

SEPT/OCT
2011

THE LEAF

The Newsletter of the First Universalist Church of New Madison, Ohio, a Unitarian Universalist Congregation

RICHARD'S REFLECTIONS — from Rev. Richard Venus

I would like to offer *"Shared Ministry"* by Robert W. Karnan as my column this month because it so perfectly reflects what I believe and he says it much better than I could.

What makes my experience in the ministry so hopeful for me is that I am not alone in this careful hearing of both pain and excitement. This is not something reserved for only one ordained and robed. It is something we all do for and with one another.

Ours is a shared ministry, a giving and receiving. We tell one another our stories, or myths, our innermost thoughts – and we seek to listen (if we can) with sensitivity and purpose and love.

We live lives. We do not live creeds or theologies or even values. We are engaged with real events and people, and we are related, torn, and isolated together. We are at odds and we are sometimes very close.

The spiritual center of our lives is not to be found in a faith, no matter how cherished or revered. It comes, rather, out of the openness and honest engagement, the courage and pain, and the love we experience with one another. Sometimes that openness is searching and doubting, confused or serene, ambivalent or empowered. But it is an openness nonetheless.

And out of it comes a vision of a world made new by the reality of our lives, lived in the service of love and justice, of gentle goodness and forgiveness.

A minister seeks to live in the struggle of each and every one of us as we seek to come to an understanding of who we are, where we are, how we are. A minister seeks to help us raise up the vision of where we must go as a people, and invites us if we need the invitation to join hands and hearts with one another to get there.

Richard V.

SUNDAY SERVICES 10:00 A.M.

- SEPT 4** Christel Brooks
[TBA]
- SEPT 11** Richard Venus
Response to Enormous Events
- SEPT 18** Ray Michel
[TBA]
- SEPT 25** Richard Venus
O God Our Hope for Years to Come...Hub?!
- OCT 2** Richard Venus
Why I'm a UU
- OCT 9** Silas Wanja
ESR Student
- OCT 16** Richard Venus
Honoring Each One's Truth Together
- OCT 23** Roberta Feltman
Unity Church of Douglas, MI
- OCT 30** Richard Venus
Ghosts, Goblins and Evil

UPCOMING EVENTS

FISH Offering Sundays

Sept. 4 and Oct. 2.

Food 'n' Friendship

Sept. 4 and Oct. 2, lunch at Fort Black Buffet.

Water Ceremony and Church Picnic

Sept. 11. Picnic at New Madison Community Park, Fayette Street

Board Meetings

Sept. 20 and Oct. 18. 7 p.m. at the church.

GUEST COLUMN

The Rev. William L. Sachs, Ph.D. is Executive Director of the Center for Interfaith Reconciliation in Richmond, Virginia.

September 11: A Challenge to Congregations

September 11, 2001, marked a turning point in American life. The destruction wrought by terrorists in New York and Washington was catastrophic. Subsequent terrorist efforts in the United States have been intercepted, but even failed attempts drive home the reality of the threat facing the nation. For the overwhelming majority of Americans who are religious, the threat is especially troubling. A major world religion, Islam, appears implicated.

Islam's proximity to terrorism seems confirmed as efforts to root out terrorism have proceeded. An elusive enemy seems empowered by violent religious sentiment. The impression has deepened as radical Islamic groups in Europe have come under scrutiny. Combined with the apparent surge of Islam's European and American populations, fear of the world's second largest religion has increased.

Ten years after 9/11, many Americans are alarmed by Islam's presence. A Gallup survey reveals that nearly half of all Americans admit to being prejudiced against Muslims and their faith. A Lifeway survey concludes that half of all Protestant clergy believe Islam is evil. Popular blogs and commentaries clearly fan these flames. But troubling questions remain for many Americans: what is the truth about Islam and can Muslims be trusted?

