

SIMPLE GIFTS

ALL SOULS UNITARIAN CHURCH OF TULSA, OKLAHOMA

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God

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WHAT IS GOD?



When I talk about God, I am talking about that which is of ultimate concern. Our individual, personal concept of God refers to that which has the highest demand on our loyalty and trumps all other demands on us. Theologian Paul Tillich talks of this Ultimate Concern

(whatever it might be) and suggests we all have a god or gods. If your ultimate concern is success, or money, or fame, and it receives your highest allegiance, and it is what you are willing to sacrifice for, then this has become your god. To what do you devote your time, loyalty, and best efforts? Even if you have stopped believing in God, you replaced God with something. That is why our most important religious – or spiritual – task is to make sure that whatever replaces our old concept of God is truly worthy of our allegiance and sacrifice.

Keep in mind that the injunction in the Ten Commandments – and in all monotheistic religions – to worship no other God but God, is not simply a jealous Supreme Being trying to guilt or scare people into believing in it. It is an important warning to be careful what you put your faith in – to make sure it is worthy of your faith and your life – because we all have faith in something.

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanbar, Senior Minister

In 1882, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche announced that God is dead. And he was half right. The concept of God that many of us had when we were children has died for us. The God we were taught about as children in Sunday school *has to die* in order for a more complex and sophisticated notion of God to be born. For some people, when the concrete and infantile concept of God



they believed in as children no longer seems plausible, they give up on trying to understand God. Over the course of mature faith development a person's concept of God is supposed to die, over and over, and each time it is reborn in newer more meaningful ways. Discovering what is of ultimate concern in our lives is a never-ending process. Religion is meant to aid us in this essential task.

So, when I talk of God, I'm not talking about a bearded man in the clouds. I'm not talking about a God who watches over us like Santa Claus, keeping tabs on whether we've been naughty or nice. I'm not talking about a God who ordered the Israelites to murder other tribes as they made their way to Canaan. I'm not talking about a God with nostrils that

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liked the smell of burning animal flesh. I'm not talking about a God who does magic tricks and miracles to convince people to believe. I'm not talking about a God who thinks only men can be priests, or one who thinks women need to cover their heads, or submit to their husbands.

I'm talking about the love that is the source of all love. I'm talking about that power within us and around us that helps us realize that loving our neighbors is the right thing

to do, and that forgiveness is possible. I'm talking about that spirit that allows the parent who has lost a child to get up in the morning and continue to live a life of meaning. I'm talking about that unimaginable force that allows us to turn adversity into character and desperation into hope.

Call it whatever you like... I call it God. By whatever name, I believe it is a source of love and strength that is available always, and to everyone.

Further Recommended Reading on God

America's Four Gods: what we say about God & what that says about us

by Paul Froese & Christopher Bader.

"Drawing from a wide-ranging survey of American religious beliefs, two Baylor University professors traveled the U.S. to explore the divisions that exist in America among believers. Froese and Bader look at what divides Americans, how they conceive God, and what role God plays in their daily lives." - Booklist

Evolution of God by Robert Wright

"Vast in scope and thrilling in ambition, this book brilliantly alters our understanding of God and where He came from-and where He and we are going next." - Amazon

History of God: the 4000-year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

by Karen Armstrong.

Armstrong traces the development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from their inception to the present day, and shows how they were created and shaped by their historical surroundings--which, in turn, they helped form and alter. - Kirkus Reviews

What is God? by Jacob Needleman

"In his most deeply personal work, religious scholar Needleman cuts a clear path through today's clamorous debates over the existence of God, illuminating an entirely new way of approaching the question." - Amazon

Why God Won't Go Away: brain science and the biology of belief

by Andrew Newberg, Eugene G. d'Aquili, and Vince Rause.

