

SERVICE ON THE 6th UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST PRINCIPLE:
The Goal of World Community with Peace, Liberty, and Justice for All
First Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbus, Ohio
July 31, 2005

OPENING

As the chalice is lighted this morning, listen to the words of Christine Robinson:

We gather this hour as people of faith
With joys and sorrows, gifts and needs.
We light this beacon of hope, sign of our quest for truth and meaning,
In celebration of the life we share together.

MEDITATION, SILENCE, NAMING

In this time of our service, let's think about silence—not only the extended period we're about to enter, but also the myriad tiny moments of silence we have during our day. There is silence between our sentences, between our words, sometimes between our syllables. There is silence after we say something and after someone says something to you. Sometimes a bit longer silence in these cases will allow us to provide a response that is less rash, more understanding, more...peaceful. Let's wrap ourselves in silence.

[temple bell]

Now in our silence, let's think of those people who surround us in our lives. Perhaps you are thinking of someone whose name is inscribed in the front inside cover of the hymnal you used earlier, or is on a brass plate on the back of the chair you are sitting in, or is on a brick in the Memorial Garden just outside these doors. Perhaps it's a name you honor, or a name you sorrowfully remember, or a name of someone who is in need of our special care; or perhaps it's a name of someone who gave you a tough time this past week. During this time, I invite you to say the name out loud in this room we all share, or say the name softly to your heart.

[names]

And now let's think of all these people in our larger common space, the earth. What a wonderful world it is indeed.

READINGS

The first reading is from the "Declaration of Interdependence," written in 1976 by historian Henry Steele Commager, a Unitarian Universalist. This is found in the book, With Purpose and Principle: Essays About the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism, in the chapter written by John Buehrens on the sixth principle.

When in the course of history (when) the threat of extinction confronts humankind, it is necessary for the people of this nation to declare their interdependence with the people of all nations and to embrace those principles and build those institutions which will enable us to survive and civilization to flourish....

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all people are created equal;

that the inequalities and injustices which afflict so much of the human race are the product of history and society, not of god or nature;

that people everywhere are entitled to the blessings of life and liberty, peace and security and the realization of their full potential;

that they have an inescapable moral obligation to preserve those rights for posterity;

and that to achieve these ends all the peoples and nations of the globe should acknowledge their interdependence...and acknowledge that the forces that unite us are incomparably deeper than those that divide us—that all people are part of one global community, dependent upon one body of resources, bound together by the ties of a common humanity and associated in a common adventure on the planet Earth.

The second reading is from a commemorative speech given on the floor of the US Senate this past spring by Sen. Patrick Leahy. He is paying tribute to a remarkable young human rights worker named Marla Ruzicka. Marla was only 28 years old at the time of her death by a roadside bomb in Iraq, not meant for her particularly, but for anyone passing by. In the last years of her short life, she was devoted to helping civilian families in Afghanistan and Iraq who obtained losses as a result of US military action. She thought this was the right thing for our country to do.

I met Marla three years ago.... She had been in Afghanistan, where she had seen the effects of U.S. bombing mistakes that had destroyed the homes and lives of innocent Afghan civilians...She felt passionately that the United States should help those families piece their lives back together.

It didn't take long to convince me because she was so obviously right. We not only had a moral responsibility to those people..., we also had an interest in mitigating the hatred and resentment towards Americans that those incidents had caused....

Her efforts led to the creation of a program - now known as the Civilian Assistance Program.... To my knowledge, this is the first time we have ever provided this type of assistance to civilian victims of U.S. military operations, and it would never have happened without the initiative, the courage, and the incomparable force of character of Marla Ruzicka.

As anyone who knew Marla discovered, she was not someone who it was easy to say no to. In fact it was almost impossible, and that was not simply because she was insistent. It was because she had been there, she knew what war was about, she had seen the tragic results, and she was not about blaming anyone. She was about helping, in whatever ways she could.

Marla saw her work as part of the best of what this country is about. It was the face of a compassionate America that she believed in, and that she wanted the people of Afghanistan and Iraq to see.

REFLECTION ON THE 6th PRINCIPLE

What a Wonderful World?
Doris Oursler

My dad, Bill Oursler, was well known to his friends and family as the best teller of jokes. A great wit, perhaps somewhat in the vaudeville tradition, he once told me, "Never, if you're on stage, NEVER follow an animal act. I did that once, and—I couldn't believe it—halfway through MY act, the audience started booing the animal act!"

So I know that if halfway through my humble comments this morning you start booing, I'll know that you didn't really like the music that Joe and Jack prepared for you this morning. I thank them as well as

thank Jim, Debbie, and Carole and the others who made this service possible. I also thank Bill Inglis for his energy in bringing to reality this series of lay-led sermons this summer on the Unitarian Universalist principles.

