

# Simple Gifts

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# The All Souls Journal

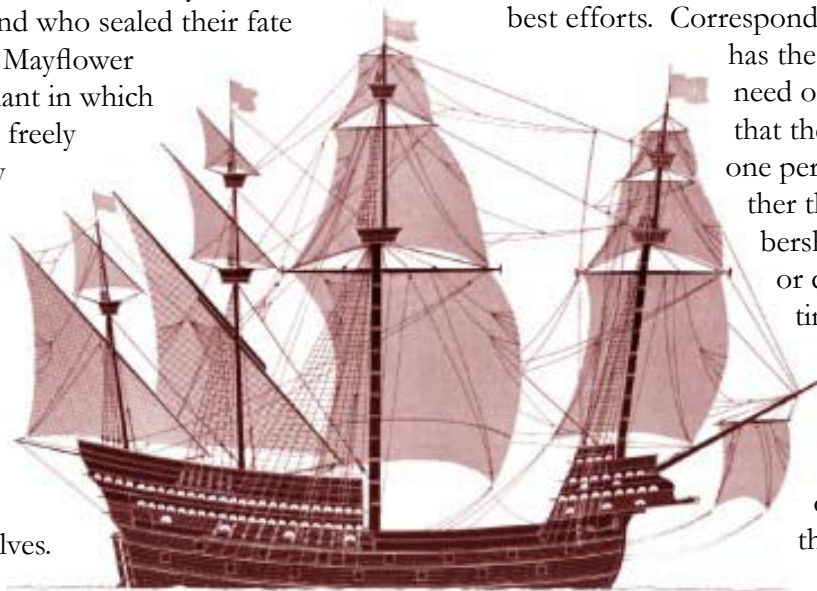
## A Pilgrim Church

by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister

We are a pilgrim church in more ways than one. We are religious pilgrims on a path of discovery that calls us to enliven ancient wisdom and stories and to discover new truths in our own times. As religious pilgrims we have left the old world of certainty and inherited dogmas and have set sail across the ocean of religious freedom. Our freedom, however, is tempered by responsibility and conscience and is shaped by the living traditions from which our church has sprung. One of the most important of those traditions is the use of the democratic process.

### *Compact and Covenant*

We are a pilgrim church in that our religious forebears were inspired by the men and women who sailed across the Atlantic Ocean on the Mayflower in search of a new life and who sealed their fate with a compact. The Mayflower Compact was a covenant in which the adults on the ship freely agreed that when they reached the shore of the new world they would not simply pursue their own self interest; rather they agreed to put the common good of their community above what was good only for themselves.



Our church is bound together by a similar covenant. Each of us agrees to be in free association with the members of the church community to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another. Much like the Pilgrims on the Mayflower, when it comes to our church, if our self-interest is in conflict with what is best for the church as a whole, we are asked to put the common good of the church above our own desires and interests. Also, like the Pilgrims, we have decided that we cannot travel this free path without yoking ourselves to a community. Through our mutual agreement with one another we make sacrifices and are protected. Ultimately we find deeper freedom and greater love.

### *Free Pulpit and Free Pew*

In our church tradition, ministers are granted a free pulpit to preach the truth as they discern it through the fire of their experience, their studies, and their best efforts. Correspondingly, the congregation

has the free pew, so members need only accept those teachings that they discern as truthful. As one person describes it "...neither the minister nor the membership shall trammel upon or censor one another at any time." What one hears believing forth from the lips of the ministers in our pulpit is never doctrine. Dr. John Wolf once told me, "All Souls is the freest pulpit in

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Democracy**

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North America. The congregation won't always agree with you, but they will defend your freedom to say it until the end!" People in our church have come to hold with great appreciation and pride the fact that at times they may hear ideas coming from our pulpit that could lead almost any other minister to lose his/her job.

### *Calling a Minister*

In our tradition the congregation chooses its leaders democratically. Only the congregation has the right and responsibility to choose and ordain its own clergy, elect its own officers, and replace them when necessary. There are no synods, bishops, or other persons empowered elsewhere with authority over our congregation.

When it comes to calling a minister a well-established process is used in Unitarian Universalist congregations. A congregation gathers a search committee who work long hours, often over a year or more, to find a candidate for their church's ministry. At the end of this search process, the custom is that the committee brings only one candidate for the congregation to consider. After a candidating period, the congregation votes on whether to call the minister. A successful call typically requires 90 percent or more of the votes in a congregational meeting that fulfills the quorum requirement.