"This fascinating and thought-provoking book by two neurologists and a veteran journalist reflects the two physicians' long-term interests in the role of religious experience in the mind and its location in the brain." - Booklist

FOR CHILDREN:

Where Does God Live? by Lisa T. Bergren

"The core message is that God is the good in all creation, always available to teach, strengthen, and love all people." - Library Journal Ages 4-8

What Is God? by Etan Boritzer

About this provocative exploration of God in many places and many religions, PW said, "Marantz's daring, highly stylized illustrations are full of character." - Amazon/Publishers Weekly Ages 6-12.

Because nothing looks like God by Lawrence & Karen Kushner;

"Designed to be the beginning of a continuing conversation between adults and children about the world and God." - School Library Journal Ages 3-7

WHAT IF I DON'T BELIEVE?

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister



This month our issue is entirely about God, but maybe you are wondering whether there is a place for you in our church if you do not believe?

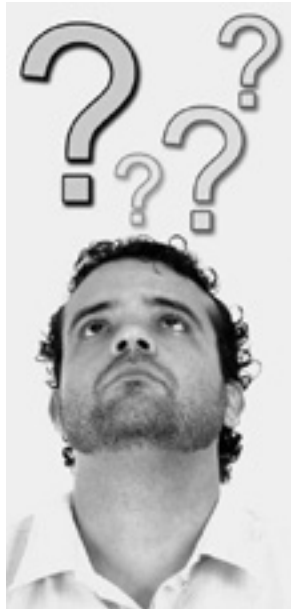
First, let me say: YES! There is a place for you here. Although you may be seated alongside those who are exploring their use of the word *God*, or beside others who are confident in their belief, there is still room for you in that pew.

My second response is to consider what surrounds your unbelief. If your atheism is opposing a certain narrow definition of God often assumed in our culture, then I can say we are most certainly on the same page. We make an assumption that the word *God* will be filtered through your own understanding as we try to reclaim theological terms usurped by the religious right.

Defining God is like trying to pin down a moving target. Most people have concepts of God that change and expand over time. If your atheism or agnosticism is a reaction to a negative history with a fundamentalist church and you feel angry, hurt, resentful, or stuck about the word God, then you may have some work to do.

In the coming spring, Dr. Chad Johnson and I will teach

a course called *Healing from Fundamentalism* in which we'll look at how you might reclaim theological language for yourself. If your agnosticism or atheism is a well-considered choice then not only do we welcome you, we need you. It is from exposure to our diversity that we can be helped to push ourselves toward broader capacity of thought. We need a church full of diverse and thoughtful people who can engage in dialogue about their differing theologies in a respectful way.



There are many ways for atheists and agnostics to be nurtured in our church home. We hope that you will take advantage of *Soulful Sundown* the first Friday evening of each month, October-May. It is a secular exploration of the monthly theme using popular music, video, and drama. *Soulful Sundown* is a great way to begin engaging with the theme. This journal, *Simple Gifts*, offers multiple perspectives on the monthly theme for your consideration. Our classes on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings offer something for everyone. And a special Emerson Hall Forum on **Dec. 12** will feature

a panel of theologically diverse All Souls members, ranging from Humanist to Theist, all discussing their varying *Concepts of God*.

So in this season of exploring the many concepts of God, let believers and nonbelievers unite. May we all stretch a little bit this holiday season. †

<p>Our church program-year (September-May) is fashioned around nine theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church's offerings each month are by no means limited to the themes. However, these topics provide an axis around which many elements of church life gain more meaning and depth. They provide us with a set of common stories and ideas that become elements of an ongoing community conversation. Be warned: Seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!</p>	<p><i>September</i> - VISION <i>October</i> - EVIL <i>November</i> - DEMOCRACY <i>December</i> - GOD <i>January</i> - CREATION <i>February</i> - RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY <i>March</i> - REDEMPTION <i>April</i> - FREEDOM <i>May</i> - MERCY</p>
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OMG, IT'S THE BIBLE!



When I first became Youth Director at All Souls, I heard a very smart yet sardonic youth joke that, “All Souls is where everyone is welcome – except Jesus.”

While I understand the underlying impetus of the joke, the sentiment is actually inaccurate and misleading.