I know you've had the orientation from the previous services, but for those in our company today who are unfamiliar, I'll just briefly say that UUs do not share a common creed, that is, a common statement of religious belief. There's a wide range of actual beliefs among us. However, we do agree to a set of covenanting principles. We honor the worth and dignity of the individual, as you heard in service #1, and we honor the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part, number #7. You'll hear more about number #7 next week.

I'll admit that up to this point, if you really pressured me, I could name the first and seventh of the principles—"bookends" they're sometimes called. I sort of knew the rest of them, maybe, certainly not in order. Is this important that we know these by heart, like a UU catechism? Should I be chagrined that I can't even recite these principles to those who ask? In fact, I WAS asked. When I shared with family and friends that I was doing this service, they said, "Oh, that's interesting. What ARE the principles?" And I said, "Wait a sec while I look them up on the website."

It's a healthy exercise for us to visit these from time to time and to ponder them and argue them—nicely!—and maybe, if you're so inclined, to memorize them. All I know is that I've spent a lot of time pondering the 6th one the last several weeks. And it's a tough one. Let me tell you why.

Early in my pondering process, a friend asked me which one I was addressing. Without checking the website or my crib notes, I confidently said it was "the *vision* of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all." After the phone call, I double checked that I got all the words in the right order and realized to my horror that I had said "vision" instead of "goal."

You see, I fell into what Unitarians are *sometimes* accused of—not Universalists so much, mind you, the great action takers of our history—but the Unitarians. I can "vision" with the best of them. Like John Lennon, "Imagine." But to have a goal, well, that requires what my mother used to call "elbow grease." Sometimes we find ourselves studying and discussing and analyzing and complaining and intellectualizing and pointing out what "should be done," but it's harder for us to roll up our sleeves and do something. Mind you, I'm not for a minute accusing anyone in our midst of not moving beyond a mere articulation of concerns. I know of people in this room who do incredible work—for example, working with our community justice-seeking group, BREAD, to effect change in our local world.

No, I think perhaps I'm talking about...well, about me. I look in the mirror from time to time and ask, "What can one person do?" It's hard enough to be a peacemaker on a local level, but the 6th principle speaks of the "goal of *world* community."

But looking in that mirror, I'm sure I'm on to something. Peace must start with the individual.

As I wrestled with "vision" vs. taking action to reach a goal, I came across the news of Marla Ruzicka. You heard a portion of a tribute to Marla after her death in Iraq. You heard that Marla was a Californian who was bent on making a difference. She set out to ascertain exactly what the civilian damage was in the war zones of Afghanistan and later Iraq when U.S. action was misdirected. She strongly believed that the United States had a moral obligation to help repair those types of wounds.

Simon Robbins of Time Magazine wrote about Marla: "Young, blonde, relentlessly buoyant and sometimes giggly, she stood out among the tired, cynical hacks and aid workers that usually populate war zones, so much so that battle-weary journalists nicknamed her "Bubbles"... uncertain what to make of this gregarious life force that had dropped in our midst. ... But behind her party girl attitude and surfer-girl looks was a fearsome determination and astonishing compassion, qualities that were

instrumental in her securing millions of dollars in aid money from the U.S. government last year to help the victims of American bombing....”

I was certainly captivated by her story. Yes, it’s dramatic—a youthful, female spirit flitting through ravaged Mideast war zones, coming back to Washington to face senators and indeed the Secretary of Defense himself, talking intently and non-stop about her advocacy work. Probably would make for a good movie. But I think what intrigued me most was wondering at what point in her life she looked in the mirror and challenged herself to do something. Perhaps when she was a girl, she sang in a youth choir that performed the song you heard Jack play this morning at the start of our service...

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me...

At a young age, she summoned up her particular skills, she studied, and she asked a lot of questions. She translated her vision into working toward a goal, and she was effective.

Marla most surely believed in the vision AND the goal of a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

As we think about what one person can do, let me take a few minutes to tell you about some of the groups, mostly Unitarian Universalist related. Of course, there are certainly many others. Some of the descriptions that follow come directly from various websites.

Our Unitarian Universalist Association—UUA—at the start of its existence created a Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office to promote world community with peace, liberty and justice for all, as reflected in the United Nations Charter.

The UU-UNO is a membership organization of individuals, congregations, and institutions in the United States and Canada. Through a special relationship with the United Nations, the Office is involved in briefings and meetings in order to communicate with other UUs through the website, the newsletter, seminars, informational films, focused workshops and events at our annual General Assembly, and special UN Sundays and other congregational programs—all with the goal of education, advocacy, and outreach with the aim of promoting peace and eliminating war, discrimination, poverty, and disease.

The current issue of the newsletter, *Window on the World*, features detailed information on the dire situation in Darfur, where during the past two years, nearly 400,000 people have died—many from governmental forces and the rest from starvation, disease, and exposure. What the UN is—and is not—doing and why is explained. The newsletter outlines specific action that Unitarian Universalists can take.

This newsletter also features projects that individual congregations take in educating itself and getting its members actively involved.