In a multiple staff church like All Souls, the congregation delegates to the called Senior Minister the authority to hire staff to help fulfill the ministry of the church. Our long-standing custom and policy at All Souls is to call a second full-time minister to support the Senior Minister and to serve the congregation. The process being used widely by our churches around the country to create strong multi-staff ministry teams is known as a "Hire to Call" process. A committee that includes the Senior Minister searches for a candidate for the second ministry position. Once the candidate is found, he or she is hired for up to two years, with the stated expectation that before the end of the

two years the congregation will vote whether to call the minister. Rev. Tamara Lebak is entering the fourth month of her second year with us as a "hire to call" minister.

Sometime during the next eight months Tamara's ministerial relations committee will recommend to the Board of Trustees that they convene a meeting of the congregation to allow the members to vote on whether to call Tamara. Her roles and responsibilities would remain the same following a successful call, however the quality of her relationship with the congregation would be deeper since both she and the congregation will have fully chosen one another. The call process is a centuries old tradition on these shores that has significance for both ministers and congregations.

### *Congregational Meetings*

In our tradition the congregation is ultimately responsible for deciding how the budget is set, how the money is spent, and the policies of the church. Regular congregational meetings are held at least twice a year – in December to approve the upcoming year's budget and in May to elect members and officers of the Board of Trustees. Between congregational meetings, the Board of Trustees runs the business of the church. In practice, the day to day tasks are delegated by the Board to the Senior Minister who functions as chief of staff.

### *A Sacred Trust*

The democratic process in church, as in government, is founded on the premise that people should have a say about who leads them. It often goes unrecognized that democracy includes some implicit theological claims about human nature. First, democracy acknowledges our free will. Second, democracy affirms the worth of every human being and respects each person as being capable of discerning what is good and right. These values pervade our tradition from the freedom of the pulpit and of the pew to the choosing of our ministers and officers. Democracy is more than a form of church governance, it is a sacred trust. †

## Democracy and Courage



I recently did a memorial service for a man who kept a well-worn copy of John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* nearby to guide him through his life and his profession as a lawyer. It is a book that tells the stories of many in our country's history who showed great courage in the face of enormous pressure and high stakes. "Some demonstrated courage through their unyielding devotion to absolute principle. Others demonstrated courage through their acceptance of compromise, through their advocacy of conciliation, through their willingness to replace conflict with cooperation."<sup>1</sup> What was most important for the success of the nation was that they balanced the needs of the many and the needs of the individual.

In our church and our nation, we must be mindful that dominant group perspectives and experiences become normative in a hierarchy of values. We may not only be unaware of our blind spots, but our normal way of organizing the world may in fact keep us from seeing these blind spots even after they have been pointed out to us. Whenever power is concerned, making an informed choice necessitates input from the marginalized or minority voices and the open hearts and minds of those in power. This does not mean that the

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Assistant Minister

outcomes will necessarily be affected, but it may affect the big picture in the long run. This is as true in politics as it is in our churches. We must ask ourselves, "Who is not at the table? Who are the stakeholders? and Who will be affected by this decision but may not have a voice?"

John F. Kennedy writes, "In a democracy, every citizen, regardless of his interest in politics 'holds office'; every one of us is in a position of responsibility; and, in the final analysis, the kind of government we get depends upon how we fulfill those responsibilities."<sup>2</sup> Sometimes our voice is invited and sometimes not. Sometimes we must find a place for our voice to be heard. Regardless, speaking out about our values and our experience takes courage and so does sharing our power. "To be courageous... requires no exceptional qualifications, no magic formula, no special combination of time, place, and circumstance. It is an opportunity that sooner or later is presented to us all... In whatever arena of life one may meet the challenge of courage, whatever may be the sacrifices he (sic) faces if he follows his conscience...each man(sic) must decide for himself the course he will follow."<sup>3</sup> †

<sup>1</sup>Kennedy, John F. *Profiles in Courage*, pg. 221

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 225

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 225

## Town Hall Meeting Invites Input

More than 50 Souls gathered for a Town Hall meeting on Oct. 21 with Chris Chivetta and staff members from Hastings & Chivetta, our St. Louis-based master planning firm. The firm was chosen for this work largely because of their detailed and inclusive process for broad-based congregational input.

