

# Simple Gifts

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## *The All Souls Journal*

### The Puzzle of Truth

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister



What do stock market investments, ecosystems, and the search for truth have in common? They are all strengthened by diversity and weakened by uniformity. There is a famous story of three blind men arguing about what an elephant is like. The one touching the trunk argues

passionately that “the elephant is like a fire hose.” The blind man touching the ear says, “That is wrong, the elephant is flat and thin like a big leaf.” The third man who is touching the elephant’s side insists, “You’re both very wrong, it is big and firm like a wall.” The three men go on arguing all day, each convinced by his own experience that the others must be wrong. Alone, each man only grasps part of the truth. By communicating with each other the men have the potential to get a fuller sense of the nature of an elephant.

We all have blind-spots, especially when it comes to issues of ultimate truth and value. At the same time, we each have powerful personal experiences that inform our understanding. For example, consider three people who each have a different experience and relationship with God. One man turns to God and is freed of a horrible addiction, and his experience leads him to trust in God and prayer. A woman loses her husband to cancer; after he prayed instead of receiving chemotherapy, he died a painful and early death. Her experience leads her to think God is an illusion and prayer is a joke. Another man realizes he cannot be sure if God exists, but he notices how much better he feels and acts when he

chooses to believe and live as if there is a God. So he chooses to live “as if,” even though he realizes he has no proof and could be wrong. It’s ridiculous for any of these people to deny the others’ experiences, and it seems that a wise seeker of ultimate truth would be informed by listening to each person.



In another real scenario, a woman in Tulsa prays to Jesus and is finally able to stop abusing drugs. Her relationship with Jesus grows over time and she becomes a committed Christian. On the other side of the world

***Truth:***

*To Tell  
the Truth*



*The Necessity  
of Ignorance*



*Perspective  
From the Bench*



*This I  
Know*

a different woman has an identical transformation while she is praying to the Hindu god Krishna and yet another woman has a similar encounter while in prayer to Allah. It makes no sense for any of these women to deny the other women's experiences. In fact, considering the totality of these experiences can tell us something about the mystery of God or at least the mysteries of being human.

As our church grows in diversity in so many ways, we are increasing the pool of experiences that can help shine light on life's great mysteries and bring us closer to understanding ultimate truths. The fool will hold his truth too tightly and deny others' experiences, while the wise among us will listen, curiously, with both ears, knowing that each person offers something worthwhile to the grand puzzle of ultimate truth. †



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## To Tell the Truth

*-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister*



*To Tell the Truth* is a television game show that has been seen in various forms, off and on, since 1956. Three guest challengers, each claiming to be person X, are questioned by a panel of four celebrities who attempt to identify who is the real X. The questions

asked are extremely important because they serve to shape the information given by the guests. The real X usually has an unusual occupation or has done something particularly noteworthy and is required to tell the truth when answering the panel. The two imposters are allowed to lie and pretend. After the celebrities have all questioned the challengers, they vote for the one they think is the real person X. At the end of the segment, the moderator says, "Will the real X please stand up?" The real person then stands (often after some playful false starts by all three guests) and then the other two reveal who they really are.

Real-life quests for truth are not quite this simple. The rules are not as well-defined and our perceptions, our emotions, our intuition, even our reason, can fool us. Finding the truth can actually be tricky when the truth cannot, in fact, speak for itself. Truth-seeking can be

quite frustrating, especially when our experience is not in line with what is culturally valued.

Finding the truth takes more than a fact-checking mind. It takes an open heart, and collaboration. It takes a community of accountability. It takes being willing to be wrong or being willing to consider a variety of possible views.