It's not Jesus who we don't want to invite; it's anyone who would be so arrogant and cruel as to condemn to eternal damnation, in the name of Jesus, those who are unlike them. And, just like the terrorists who give Muslims a bad name, it's those kinds of hateful, self-righteous fundamentalists who give Christians a bad name.

As a defense mechanism, and perhaps for self-preservation, we sometimes have a tendency to reject all of Christianity and its teachings. However, that is throwing the baby out with the bath water. We are denying ourselves some valuable wisdom if we eliminate the Bible and its teachings completely. Therefore, it is part of the mission of the youth department to help our young people realize that that's not what Jesus would do. We engage our youth with Christians through interfaith work. And, we introduce our youth to a liberal interpretation of the Bible, as well as other sacred texts.



-by Kate Starr, Youth Director, & Linda Ford

Linda Ford, a biblical scholar, has donated her time to the youth department to explore the Bible with our youth. Linda grew up in a Baptist church where her initial interest in the Bible was nurtured through the regular telling of its stories. She went on to receive a Master of Divinity from Golden Gate Seminary and pastored a small Baptist church in the San Francisco Bay Area, although she was denied the opportunity for ordination because she is a woman. Ford's theological interests led her to further study at Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University where she began coursework for a PhD in pastoral theology and pastoral counseling. A chance to return to an administrative role in theological education led her to discontinue the ordination process with the Presbyterian Church (USA), and she is currently serving as director of student recruitment at Phillips Seminary. I asked her what value she sees in sharing her experience and knowledge with our youth.



“My aim, first, is to present an interpretation of the Bible that stands well within the tradition of Christianity, yet runs counter to the literal, conservative, essentialist tradition of the more conservative strands of Christianity. Whether the youth accept it as legitimate for their own faith journey or not, I want them to know that the

dominant Christian voice in this part of the world is not the only Christian voice.

“Second, my goal is to enable our youth to have some biblical literacy to help them make sense of some of the embedded cultural references to the Bible, as well as to be able to respond knowledgeably to those who insist there's only one right way to interpret it.

“Finally, I want them to catch a glimpse of my passion for the beauty of this ancient sacred text, as well as my discomfort with it, and, therefore, to know it is okay to be affected in those seemingly contradictory ways by it.

“I truly believe the Bible is an important sacred text that, regardless of religious preference, offers the potential to shed light on human experience. Some in history have used it abusively, and a common response to the abuse has been to reject it outright. I think it’s important for religious liberals to stand counter to that tendency and claim a voice in the debate about the Bible’s value. My hope is that in teaching young people the Bible from a liberal perspective they will not simply inherit the rejection of it, but will learn to consider it an important sacred text, and perhaps even discover that it offers some meaningful insight for understanding human struggles.

“The stories we dealt with this year include the Creation stories. There are two accounts of God’s creation of the world in Genesis. Reading them together challenges the notion of a literal interpretation of the texts. They, to some extent, contradict each other if one is looking for a *how it happened* account of the creation. Instead, the texts seem to point more toward *why it happened*. They are beautiful accounts of a creative God, deeply connected to what is created, who views it as blessed and beautiful.

“The text has been abused to indicate that God’s intent was for a hierarchical order of men over women. But if one digs into the Hebrew language in the stories, particularly the second account in Genesis 2, what it offers instead is the story of God’s creation of a genderless human being who is lonely and in search of companionship. When no suitable companion is found in the animal world, God makes two separate gendered beings out of the one genderless being, thus the creation of intimate human con-

nection.