In this second of two Town Halls, the process initiated at the Leadership Retreat in August was replicated. All church members were invited to attend, to hear Marlin's vision, learn more about the master planning process and give their own input regarding their personal and institutional goals for our master plan in small group

meetings with members of the Master Planning Committee and Hastings & Chivetta staff. Everyone was further invited to name five things they wanted to see addressed in a master plan. A report out process at the end of the 3 1/2 hour meeting yielded results consistent with those at the first Town Hall: more worship space, more social space and more parking topping the list.

The next Town Hall will present conceptual plans for our feedback before the detailed Master Plan developed.

# Democracy is the Song

-by Rev. Debra Garfinkel, Minister of Pastoral Care



Singing and music have been an important part of my life for as long as I can remember. I loved listening to my mother sing hymns like *How Great Thou Art* and popular songs like *On the Sunny Side of the Street*. Time stood still as she played

the piano and we sang tune after tune; I sang the melody and she harmonized. That was the best! Well, actually, the very best was when we sang with the congregation in church – all our voices raised in an offering of individual notes that somehow blended into one magnificent voice.

We weren't all sounding the same tone, though. There were folks who sounded like tiny, timid bells and others who sounded more like strong, confident brass. Some sang with an ebb and flow that suggested much practice. Others produced short, staccato phrases that emphasized particular notes and words – I never really knew why. All I knew was that it was a marvelous result. It made me feel part of something much larger than myself. As a very small child in a world of giants, singing in a group brought me tremendous joy; it filled me with a sense of power and energy. What an awesome experience.

For me, our democratic system offers a similar opportunity for just such an awesome experience. Within this system, it is possible for each voice to join with the voices of others to create something full of transforming power and energy. Our Unitarian Universalist ancestors adopted a democratic approach in order to take advantage of and respect diverse

points of view. As UU musician, Jim Scott, says in our much loved hymn #347, *Gather the Spirit*:

Gather the spirit, harvest the power.  
Our sep'rate fires will kindle one flame.  
Witness the mystery of this hour.  
Our trials in this light appear all the same.

Democracy as a spiritual practice means gathering together to kindle the flame of hope, compassion, and strength. It means setting aside time and space in order to listen – really listen – to points of view different from our own. This is asking a lot. However, the opportunities exist for each of us to notice possible openings for more than surface conversation. It can be as simple as attending a different church service than your usual one. Or, you could attend an intergenerational event like a church picnic or the Oktoberfest dinner and sit with a family with kids (even if you don't have kids), join the seniors for a Game Day or volunteer to work in our children's and youth programs with children and youth who are not your own. Just within our own church, there are many possibilities for engaging with people of different ages and from different backgrounds. You can always branch out and pay attention to other moments for holy conversation – at home, at work, at school, at play.

This is precisely what we are about – holy conversation – to hear all the voices that contribute to the transforming power and energy in our democratic association. It's a matter of practice. The more we practice, the more amazing will be the glorious, joyful noise that results. We are the choir. Democracy is the song. See you at practice. †



# Theological Diversity at All Souls

*It should come as no surprise that a church without a creed, a church that emphasizes freedom/reason/tolerance as basic principles, would incorporate a lot of different theological positions. And All Souls does. Herewith we conclude the series expressing some of the many different theologies that exist in our church. We've been running these for several months, and the entire collection - those published, and several more - will appear in a special section of the forthcoming history of the church: "Love is the Spirit of This Church: A History of All Souls Unitarian Church of Tulsa, Oklahoma." -Davis Joyce, editor, Love is the Spirit of This Church: A History of All Souls Unitarian Church of Tulsa, Oklahoma*

## Earth-centered Spirituality

-by Randy Wymore

When I read Hillary Rodham Clinton's book, *It Takes a Village*, I was moved by the concept of community. Not just community in the sense of the town or city that we live in, but in the sense of a collective of people that share common values, dreams, and goals. At first this was an intellectual curiosity to me. After moving to Tulsa in 1998 my wife, Jo Ann Mangili, and I began to look for a community where we would feel secure raising our young daughter. To find such a community was a daunting task. We both have graduate degrees in the biomedical sciences. As a molecular physiologist I have no doubt regarding some of the fundamental aspects of evolutionary theory. To further complicate our search, we both have long-held respect for both the cultural and spiritual aspects of Earth-based spiritual paths. Where could I find a church community that welcomes one who is an evolutionary biologist and a pagan? Where is there a community that would help in the raising of a daughter – instilling a sense of service to others and a love of our home, the Earth? Through what, in retrospect, seems almost an event of serendipity, we found such a home at All Souls Unitarian Church.