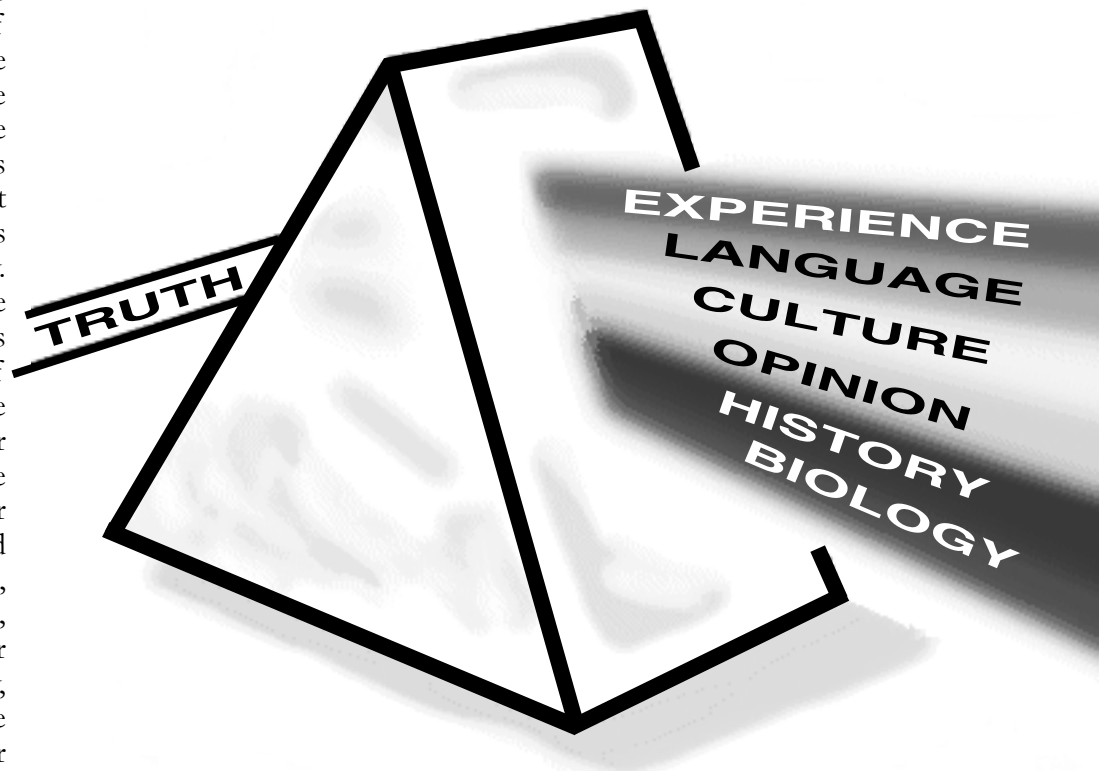
This month's story for Children's Religious Education is the familiar tale of the three blind men and the elephant. Each visually-impaired seeker tells the truth of his experience of the particular part of an elephant that they encountered. Yet, each is wrong to some degree: the whole of an elephant is not like a leaf, or a wall, or a fire hose. They only discovered part of the truth. Defining the elephant by only one of its many parts ignores the complexity and richness of the whole and does a disservice to the truth-seeker.

We so often forget the importance of honoring each other's perspectives, of valuing the messenger so we can hear the message and gain insight into the common reality we experience, thereby moving closer to the truth. We each have a unique experience of the world.

When I taught epistemology, I liked to use the image of a prism to illustrate the complexity of truth. Absolute truth or objective reality is like the light that shines into the world, but we can not access that light directly. Our subjective experience is as a single beam of color, and there are an infinite number of colors. The prism itself is our world, our limited sensory experience, our language, our culture, our personal history, and biology. The result is a particular perspective. We see the world through the glasses of that particular shade, which, in fact, cannot be removed. We may be influenced by other perspectives, cultures, and opinions, but ultimately we cannot remove the observer from the observed.

Now, I am not arguing for total subjectivism. I have a primary assumption that there is indeed something objective to experience. There are common threads of our human experience that, in my opinion, cannot be denied. There are common struggles of wanting to be authentically who we are – of wanting to be seen and heard for the perspective that we hold, and wanting to be valued.

As humans, we all seek the truth and a community with which we can identify. We tell stories – stories that ground us in a common beginning, a common purpose, and bind us together religiously. Religion, etymologically, comes from *religare* and means to “bind together.” Religious and cultural stories indeed do just that. We can unite around being Americans, and Oklahomans, and Tulsans, or around categories and descriptors like Caucasian,



African American, Native American, gay, straight, Christian, or Unitarian. We can unite around a common cultural experience.

We must remember that such stories can also build a wall that keeps others out. We are members of this free religious community of All Souls: a church that can hold the paradoxes and complexity of being human and being alive; a church that celebrates the mystery; a church that can hold our questions as well as our experience; a church that can help us clarify our values and gifts and how to manifest them in the world; a community that can hold us accountable to integrate our theology with our experience in order to live a life of integrity. It is this community that can help us remember to pay attention to categories, and to treat those categories as stepping stones that further us on our journey toward truth in love and not as idols that stand in our way.

We are a community that covenants to seek the truth in love. In *Love*. It is a delicate balance. Thank God we are all in this together! †

# Cookie's Confession

-by Debra Garfinkel, Pastoral Care Minister



A funny thing happened on the way to Truth – I bumped into Trust. I couldn't get Trust out of my mind. So, I decided that, for me at least, I can't begin to know spiritual truth and the nature of the Universe until I let go of my need for control – and that definitely includes whatsoever is

True, as the apostle Paul stated. I invite you to join my journey toward Truth by way of Trust.

*Trust and obey for there's no other way  
to be happy in Jesus... than to trust and obey.*

That's a bit of an old hymn that my grandmother, Cookie, used to sing at the top of her lungs when she was a child. The only Christmas that I ever got to spend with her was in Oregon when I was 14 years old. As we sat around the table after Christmas dinner, Cookie 'fessed up that what she *really* used to sing was, "Cuss and obey, for there's no other way, etc." As I've been reflecting upon our theme of Truth this song about Trust kept visiting me at the oddest moments. There's something about this trust, obey, and cuss thing.

Who gets to decide what is *The Truth*?