There is a current story of our UUA president, William Sinkford, taking part this month in a UN working group on faith-based initiatives in these important matters.

Another organization, heard about around here especially at Christmas time, is the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee—or UUSC. We all carry home little boxes called *Guest at Your Table*, and in a meaningful act, families drop coins in the box every time they have a meal to remind themselves that there are people around the world who may not be able to have a meal on that day.

The UUSC’s mission, besides emergency relief, is to advance human rights and social justice around the world, partnering with those who confront unjust power structures, and mobilizing to challenge oppressive policies.

The UUSC has a proud history. Unitarians worked diligently in Europe to help refugees from Hitler's persecution to escape. In 1940, the American Unitarian Association formed the Unitarian Service Committee—or USC—as a standing committee. The next year, it adopted the flaming chalice as its symbol.

In mid-1945, the Universalists formed its group, the Universalist Service Committee, to work on war relief. But within months, the two organizations—the Unitarian one and the Universalist one—joined together into what would eventually become what we know today. Remember that the two parent organizations didn't merge until about 16 years later.

Today the UUSC's focus is on three major areas: (1) opposing economic injustice by addressing issues of globalization and privatization, and defending and promoting workers' rights; (2) defending civil liberties as well as access to democratic processes; this includes the STOP campaign—Stop Torture Permanently; and (3) promoting environmental justice with a primary focus on defending the human right to water. We had an excellent service here just a few weeks ago on this significant topic.

The UUSC is a very visible presence as well at our annual General Assembly with ample opportunity for education and involvement.

Another group I'd like to mention is the Unitarian Universalist Holdeen India Program. This group works mainly with India's most excluded and oppressed peoples, namely women, the people we often call the "untouchables," and other displaced persons. The work focuses on supporting their efforts to participate fully in the social, economic, and political life of India.

As we approach the anniversary next week of the bombing of Japan by US forces to end World War II, the UUA is sponsoring a series of activities and studies for the Summer of Peace. There are many intergenerational activities our congregations can participate in that will mobilize us to work for peace and the hope of a better world.

One final group I'll mention is Amnesty International. Though not a Unitarian Universalist organization, its mission is in line with much of what we value. As a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights, it envisions a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

The current Executive Director of Amnesty International USA is William Schultz, a Unitarian Universalist minister who served our Association as President from 1985 to 1993. Rev. Schultz has inspired many of us over the years with his fervent words regarding the 6th principle. He is also the author of a pamphlet out in the racks in the Gallery—titled *Engagement with the World: A Personal Perspective of Faith in Action*.

So as I see the individuals and the groups who are "out there," I ask myself, "Is this a wonderful world?" Of course, it is. Despite my somewhat cynical title today, there's no doubt about it. Just this past week, I saw an article indicating that the Irish IRA plans to not use violence anymore. I read about an aggressive message by American Muslim leaders to their fellow Muslims that decries the use of violence. Stories of achievement and progress may seem to be swamped by the stories of ethnic cleansing, and abuse of women and minorities, and terrorist bombings. But there always will be unreported stories of excellent and passionate and successful work by people like Marla and groups like the ones I mentioned.

Perhaps we can imagine peace as a brilliantly burning star—bright and beautiful to behold. When we feel we are in the right place, the light is incredible. Likewise, an equally bold star for liberty. And one for justice. And one, too, for love. When we are in turmoil, such as on the verge of war, or struggling with nations and their citizens in incredibly troubling situations, or wrestling with national leaderships

or disparate factions engaged in corruptive and disruptive and violent activity, the stars seem dimmer. Perhaps that's what I sometimes feel in my personal despair—that the light is going out.

But Unitarian Universalist minister, the Rev. Ricky Hoyt, says that the stars burn just as bright. Peace is bright. Liberty is bright. Justice is bright. Love is bright. They always have been and always will be. It is *we* who have moved in our location to these stars. We are farther away. We are off to one side or the other. It is for us to move closer to the stars to enjoy their brilliance.

According to Rev. Hoyt: “Because those values [or stars!] that call us never change, no matter how far away the world slips from them, we can take comfort knowing that the value itself is not damaged by even the worst mistakes we make in our work toward them. The values don't change, only our circumstances and actions change. Peace is always peace, no matter how much we battle. No amount of injustice lessens the power and beauty of justice. Hate does not destroy love; it only postpones it. However far we feel today from the world of love, peace, and justice we hope for, nothing about the values of love, peace, and justice has been compromised by our current actions.... They are not ours to compromise. The values themselves are strong, good, and true, just as strong, just as good, just as true, as they always have been.”

Something to think about the next time you look in the mirror.

CLOSING

And now, listen to the words of that wise and wonderful Unitarian Universalist minister, the Rev. Mark Belletini:

Crave peace for all people in the world, beginning with ourselves,
And go as you go with the dream of that peace alive in your heart.