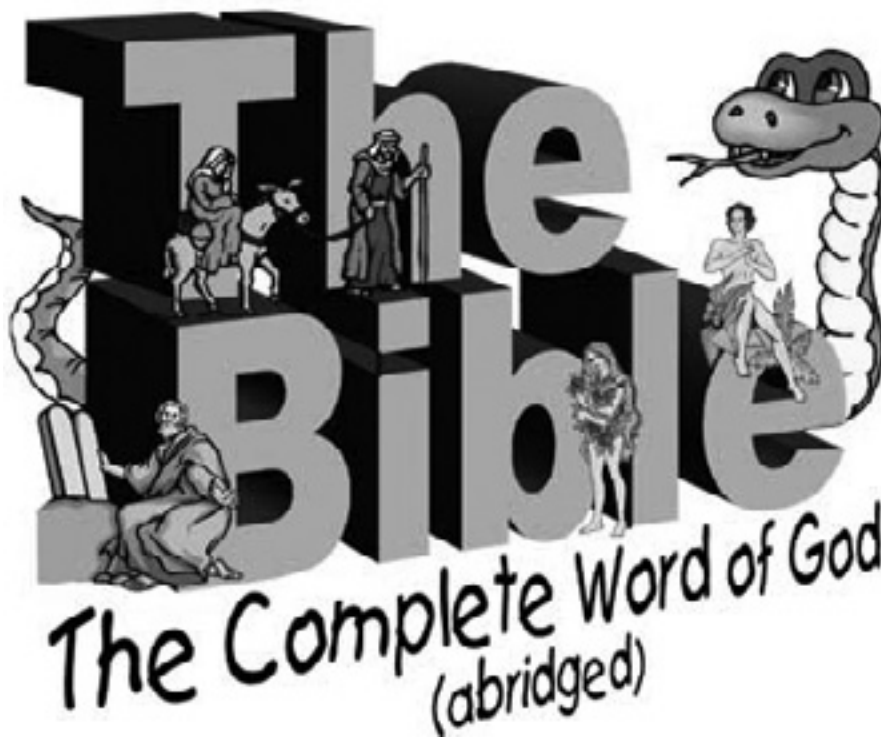
“Another example we explored was the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. This story, also from Genesis, has been used to suggest that God abhors homosexuality. A closer reading of the story and understanding of it in context reveals that the story is about God’s displeasure with a city full of people who do not demonstrate hospitality toward strangers.

“Finally, we looked at the famous story of the Temptation of Jesus. This story is found in slightly different forms in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Literature from the first century often places religious heroes in a time of spiritual testing or trial, so it’s not at all surprising that Jesus is seen experiencing such a time of testing. Whether there was a literal time of testing in the wilderness or not, the story serves a purpose in demonstrating Jesus’ values and the

kind of authority he assumed and on which his ministry was based. His works were meant to point others to God, not to draw attention to himself or to be in any way self-serving.

“To be honest, I say *yes* every time I am asked to teach the youth, because it helps me continue to make peace with the text myself. The stories of the Bible are deeply embedded in the fabric of

my soul. I can’t shake them no matter how hard I try. I can choose to resist them, or I can learn to reconstruct their meaning in a way that proves valuable. Hearing the fresh insights our youth bring when given the chance to talk about the stories challenges me to continue taking the text to task, to ask questions of it, and not to just accept my initial response to it as the only way of seeing it.” †



THE CASE FOR GOD



When Dale Watts and I discussed how we would work through Karen Armstrong's 330-page book, *The Case for God*, we were in Emerson Hall. After we had leafed through the book together and agreed on a class format, I half-seriously and half-jokingly asked, "You mean, we're going to spend six weeks

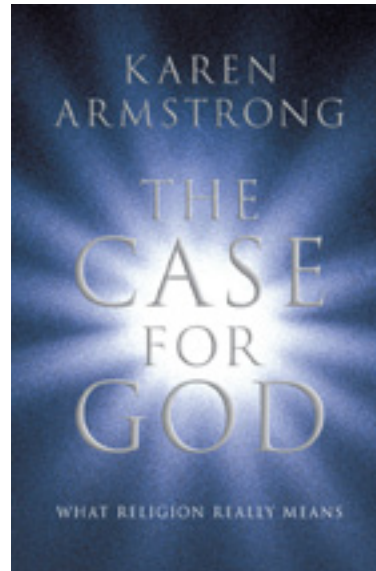
reading all these words, and talking a lot, in order to convey that the way to a personal understanding of God happens in a place beyond language?" Dale hesitated for half a second and then laughed heartily as he replied, "I guess that's just about right. And I bet we'll have a good time too." Dale was right, and those who attended our Wednesday evening class have had fun using words to reach together toward a realm beyond reason, or *logos*, as we explored the realm of religion, or *mythos*.