As children, we know this Truth: that we are dependent upon someone bigger, older, and more experienced than we are. We need the basics: food, shelter, clothing, intellectual stimulation, rest, play, and affection. Some of us are blessed with an abundance of all of those. Some of us receive much of some of them, enough of other parts, and are completely lacking one or more of these basic human needs. But however things work out for us, sooner or later we experience disappointment or even betrayal by the very people upon whom we depend. In other words, our trust and faith in those who care for us – our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or guardians – are shaken. These are the people who help us discern whatsoever is True. And, because we are young and unable to make our own decisions and make our own way in the world, these

are also the people who must be obeyed. How can we continue to trust and obey once we've known disappointment, disillusionment, or even suffered abuse? A child's sense of fairness kicks in. I don't think my grandmother was the only child before or since to send a message to God or the Ultimate by calling out, "Cuss and obey!" She was asking, *What is The Truth?*

So, as we age and try to figure out what is Really Real (True), we carry within us that childhood experience of what trust means and what trust requires. It's a lot to ask of someone to trust another person. We hear or say: Trust me, I'm your friend – I've got your back. Trust me, I love you – I'll be faithful. Trust me, I'll keep you safe. Trust me, I'll invest your money. I'm sure you've got your own list of relationships and situations where your trust has been taken for granted or trampled. If it happens often enough, it can shake your faith in Kindness, Goodness, and Compassion. It can be enough to make you doubt your ability to know what is True; it can be enough to make you doubt whether there is a Love that conquers all. And that whole "obey" thing (as in "Listen, here's The Truth") well, that just might be more about power and control than about trust and love. Or is it?

Children are such marvelous teachers about trust and truth and love. They live in a world that continues to offer wonder and endless possibilities. It takes a lot to cause a child not to trust – *a lot*. Children inherently know that they need certain material things in order to thrive and survive; they also know that they need the deep connection of emotional intimacy. They need hugs and play and joy. They also need healthy outlets to express frustration, anxiety, and fear as they experience the changes and disappointments that are part of life. They need to believe in Something Greater Than Themselves (what is True). If we pay attention, they teach us what we need to know.

Here's how I learned from my grandmother: My Cookie grew up on a farm in central Kansas. She had chores to do. She shared the affection of her

parents and grandparents with her baby sister – eventually. And like most children, she tested the limits of The Rules. When her parents told her not to ride old Joe, the big farm horse, what do you think she did? You guessed it – she found him grazing near a fence, climbed up the fence, and then jumped onto Joe’s back. He gave her a ride alright – bucked her into a large, sticky thistle patch. Cookie had thistles all over, but especially in her long hair. (This was around 1900 and girls didn’t cut their hair back then.) Of course, her mother knew exactly what Cookie had been up to when she came crying to her. As the consequence for her disobedience, Cookie’s mother took a large pair of shears and cut out hunks of Cookie’s hair where the thistles were entangled. Cookie suffered humiliation and disgrace at the hands of her own mother.



Those of us who are parents know the truth that Cookie’s mother knew: Children need to follow rules in order to safeguard their very lives. Cookie could have easily been thrown beneath Joe’s hooves and been stomped or kicked. But Cookie didn’t think that would happen to her. She thought her parents were trying to keep her from having fun; she thought they didn’t trust her.

There we have it. Although in some sense there is a certain element of power and control involved within a state of trust that moves us toward The Truth, Trust is about mutual communication and commitment; it’s ultimately about being in right relationship, and that means behaving respectfully and being responsible for our way of being human. Inside each adult is that little child, that little Cookie, who remembers the pain and humiliation of learning the nature of trust and responsibility. Inside many adults is a young person who may have suffered neglect, abuse, and gross injustice. Where do adults go when they reject authority and rules? When they feel more like cussing out God? In What or in Whom can they trust? What is The Truth?

There are no quick and easy answers. There are stories in your family just like this one from mine. Cookie survived her wild child antics. She met and married a man who survived his own set of circumstances. Together, they had an amazing daughter, my mother. A college-town girl, she trusted and obeyed and grew into a young woman who met and married a man who grew up on a farm. Together, they brought me into this world. Now, I’ve raised my children and they are beginning to raise their children. We all have our stories with issues of trust. We each find our ways to look deeper within ourselves for that spark of holiness, that abiding Love, which Jesus talked about as The Truth. And, we each find our ways to seek and recognize that spark of holiness and abiding Love that resides outside of ourselves.

May you find more Love somewhere. May you have enough Trust to continue to search for The Truth. And may you warmly safeguard, honor, and cherish the little Cookie within you in order to do the same for others – even, and perhaps especially, when you feel more like cussing than trusting. Blessings be upon you. †

# The Necessity of Ignorance

-by Jill Webb, Public Defender



Right now, I'm waiting for a jury to return a verdict. If they find my client guilty, he'll probably spend the rest of his life in prison. Waiting is difficult for me, but not as difficult as it is for my client, who I imagine is pacing back and forth in his cell right now.

He's charged with violent crimes. The jury doesn't know it, but he had just been released from the penitentiary for exactly the same crime that he was arrested and is now on trial for. If the jury knew about his record, I doubt that they would deliberate much at all.