ISLAM — *a definition*

Islam is a monotheistic religion based on revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century, which were later recorded in the Qur'an (Koran), Islam's sacred text. The Arabic word islam means "submission," reflecting the religion's central tenet of submitting to the will of God. Islamic practices are defined by the Five Pillars of Islam:



- *faith*
- *prayer*
- *fasting*
- *pilgrimage*
- *alms*

The questions are not academic, nor removed from daily life. The number of Muslims in the United States is growing and may number as high as 5 million. Muslims are also dispersing, bringing Islam to American cities and towns where there has been little presence. Increasingly, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and people of all faiths encounter one another at work, at school, and in daily life. Understanding and trust between faiths has become an issue of acute importance. Did 9/11 instill lasting suspicion, or could the observance of its tenth anniversary encourage needed efforts to build interfaith cooperation?

There is little sense that prejudice and misunderstanding are being

addressed by congregations. Few Christians understand Islam or interact with Muslims. Despite long-standing talk of "justice" and "diversity," congregations seem to be doing little to combat prejudice. Most congregations have no dealings with Muslims even in their vicinities. Some congregations encourage efforts to convert Muslims, while others explicitly condemn Islam. Ten years after 9/11, the actions, or the silence, of many American congregations may allow religious suspicion to increase.

At the same time, there is evidence of fresh attention to mission in many congregations. More than ever, American congregations envision service to people in need as the pathway to an authentic faith and to making the world a better place. Mission may arise as a way to tap fresh spiritual energies in the congregation or in the hope of moving beyond conflict. Surely, congregational leaders conclude, fresh commitment can emerge through cooperation to feed the hungry and house the homeless. But this logic is rarely applied to understanding people outside the congregation who are different. Few people in congregations make the connection between their spiritual growth and the urgency of building understanding with people of different faiths, including Muslims.

Meanwhile, Islam is in the news daily. Books and articles on Islam shower the public and sell sufficiently that publishers bring out more. But prejudice continues and congregations remain disengaged. To address fear and

prejudice, and to extend their emphasis on mission, congregations could promote understanding that builds cooperation. They could educate people about what Muslims believe and what trends are shaping Islam. How are Muslims similar to Christians and Jews? How are they different? What is the shape of Islam in America? How can local cooperation be built so that people of different faiths can build a better community?

Fresh resources are needed for mission with Muslims and people of all faiths. I am working with the Alban Institute to create such a resource in time for the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Your input and insights into the ways you and your congregations have engaged Islam – or not – will help make this

resource responsive to the needs of congregations willing to take on this important subject.

1. What does “mission” mean in your congregation? Has there been fresh emphasis on mission in recent years?
2. Are you aware of increasing religious difference in your community? How have you responded?
3. What steps could your congregation take to encourage understanding and cooperation with Muslims and with people of other faiths?

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HARVEST SOUNDS

Do You Like...

The strumming of guitars,
The “tickling of the ivories,”
Sacred chords of an organ,
The exuberance of Irish Dance,
Lilting melodies played on a flute,
Vocalists singing favorite tunes?

If so...

You will enjoy all these sounds at HARVEST SOUNDS 2011, First Universalist’s eleventh benefit concert. Opening the show will be the First Universalist Trio featuring flutist Margaret Schryver, pianist Roberta Feltman, and Lloyd Ketring on organ. Drew Lovejoy, 16-year-old World Champion Irish Dancer, will demonstrate his skills as a national and world champion performer. Closing the show will be Columbus-based Stu Schlotterbeck, along with his friends Wanda and Dennis, playing a variety of instruments and singing your favorite songs.

100% of the proceeds of the event will go to HOPE Foundation (Helping Other People Excel), dedicated to improving the quality of life for residents of Darke County.

HARVEST SOUNDS 2011 will be held at First Universalist Church, 331 East Washington St., New Madison on Sunday, November 6 at 3:00. A reception will follow the concert, with time to meet and greet the artists and audience members. Tickets remain at \$8 (no charge for students through grade 12) and will be available at the door the day of performance. For more information about HARVEST SOUNDS, please refer to the July/August issue of *The Leaf*, or call 937-548-2480.