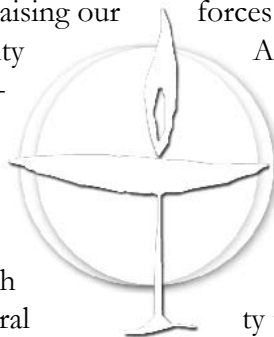
We are products of our genetic ancestry, our cultural heritage, and events in our lives. As a biologist, I often feel a disconnect from the Earth that we so depend upon, the mother that has nurtured all life to this present day. Fundamentalists take literally the Genesis admonition to “subdue the Earth” and all

its creatures. That disturbed me from my days as a young adult. The uninterrupted spiritual traditions of indigenous people generally seek to dwell on the Earth as a part of and caretaker of the biosphere – not seeking to rule over it in a literalist manner. The modern incarnation of pagan traditions that my wife and I are attracted to similarly attempt to reconnect with that ancient rhythm of the seasons and the forces of life and nature as a partner and not a ruler.

All Souls is a community that nurtures the freedom both to actively participate as a member of this church and to follow the rhythm of nature and the seasons as a pagan.

A community is made up of individuals, yet there are groups within that larger community that share common interests. In my case, one of those subsets within the larger community is others who share an interest in Earth-centered spirituality. At All Souls my third-grade daughter feels at ease singing in the Junior Choir and participating in virtually every event available for children. She is equally at ease drumming at the solstices, equinoxes, or marking the passage of the seasons and moons.

My wife and I are thankful that we have found a church based on mutual respect and service toward others. We are part of a community that provides a safe and loving environment for cultivation of the spiritual lives of adult and child alike. All Souls is comprised of members who truly believe in the words: “...to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another.” †



# Spiritual Exercises: Democracy

-by Jeremy T. Elliott, Intern Minister

The Reverend William Ellery Channing wisely noted that we should pray more often with our lives than with our lips. Our faith is something that should embrace every aspect of our lives. Unitarian and Universalist Americans have a long history of mingling the sacred with the secular. Our voices of liberal faith are vital to the life and consciousness of our democracy. Our faith informs our lives and it can be a powerful blessing to our community. Sacred activism – acting to further our spiritual ideals in all dimensions of living – demands a political faith. Indeed, the social conditions of our world demand a renewed political faith. These suggestions explore ways in which your life, and your voice, can effectively and regularly make a difference in our society.

1. *Plant a Few Seeds.* We don't have infinite attention to offer the world. We can't care about everything and personally touch every issue. Often, that's exactly what we try to do and the outcome is predictable. We over-stretch ourselves, diminish our passion, and give up. This is why it's important that we admit that our attention is limited. Pick just one or two or three issues that really speak to you – healthcare, the environment, anti-racism, or whatever they may be – and really commit your attention to those issues. Have faith that others will be called to serve the world in ways



that you cannot. By committing your time and resources to a limited number of issues you will gain greater depth of

wisdom and not find yourself buried under the weight of our society's social problems.

2. *Keep the Sabbath Holy.* After you choose one or a few issues to commit to, develop a schedule for regularly engaging those issues. You might write one letter to your representatives each month, alternating the issues you are addressing. You might plan to meet with your congressional representatives once every six months. You might join a social justice organization or committee at the church to regularly participate in directly affecting social change. If we don't develop schedules to keep the Sabbath holy as part of our spiritual practice, we often forget our spiritual work and then don't fully utilize the potential of our lives.

3. *Tithe.* The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker, President of Starr King School for the Ministry, encourages religious liberals to take up the practice of tithing. Give away 10 percent of your income to worthy causes. She suggests that we aim for 10 percent to truly extend the reach of our being further into the world. We may start by only giving a smaller percentage to the church, but we can work to gradually give more through Sunday church collections which go to noble causes, or to organizations that advance the issues we care about. Our money is an extension of our being, so we should strive to continually offer more of ourselves to our highest ideals and the visions we hold for our world.

4. *Soul-search.* Privilege can come from having white skin, a certain sexual orientation, being born male, and from a litany of other identities. Become aware of what your privilege is, how it's serving your life, and how it is possibly oppressing the lives of others. The Rev. Dr. Dorothy May Emerson writes, "As a white person, I have the privilege of choosing whether or not to notice racism, whether or not to deal with the racist systems in which I live." Use whatever privilege you may have to notice the injustices of our society and engage them. Social change, the sacred work, begins with you. †

# Democracy Personified

-by *Kate Starr and Rev. Tamara Lebak*

Every weekday morning, usually before dawn,  
Democracy slides into the booth at the local  
diner  
with Peace and Power and orders the usual:

black coffee, oatmeal with bananas and walnuts,  
dry wheat toast, one egg over easy  
with a dollop of salsa,  
and fresh fruit or homegrown tomatoes  
if they're in season.