The jury's job is to determine the truth. The State has presented evidence that my client committed three violent felonies. I've tried to cast doubt on the witnesses' identifications. If they knew he were a convicted felon, that knowledge would destroy their ability to think clearly about the evidence the State presented, and would, instead, focus their attention on his past. And his past is irrelevant to the question of what happened in this particular case.<sup>1</sup>

Often, knowing less, not knowing more, is necessary for getting closer to the truth. In my own life, I know that my experience brings with it not only knowledge, but also bias. I cannot remove myself from my own mind.

For example, a few months ago, I had a child pornography case. I have handled hundreds of felony cases, but I had never had one with this particular charge. Of course, it was my responsibility view the evidence. I needed to make sure the images were what the State said they were. So, I went to the District Attorney's office to view them on a specially designated laptop. I clicked the arrow to flip through the photographs one at a time.<sup>2</sup>

I cannot go back to being the person that I was before I saw what was on that computer.

For the first few weeks after having seen those images, I was deeply disturbed. Every time I saw a young girl, I wanted to throw a barricade around her. The knowledge that this kind of horror is out there didn't bring me closer to seeing the world as it truly is. Instead, it distorted my reality, making a small, but horrific part of humanity feel huge; it seemed to cling to my skin everywhere I went. Time has taken care of most of the distortion, I think. But I can't know for sure, because I can't be objective about my own view of the world.

The best I can do is be aware of my experiences, and be thoughtful about how those experiences might bias me. Life doesn't allow us the luxury of being like the jury, only exposed to the relevant information. Instead, we have to constantly sift through what we experience, keeping what is devastating and elevating in perspective, and being honest about what makes up who we are. †



1. *After four and a half hours of deliberation, the jury found him guilty on all counts. He will be eligible for parole in 2039.*

2. *My client worked with investigators, teaching them how to find more of these images on the web. As a result, two of the girls in the photographs, living in different parts of Europe, were identified, and have been rescued and given safety.*

# Truth: Perspective From the Bench

-by Judge Bill Kellough



Truth is my stock and trade. I spend a great part of every day listening to witnesses in court telling stories, giving impressions, relating events, and providing opinions after having been sworn to “tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth...” so help them God. The Deity’s name is invoked, not because the courtroom is a sanctified arena, but because most people, even in our generally secular culture, have a nagging suspicion that to lie is a sin which might very well be punished. But I still instruct juries that credibility is to be judged by a variety of factors, the oath-taking being only one.

The stickiest part of that oath is the part about telling “the *whole* truth.” Most of us pride ourselves in not lying, knowingly or overtly. But few people, even the most upstanding, can recount events in their entirety. Things are left out simply because our minds absorb and retain limited information. The masked man was wearing a shirt, but it may have been brown or red; he was wearing jeans or dress slacks; the robbery took place at 6:00 or 8:00 pm; there may have been two or three of them; one or two had guns drawn, etc. Despite our oaths and best intentions, the *whole* truth can never be known. That is why the law encourages evidence from many sources and not just testimony. DNA can be “truth” as well as fingerprints and photographs. The object is to assemble a puzzle with as few missing pieces as possible and without the aid of a picture on the cover of the box.

In the courtroom, truth is the raw material from which justice is made. Like Plato, we may want to know the enduring definition of justice on a cosmic scale. But in the meantime, we have a civil society to tend to, messes to clean up. Accounts have to

be settled. Conflicts have to be resolved without bloodshed. Errant persons have to be restrained from hurting others and taking their property. To manage civilization, we must insist that all of us speak the truth, that is, we must strive to understand and share the same sense of reality as our neighbor. We are free to think what we want but, for the common good, we cannot be allowed to say whatever we want. Our beloved First Amendment protects speech which we use to express ourselves, to define who we are to all who will listen. But it does not protect speech which imposes an alternative reality on others.

Everyone’s perception of reality differs. How, then, can we put any stock in truth? As long as we spell truth with a small “t” we can get by. Those whom we have designated as legal “fact finders,” judges and juries, simply have to do the best they can with what they are given. I should say “are *allowed to be given*” because we have found, over the centuries, that we get a better and more just result if we *restrict* information – control it in some logical sense.

We call these restrictions “rules of evidence.” When a witness says: “The store clerk told me that the man who fled was wearing a red shirt,” it may be absolute truth. But experience has taught us that facts get garbled as they are passed from one person to the next. Truth is an imperfect alloy as it is, without diluting it even further with that alluring but cheap element: hearsay.

Truth with a small “t” plays a vital role in maintaining and advancing the security and well-being of our community. We should all devote much of our lives and intellect, like Thomas Aquinas and Einstein, to searching for those larger theological and scientific Truths. But truth-telling, as I know it, is simply that habit of conscience which is at the heart of our social compact. †



# Daily Thoughts...

**MAY 1**

Truth is generally the best vindication against slander.

~Abraham Lincoln

**MAY 2**

There are few nudities so objectionable as the naked truth.

~Agnes Repplier

**MAY 3**

Believe those who are seeking the truth. Doubt those who find it.

~Andre Gide

**MAY 4**

All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.

~Arthur Schopenhauer

**MAY 5**

When you have eliminated the impossible, that which remains, however improbable, must be the truth.

~Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

**MAY 6**

What is laid down, ordered, factual is never enough to embrace the whole truth: life always spills over the rim of every cup.

~Boris Pasternak

**MAY 7**

I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it's for or against.

~Malcolm X

**MAY 8**

Strike an average between what a woman thinks of her husband a month before she marries him and what she thinks of him a year afterward, and you will have the truth about him.

~H.L. Mencken

**MAY 9**

Truth fears no trial.

~Proverb

**MAY 10**

The greatest friend of truth is time, her greatest enemy is prejudice, and her constant companion humility.

~Charles Colton

**MAY 11**

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

~John 8:32

**MAY 12**

The ability to ask questions is the greatest resource in learning the truth.

~Unknown

**MAY 13**

Chase after truth like hell and you'll free yourself, even though you never touch its coat-tails.

~Clarence Darrow

**MAY 14**

We should not pretend to understand the world only by the intellect; we apprehend it just as much by feeling. Therefore, the judgment of the intellect is, at best, only the half of truth, as must, if it be honest, also come an understanding of its inadequacy.

~Carl Jung

**MAY 15**

The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple.

~Oscar Wilde

**MAY 16**

It is a puzzling thing. The truth knocks on the door and you say, 'Go away, I'm looking for the truth.' and so it goes away. Puzzling.

~Robert M. Pirsig

**MAY 17**

I never give them hell. I just tell the truth and they think it's hell. ~Harry Truman

**MAY 18**

The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth. ~Niels Bohr

**MAY 19**

All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them. ~Galileo Galilei

**MAY 20**

Truth springs from argument amongst friends. ~David Hume

**MAY 21**

Men stumble over the truth from time to time, but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened. ~Winston Churchill

**MAY 22**

Be not astonished at new ideas; for it is well known to you that a thing does not therefore cease to be true because it is not accepted by many. ~Spinoza

**MAY 23**

Hope is nature's veil for hiding truth's nakedness. ~Alfred Bernhard Nobel

**MAY 24**

Speaking from the heart frees us from the secrets that burden us. These secrets are what make us sick or fearful. Speaking truth helps you get clarity on your real heart directives. ~Sara Paddison

**MAY 25**

In time, society will have a new measure for confirming truth. It's inside the people—not at the mercy of current scientific methodology. Let scientists facilitate discovery, but not invent your inner truth. ~Doc Childre

**MAY 26**

The greatest truth must be recognition that in every man, in every child is the potential for greatness. ~Robert Kennedy

**MAY 27**

Three things cannot long be hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth. ~Confucius

**MAY 28**

If you cannot find the truth right where you are, where else do you expect to find it? ~Dogen

**MAY 29**

Lying is the most simple form of self-defense. ~Susan Sontag

**MAY 30**

Truth has not special time of its own. Its hour is now—always and indeed then most truly when it seems unsuitable to actual circumstances. ~Albert Schweitzer

**MAY 31**

I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant. ~Martin Luther King

... *On* **Truth**

## This I Know

-by Kate Starr, Youth Director



When polled in depth, some 60 percent of Americans report they have had a spiritual experience that changed their priorities, relationships, values, theology, personality – their lives. Spiritual experiences are defined as feeling the presence of “God” or a “patterning of events in their life” that persuades them they are part of a cosmic design. This, according to research included in *Fingerprints of God: The Search for the Science of Spirituality*, by NPR religion reporter Barbara Bradley Hagerty.

I am among them. I can tell you what mystical events led to my theological shift away from atheism and toward a firm belief in a higher power, the details of a two-way conversation I had with my dead mother, my knowing that the man I had just met was “the one,” and the series of strange and fortunate events that led me to the perfect job at All Souls.

According to those interviewed in Hagerty’s book, spiritual experiences contain certain elements, among them, a noetic quality – a deep insight that is truer to the person than the material world itself. The insights may differ, but they also share certain threads: the unity of all things, the love of a conscious “other,” and the confidence that all is as it should be. This is a truth that results in a deep knowing, but cannot be proven – or can it?

Hagerty explores this question as she delves into discoveries science is making about how faith affect us, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. And one thing she “proves” is that no one religion has exclusive claim on the path to the divine. In fact, in a transcendent state, Christian mystics sound like Sufi mystics, who sound like Jewish mystics, who sound like Buddhists. And people who have experienced mystical states often drop religious labels and their exclusive claim to Truth.

By studying what happens in the brain during transcendent moments, research shows different religions often drive the same neural routes to transcendence. One of the most applicable studies was analyzing the

brain functions of Buddhist monks during meditation and Carmelite nuns during prayer. The theological underpinnings of these practices have nothing in common. Yet their descriptions of transcendent moments are very similar.

The nuns describe “communion, peace, openness to experience, an awareness and responsiveness to God’s presence.” The monks described the experiences as “timeless and infinite, an intense feeling of love, a profound letting-go of boundaries, a connection with some kind of energy, a state of being that had a quality of clarity, transparency and joy, a deep and profound connection to everything, and a recognition that there never was a true separation at all.”