—Roberta Feltman



GETTING TO KNOW YOU — MARY EVELYN GEETING

As it continues to feature the biographies of its members, this month The Leaf introduces Mary Evelyn Geeting, a delightful woman who has lived an interesting life...

One of the delights about doing interviews for *The Leaf* is that I get to know the most delightful and interesting people, and this month's interviewee is no exception. Mary Evelyn Geeting is a fun-loving, bright, thoughtful 87-year-old born in New Madison. She left New

Madison to live in other places, but ultimately returned to her hometown where she lived for many years as a Universalist with her husband Wayne.

Wayne and Mary Evelyn grew up together – their parents were friends. Her first years (perhaps until she was about six) were spent in the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) church Sunday School, but by high school she had pretty much given up on church.

One of the places Mary Evelyn went, around the time of her 20th birthday, was to Washington DC where she worked for two years for the FBI. She didn't say what she did for the FBI – maybe because it was classified! After her stint with the FBI, she returned home to work in

her father's county auditor's office. She named her father as one of the most influential people in her life. "He was the reason I went to work for the FBI," she said. Her father signed the membership book at the New

Madison Universalist Church, but she recalls how, at the time, her mother said, "You may have signed the book, but I am not a Universalist!"

“Once Wayne and I started attending the Universalist Church we never went anywhere else.”

— *Mary Evelyn Geeting*

Mary Evelyn and Wayne were married in July of 1976 and stayed married until his death in 2010. Wayne was the reason she left her father's New Madison office. Wayne ran a business selling grain, feed, fertilizer and just about anything else the area farmers needed. "Wayne was a good businessman," she said, "but he was a poor bookkeeper." So Mary Evelyn kept his records straight for the next 30 or so years.

She and Wayne attended the EUB Church for awhile, but "once Wayne and I started attending the Universalist Church we never went anywhere else," she said. She had been teaching in the EUB Church's Sunday School, "but we found that what was being taught didn't coincide with our beliefs."

She and Wayne had three daughters, Janice (Cassity), Joyce (Dues) and Brenda (Murphy) and four grandchildren. Her idea of a perfect day was working with Wayne and being with their daughters.

The word she said was the quality she most appreciates in people is *sincerity*. No one exemplifies this word more than Mary Evelyn Geeting herself. Her wit continues to endear her to those around her. Her membership in the Universalist church is exemplified by integrity and honesty – a legacy she leaves with the world she continues to enlarge.

— *Richard Venus*

QUOTABLE QUOTE

“What makes a person religious is not a declaration of belief, but a breadth of sympathy and understanding, an appreciation of the world to which we belong, and an acceptance of ourselves as contributors to the well-being of that world.”

— *Sophia Lyons Fabs (1876-1978)*
teacher, writer, editor, advocate

THIS AND THAT

A Book in the Works

In writing the preface to my book of essays based on sermons offered over several years to three Unitarian Universalist congregations, Dr. Judith Martin notes that, “The chapters are short and each begins with an anecdote about either *the poignant*: a woman fleeing from her burning home, a Jew given hospitality in a Palestinian refugee camp, a friend with dementia – or *the seemingly banal*: scenes from everyday life such as feeling pain while bending over a laundry basket, sharing an umbrella – or *the controversial*: science versus religion, immigration, racism. Succinctly told, the stories trigger questions that give us pause – ‘Why is God always punishing folks who are trying?’ – and lead us into our depths, not for answers but for insights such as ‘Healers are hosts who patiently and carefully listen to the story of the suffering stranger.’”



I am grateful to Dr. Martin for her kind and

thoughtful preface to a book that is still in the hands of my publisher, who is editing its 18 or so chapters and adding art work to make it visually appealing. My hope is to have it completed late this fall.