For Armstrong, and for zoologist Stephen Jay Gould, religion and science occupy separate realms, the first extending over questions of ultimate meaning and moral value, the second extending over questions of fact and theory. What is the universe made of? Why does it work this way? Religion, Armstrong argues, is intended to help us live creatively with realities that have no easy explanations or solutions: mortality, pain, grief, despair, injustice, and cruelty. Armstrong writes, "Scientific rationality can tell us why we have cancer; it can even cure us of the disease. But it cannot assuage the terror, disappointment, and sorrow that come with the diagnosis, nor can it help us to die well. That is not within its competence." Thus, religion and science need never be in conflict.

Armstrong's case includes the argument that until the modern period, beginning in the 17th century, no theologian thought of confining his attention or his interpretation to a literal or non-metaphorical reading of scripture. She explains that it has been the misapplication of scientific thinking to the reading of scripture, begun during the Enlightenment, that has led us to current forms of literalism, and birthed the twins of radical atheism

-by Barbara Prose, Resident Minister

and fundamentalism in the late 19th century. With Armstrong's long view of religious history, all fundamentalisms then are *unorthodox*. They are forms of faith that frequently *misrepresent* the traditions they try to defend, whether they be Christianity, Islam, or Judaism.



Never a literal but a lived endeavor, Armstrong persuades her readers, religion is something to be experienced and not thought. Its scriptures are meant to be read aloud, chanted, and debated. Only through the hard work of engaged practice can a glimpse of the ineffable truths of God and Mystery be gained. Speaking to atheists she writes, "It

is no use weighing up the teachings of religion to judge their truth or falsehood before embarking on a religious way of life. You will discover their truth – or lack of it – only if you translate these doctrines into ritual or ethical action." She cautions believers that, "...revealed truth [is] symbolic... and that revelation [is] an ongoing, creative process that requires human ingenuity."

If we accept that religion is not meant to provide us with information about God's existence but instead to help us live lives of dignity, meaning, worth, and joy, then we might also accept that God is no longer a problem to be solved but rather a mystery in which we can participate.

I leave you then with the same question with which we closed our class. Are we *homo-religious* as the title of Armstrong's first chapter suggests? Is our desire for transcendence *the* defining human characteristic that calls us to action, beyond belief? You may have to read the book to decide for yourself. †

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES: MANY PATHS AND MANY NAMES

-by Rev. Debra Garfinkel, Pastoral Care Minister



Writer Anne Lamott says that there are only two prayers: “Help me. Help me. Help me.” and “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.” These prayers go out to the Universe in times when no other words are possible and when intellectualizing isn’t even possible. These prayers come from the depth of

our being. These prayers recognize that we are not in control.

We share this feeling of not being in control with all people of all ages throughout all time. Especially during the holidays and during the darkest time of the year, there is a need for reassurance that there is a greater Love at work in the world. How may we be in touch with it? How can we make it tangible and real?

There are many practices for deepening our awareness of, and our relationship to, the Holy. The names of God can be a powerful way to move from your head to your heart and back again. Here are some suggestions:

★ Feeling tense or overwhelmed during your work day? Close your eyes and take a deep breath. As you breathe in, say to yourself the name that comes to you in that moment. “God of Love,” “Wondrous Creator,” “Great Mystery,” or whatever makes sense for

you. Breathe out and say to yourself the same name or another one. Repeat.