It's not the breakfast most would expect  
for a muscular man in coveralls,  
with thick calloused hands and a flattop haircut.  
This self-educated man has been influenced  
by his daughters,  
Education and Nutrition,  
and wants to live long enough  
to travel around the world with them.  
His one indulgence is the hand-rolled tamales  
the Mexican vendor sells at lunchtime  
outside the water treatment plant where  
Democracy serves as union president.

Democracy lives on his family's farm  
where both he and his father Idealism grew up.  
Idealism and his wife Justice  
taught their only son how to grow crops,  
milk cows and goats, make cheese, gather eggs,  
gig frogs, slop hogs, and skin rabbits  
for meat and fur.  
Today, Democracy and his wife Freedom  
still cook on the original wood stove,  
but they did install indoor plumbing.

Democracy and Freedom lead a simple life  
and are quite happy.  
There was a time when Capitalism,  
Democracy's high school sweetheart,  
tried to seduce him into leaving Freedom  
to travel third-world countries  
selling encyclopedias, English dictionaries,  
and Bibles.

All is forgiven now. Capitalism married Power  
and they've been together almost as long  
as Democracy and Freedom.

Democracy walks with a limp –  
the result of a brawl  
he and Power once got into  
while on leave during The War.  
They have an ongoing argument  
over the inherent goodness of people  
and their right and ability to make good decisions  
for themselves.

It is a topic they no longer discuss.  
Democracy is also slightly hard of hearing –  
especially in a crowded room  
when everyone is talking at once.  
The resulting misunderstandings can be  
both humorous and disastrous.  
It frustrates him no end to rely on  
whomever he's with to tell him what he's missed.

Democracy is a gentle and sensitive man  
who cries every time he hears  
The Star Spangled Banner,  
or any national anthem for that matter.  
Friends also describe him as cranky and impatient.  
He can't seem to understand why  
everyone insists on such a scarcity mentality.  
He believes there is enough for everyone:  
enough food, enough land, enough jobs,  
enough untapped human potential on the planet.  
There is so much fear and ignorance and greed.  
The whole thing just breaks his heart.



## Green Team

-by Rain Johnson

According to the UU Ministry for Earth; “Our purpose is to inspire, facilitate, and support personal, congregational, and denominational practices that honor and sustain the Earth and all beings.”

All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa aspires to reach these common goals. The Green Team is a task force committed to creating and maintaining environmentally conscientious and sustainable policies and practices within the church. On Sunday mornings, in Emerson Hall, Energy Star compact fluorescent light bulbs are available for purchase, and for every bulb purchased the Green Team donates one to the church. Sexton Aubrey Johnson installing these new light bulbs throughout the church, dramatically decreasing energy consumption. The booth in Emerson Hall is also a great place to enroll in our email contact list, purchase Tulsa’s Green Directories, obtain answers, and make suggestions.

We have been working very closely with Michael Patten and the Metropolitan Environmental Trust. They have generously provided the recycling containers we are now using around the church. Patten has also been consulted regarding sustainability practices for some church events and continues to provide materials and education.

Currently we are consulting with Living Kitchen about using more local foods in our church meals. The Garden Committee planted an herb garden for our chef, John Evans, just outside the kitchen door. Sensors have been installed on the lights in two of the bathrooms. Earlier this year Steve Eberle performed an environmental audit, and the results are currently being assessed. The Youth Department is very excited about being on board with our Green



Team and they look forward to participating in all our endeavors. I am raising funds to buy industrial - grade coffee makers which will allow us to convert all our coffee consumption to Fair Trade Coffees. Adult Religious Education dedicated much of October’s programming to environmental issues supporting our theme that month – Creation. Greg Bledsoe and Herb Beatty are working on a Walk or Bike to Church campaign. We also encourage you to carpool whenever possible.

Deep in our hearts we all love Mother Earth and share the hope of a bright tomorrow and a safe home for the world’s children. With strength of community and individual commitment, we will be the change we want to see. Thank you all for your participation and excitement. We look forward to making a difference. †