You who are members of First Universalist Church have heard many of the essays that are contained in the book – and to you who have been so patient and understanding with me as I struggle to put into words the mysteries that underlie the spiritual life, I say “thank you.”

— Richard Venus

Please help us!



Outreach Committee Launched an Emergency Project

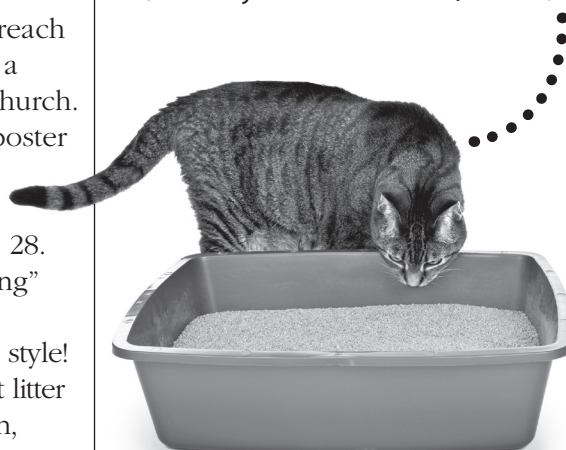
In mid-August, a so-called “animal shelter” in Huber Heights was investigated by the authorities in response to complaints of smell, noise and suspected abuse. What they found there was shocking. Over 100 cats and dogs were living in horrible conditions – many of them were sick, some beyond help. The animals were removed and taken to the Montgomery County Animal Resource Center in north Dayton. Because of this sudden influx of so many animals, the Center’s own resources were stretched dangerously thin. A plea was issued for donations of emergency supplies. The Outreach Committee quickly organized a project for First Universalist Church. In response to an email and poster sent to the Congregation, a collection was taken up on two Sundays – August 21 and 28. Once again, the “spirit of giving” demonstrated itself in First Universalist’s usual enthusiastic style! We collected 9 containers of cat litter totaling 242 pounds! In addition,

5 cat litter trays, 3 bottles of hand sanitizer, 1 bag of pet food and 19 rolls of paper towels were donated. The items were dropped off at the Animal Resource Center to their *very* grateful staff. Many cats and dogs also say “thank you” in their own way — “WOOF-WOOF! MEE-OWWW!”

— Margaret Schryver

First Universalist came to my rescue!

(and just in time, too!)



CELEBRATIONS

September Birthdays

- 4 Ellen Teller
- 5 Laura (Moeckel) Willis
- 6 Louie Leedle
- 7 Della Cassity
- 8 Dennis Burns
- 15 Barbara Burns
- 15 Will Thomas Huntington
- 18 Lori Lucas

September Anniversaries

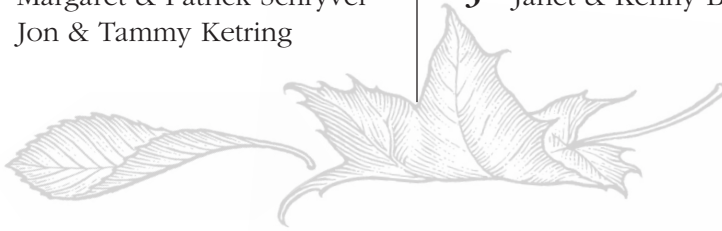
- 5 Janet & Roger Cassity
- 19 Margaret & Patrick Schryver
- 23 Jon & Tammy Ketring

October Birthdays

- 7 John Searls
- 10 Shay Mutter
- 11 Jennifer Hamelberg
- 11 Adam Searls
- 12 Linda Searls
- 18 Ray Michel
- 20 Grace Wilcox
- 22 Wells Behee
- 26 Sara Hamelberg

October Anniversaries

- 3 Janet & Kenny Baker



DON'T MISS IT!

Annual Picnic and Water Ceremony!

Our annual church picnic will be held on September 11 following the morning Service and Water Ceremony. This year we have a new location for the picnic – the nearby New Madison Community Park on Fayette Street. In case of rain, we will dine indoors at the church.