When analyzed, the brain mechanics in both the monks and nuns were also similar. The frontal lobe lit up. The frontal lobe is the Chief Operating Officer of the brain; it handles details, helps plan and execute tasks, keeps you awake, alert, and, above all, focused. The parietal lobes – the part of the brain that orients you in space and time and tells you where your body ends and the rest of the world begins – went dark.

However, in the brain of a charismatic Christian speaking in tongues, the frontal lobes actually shut down. This suggests that when you are meditating, you control the process by focusing on something; when you’re speaking in tongues, you surrender. Also in contrast to the brain scans of the nuns and monks, the activity in the parietal lobes (the association area) in the charismatic brain actually increased. The nuns and monks lose their boundaries and merge into God or the universe; Pentecostals remain keenly aware of themselves as separate from God. It is a relationship, not a union. This suggests that what differentiates one type of spirituality from another is not necessarily doctrine, it’s style. Despite shared beliefs in Jesus as the Son of God, the spiritual practices of the Catholic nuns and Pentecostal Christians have very little in common – both inside the brain and outside of it – which does not pronounce one right and the other wrong, but rather suggests there are many routes to transcendence.

It also might explain why we have three pretty distinct styles of worshippers at All Souls – those who find the meditative first service conducive to reaching a transcendent state, those who find the praise music of the second service a conduit to their relationship with the divine, and those of us who want to explore both paths. It reminds me of my daughter’s frustration at the seemingly conflicting advice on the best technique to use to prepare for a test. “You tell me it’s meditation. Dad tells me it’s concentration. And my teacher tells me it’s repetition. Which is it?” Just like the paths to God, it’s *all of them* – clearing your mind of distractions, focusing, and regular practice are all proven techniques.

Contrary to the beliefs of the smug atheist I used to be, my own personal experience and Hagerty’s book have confirmed that those touched and converted by spiritual experience are the healthiest among us. Turning to God appears to boost our immune system and stave off the disease nearly five times as effectively as rejecting God. Belief in a cosmic design changes us – our worldview, priorities, relationships, our very personality.

The bottom line for me, though, is I don’t care how I get there, I just want to go. I’m a much happier, more peaceful, and decent person every day if I believe, focus, and practice my faith. This I know. †

## Truth: The Duty Not to Accept

-by Phil Haney



Throughout history extraordinary men and women have spent their lives searching for truth. Socrates and Darwin come first to mind, but there are others who lack their historical stature. Consider the now relatively obscure life of Arthur Koestler. By all accounts, Koestler was a hard

case. A polymath and renowned 20th century skeptic, Koestler was not universally popular. He was the type of man who never lost an argument, a man certain, perhaps too certain, of his convictions. Koestler was manic-depressive, a serial adulterer, a callous misogynist who left waves of sadness and personal wreckage in the wake of his life, which ended in dramatic double suicide with his wife in 1983.

But as a journalist he was fearless. By the time he was 40, Koestler had experienced communism, fascism, world war, cold war, and Zionism. Always at the forefront of the *zeitgeist*, Koestler had reason to know the value of truth, and to understand the effect of suppressing it. His relentless pursuit of the truth often landed him in prison. Once, in 1936, as a result of his anti-fascist reporting in Spain, Koestler was imprisoned in a Franco death cell. But, as in many other occasions in his life, fortune intervened, this time in the form of the British government, and he was spared execution. Upon his release, Koestler vowed to devote his life to a search for truth.

Koestler remained true to this promise. He became known for speaking the unvarnished truth. During his brief experience as a member of the communist party, Koestler quickly discerned its true nature. Disguised as a novel, his manifesto, *Darkness at Noon*, exposed the myth of Soviet totalitarianism. Writing about the *Reichstag* fire trials held in Moscow, Koestler recognized that “in the field of propaganda the half-truth was a weapon superior to the truth.” (*The Invisible Writing*, 1954, Arthur Koestler.) Another Koestler classic, *Scum of the Earth*, told the truth about the relationship between the French and Nazi fascists in the run-up to the French occupation.

Koestler was moved by the brutality of totalitarianism; and its abuse of the truth through the propagandistic use of half-truths and other devices of deception drove him mad. He vowed as a journalist to hold to the “duty of independence,” and to use the truth as his standard. Koestler was the ultimate skeptic, understanding that “in a world where nobody is well, the duty not to accept” is paramount to finding the truth. By “not accepting” Koestler met the duty of independence, and lived authentically.

What meaning can we take from Koestler’s extraordinary life? Above all, he championed freedom of thought. He was committed to responsible preservation of what he called the “aspiration to free thinking.” This is Koestler’s legacy, his truth: think free; doubt; question everything; accept nothing. †

# Emptying: Practicing Seeking the Truth in Love

-by Debra Garfinkel, Pastoral Care Minister



For centuries, people have wrestled with what is Really Real. Philosophers and religious folk have sought paths to the Ultimate, to *The Truth*. For many, the process requires dealing with the issue of trust. How can we move into a place of trust in order to make ourselves available to *The Truth* –

whatever it may be for us? I invite you to consider this month's spiritual practice as one possibility.

