn't worth the time and effort. Once we cross this line we feel increasingly that we don't need this.. We stop talking and listening to each other, and the temptation to give up, to walk away becomes stronger.

Important check points to consider in response to these warning signs - sustainability, selectivity, integration and sanctuary. Take in and honour all the ideas, but select carefully among them, with respect to the community's collective resources and strengths, Come together to review what we can do reasonably do so that we don't exhaust the group. Taking a summer recess can rejuvenate everyone, with renewed sense of anticipation about in-gathering, coming back.

Providing sanctuary is the most important principle of all - that we establish and sustain a safe and trusting environment in which to explore our selves and others in a spiritual community.

Sanctuary involves covenant to support each other, to be ready to help when individuals are expressing frustration, fatigue, disillusionment, to find ways to work on a problem together.

This is not easy to do. In a Fellowship like ours we don't have a go-to person like a minister to take charge for us, but then again, we have managed most of our 50+ years as a lay-led fellowship. We work on a different model. The overriding fourth principle is to always do your best, under the circumstances at hand. Then you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse and regret. As a Fellowship, we are not results-driven. What matters most are the relationships we have with each other.

Summary written up by Sylvia Hale.

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