Trust is perhaps the most difficult and elusive spiritual practice of all. How much can we allow ourselves to let go? Are we able to truly admit that we are not in control – that control is an illusion? What happens if someone relaxes into trust in the Divine (*The Really Real – The Truth*)? Here's an invitation to try:

As with all spiritual practice, first, create a safe space for yourself, free from interruption and arranged so you feel secure and protected. Then center yourself. Breathe. Acknowledge that which distracts you from being fully present in this Now moment. Set it gently aside.

As you rest in this sacred time out of time, imagine yourself as a clay vessel. Consider how you fill yourself with information, food, distractions, your To Do lists, methods – everything and everybody who occupies your cares, your concerns, and your enthusiasms. Notice where your focus lands. Sit with that awareness. Notice how full you feel. Comfortable? Overflowing?

When you are ready – and that may be another time, another day, or immediately following your previ-

ous experience as a clay vessel – once again, imagine yourself as a clay vessel that is full, and imagine pouring out one portion of that which you contain. Can you imagine pouring out the attachment to that one thing or person or situation that you noticed occupied your previous focus? If you can, imagine yourself letting that portion flow gently out of your vessel and into a beautiful, clear, life-giving stream nearby. Notice your level of trust. Can you allow the stream to carry it wherever it needs to go?

If you are unable to release that particular portion, imagine examining other portions that you hold within your vessel. Locate one that you feel comfortable releasing. Imagine letting it flow gently out of your vessel and into the beautiful, clear, life-giving stream. Notice again, your level of trust.



Continue, as you are able, with this practice. Ancient wisdom traditions teach us that it is only when our vessel is empty that we are able to receive that which we truly need: Wisdom, Compassion, Love, and Understanding. It is the practice that leads us to a place of peace. It leads us to Truth. Said another way, when we empty ourselves of attachments, we allow the Holy to fill us up with everything we need to

be healthy and whole. This is how we grow in trust. This is how we move from a place of fear and scarcity to a place of compassion and generosity.

Blessings upon all of our practices, as individuals and as a community of faith. May we continue to support each other in our efforts to be wholly present as we build a land of hope and freedom where we can seek the truth (*The Truth*) by trusting in the Greater Love. †

# Our Shared Truth

-by Maggie Tirrell and Ren Pasco, 2010 Coming of Age Graduates

The Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) attempts to create dialogue between youth of diverse faiths, focusing on developing new relationships based on religious pluralism and the core values we share. This year, to honor Martin Luther King Day, the IFYC teamed up with the Unitarian Universalist Association for a three-day training in Atlanta for UU youth and advisors.

We, along with advisor Laura Hailey-Butler, were among the 40 people from around the United States who attended the event, which taught us how to create and host an interfaith service project.

Most Unitarian churches have such diverse beliefs among their members that we are interfaith events unto ourselves.

However, the premise of this training is that there is a lot to learn from other religious groups, and a service event should not be limited to one congregation, no matter how diverse. Interfaith dialogue has three main goals: to encourage participants to deepen their own religious or philosophical identity, to help participants discover shared values, and to build a sense of cooperation and collaboration among youth from different faith traditions.

One workshop was about religious pluralism, which means having respect for individuals from different faith traditions, striving toward meaningful relationships between diverse individuals, and working toward creating common action for the common good. Reverend King said, "Religious pluralism is about finding a way to live together peacefully in this world with people who have different religious and philosophical perspectives than we do."

In another workshop, we talked about religious freedom and some court cases in which religious freedom was questioned. In the evening, we discussed storytelling and how that can help us to build bridges among the community. That night, we helped lead

the worship circle. We built a human bridge and everyone said one thing that they could contribute to the world, sang *Building Bridges*, and did a meditation to John Lennon's *Imagine*.

The next day, we discussed how to create a safe space for interfaith dialogue. In order to create a safe space, one must have intention-setting activities, storytelling, and a focus on common ground. Intention-setting activities may include group introductions, and explaining the event and "safe space" concepts. Storytelling helps people relate to one another. The focus on common ground makes it easier to discover shared values among individuals.



We spent Martin Luther King Day in service to others at a non-profit organization called HomeStretch ([www.homestretch.org](http://www.homestretch.org)), which provides temporary housing for low-income or homeless families who are stabilizing their financial situation. We painted houses and cleaned up outside. While we were there, they explained to us that one reason it is good to do community service is because you never know when you might be the one in need of service. We enjoyed making a difference in the community instead of just talking about it.

This was a great opportunity for both of us and gave us an idea of how to do an event on a larger scale. It helped us realize that we already have what we need to do great things to help others. We plan to use what we learned in Atlanta at this year's Summer Social Action Project. We're planning an interfaith event with Christ the King, Boston Avenue Methodist Church, and the Jewish community. This event was put on the calendar after Eboo Patel, IFYC founder, came to Tulsa as part of the YMCA's 100th anniversary. We were all a part of an IFYC training at that time, and he inspired us not to let our relationships end there. The event is still in the planning stages, but we'll keep you posted. †

# Truth – Personified

-by Kate Starr, Youth Director, & Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister

The first time Truth really thought about who he was, and what he believed, was during the Coming of Age program at his church. He stood before the congregation in his white button-down shirt and black jeans and spoke from his very core and his background, and his education, and the opportunities afforded him, his nature and his nurture.

*I believe all mysteries will eventually be explained by science.  
I believe in cause and effect;  
and that there are consequences to our actions.  
I believe that if we are good, good things will happen  
so we should always strive to do the right thing.*

Pretty black-and-white thinking  
for a boy with blue hair.  
He didn't know that the minute the words  
left his lips they had already begun to evolve  
into something different,  
something almost unrecognizable from the original.  
Like a tiny, pink, newborn kangaroo  
that crawls out of the womb  
and into the security of its mother's pouch  
before eventually hopping off all on its own.

The chalice necklace  
hadn't even been hung around his neck,  
and a metamorphosis was occurring in Truth,  
in his mind, in his heart, and in his soul.  
To commemorate this important milestone,  
Truth changed the spelling of his name  
to include two capital Us in its center.

The teen years challenged TrUUth's absolute notions  
of right and wrong, good and evil, cause and effect.  
He discovered he was made of both –  
confidence and insecurity,  
generosity and selfishness,  
compassion and indifference,  
love and hate, peace and violence –  
and that anyone who said otherwise was lying  
or didn't know themselves.  
He noticed that he had real power  
and was powerless,

that he had some control and an illusion of control,  
that everything was orderly  
and everything was utterly random.  
TrUUth realized there is rarely only one right thing  
because “the” right thing depends on time  
and place and context and no one has  
an exclusive claim on righteousness.  
And he found comfort in the paradox.  
beauty in the struggle, joy in the painful journey  
and traveling companions along the road  
in search of ultimate meaning.

TrUUth learned that if he used his beliefs to be right,  
he left others feeling wronged.  
If he wielded his ideas like a sword,  
they only divided him from those he loved.  
If he built his foundation on absolutes,  
he would be forever stuck in the same place.  
He learned the difference between  
the hard-and-fast beliefs to stand up for  
and the soft beliefs,  
the sometimes beliefs,  
the slippery beliefs we often cling to.  
There's the letter of the law  
and the spirit of the law,  
and TrUUth wanted to live in spirit.

To celebrate his high school graduation,  
truth changed the spelling of his name yet again.  
He lowercased the letters from beginning to end  
to show his identity was not based on certainty,  
to concede the impermanence of knowledge,  
and to bow to the mystery of being alive  
that may never be explained by science.

But as he crossed the stage to collect his diploma,  
truth had a vision of his own child  
standing before the congregation,  
stating her personal beliefs,  
struggling with absolute notions  
and the subjectivity of knowledge  
to the point of analysis paralysis.  
And he knew, that for the sake of his own child,  
he would change his name again  
to Truth with a capital T. †



## Introducing Barbara Prose: Our 2010-11 Intern Minister

Barbara comes to Tulsa from Boothbay Harbor, ME, after a year as ministerial intern at the UU Church of the Monterey Peninsula in Carmel, CA.

After receiving an undergraduate degree in Russian Studies from Brown University, Barbara felt her first call, to midwifery. She established a homebirth practice in Maine, and after years of being present to the Mystery of Life at birth felt called again, this time to the academic study of religion.

She studied at the Interfaith Theological Seminary, in Tucson, and was ordained as an Interfaith Minister in May 1999. She continued her studies at Bangor Theological Seminary in Portland, ME, receiving her Master of Divinity degree in May 2009. It was in seminary, while working for the Midcoast Fellowship, that she was called for the third time, to begin the process toward Unitarian Universalist ministry.

Barbara is married to Rick Prose, executive director of [lowernine.org](http://lowernine.org), a non-profit dedicated to rebuilding homes, lives, and communities in the lower ninth ward of New Orleans. Rick and Barbara have two daughters, Sophia and Celeste. As a family, they continue to manage *Harborfields on the Shore*, a family-style resort in mid-coast Maine.

## Resources for Further Reading

### **Truth - A Guide**

Simon Blackburn. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Gently leads the reader on a guided tour of one simple question: Is there a universally applicable set of data that can be called Truth?

### **Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth**

John R. Franke. Abingdon Press, 2009.

Emergent theologian John Franke describes truth as a reality that the variety of witnesses in the Christian tradition all point toward.

### **Why Truth Matters**

Ophelia Benson and Jeremy Stangroom. Continuum, 2006.

Critical yet accessible examination of the current trend of skepticism regarding the reality, meaning, possibility, and importance of the truth.

***Ideas Have a History: Perspectives on the Western Search for Truth***  
by Frederika Oosterhoff. University Press of America, 2001.

From the time of the Greeks, the West has experienced a dramatic transition in the way it views "truth." What role have religion, philosophy, and science played in this transition?

For children:

### **Old Turtle and the Broken Truth**

Douglas Wood (author) and Jon J. Muth (illustrator)

A Little Girl, a wise Old Turtle, and Crow set out to mend the broken truth and create a perfect whole. Used by UU churches.

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