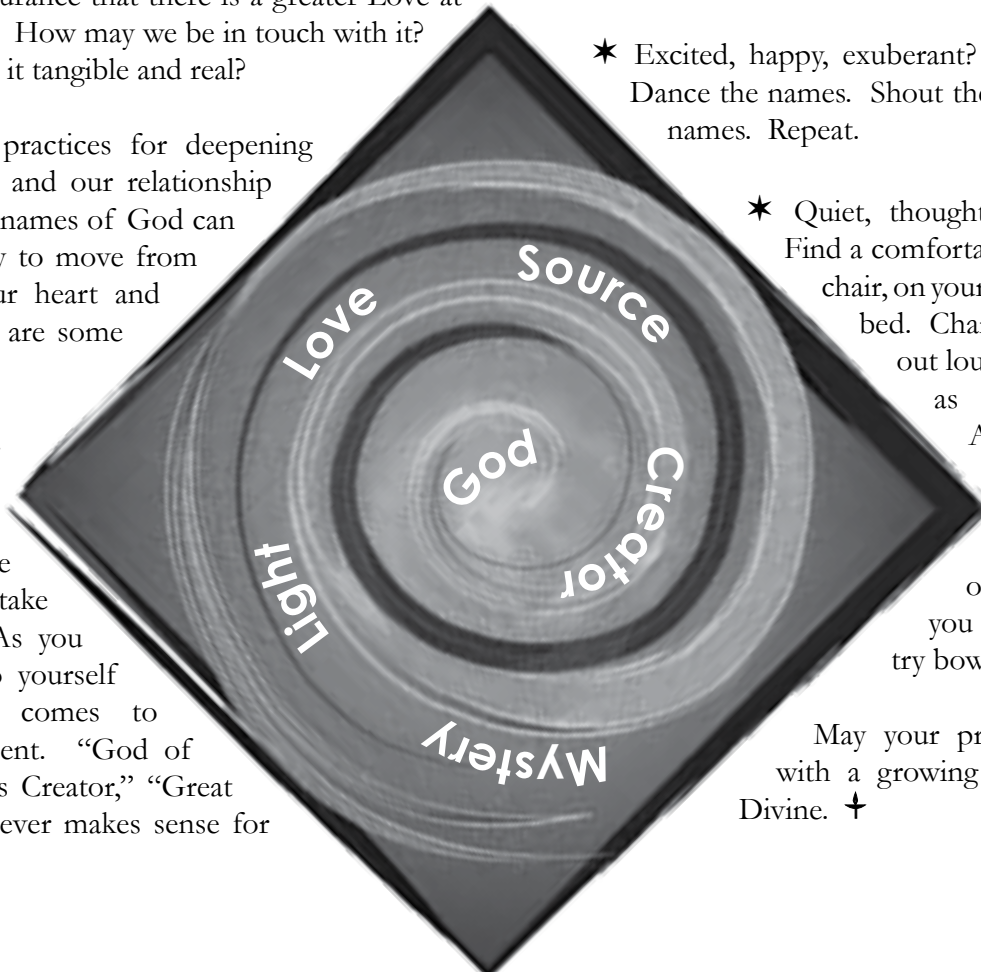
★ Rushing from one thing to another? Pay attention to your steps. With each step, say to yourself (or aloud if you wish) “Source of All,” “Living Presence,” “Highest Self” or some combination of names of God that you are drawn to in each moment. Repeat.

★ Feelings of frustration, impatience, or anger? Remember to breathe. Look at the object of your discomfort (person, thing or situation.) Really look. Then, say to yourself, “The Light inside me sees the Light inside you.” Repeat.

★ Excited, happy, exuberant? Sing the names. Dance the names. Shout the names. Clap the names. Repeat.

★ Quiet, thoughtful, or sleepless? Find a comfortable position – in a chair, on your knees, or sitting in bed. Chant a name of God out loud, softly or loudly, as you feel moved. As you do, move your body. Try rocking a bit back and forth or side to side. If you are on your knees, try bowing.

May your practice be blessed with a growing closeness to the Divine. †



Daily Thoughts...

December's quotes also include some of the 99 names or attributes by which Muslims describe God.
For a complete list of the 99 names, visit: www.sufism.org/society/asma

December 1 *Al-Wahhab: The Giver of All*

"What we are is God's gift to us. What we become is our gift to God."

~Eleanor Powell

December 2 *As-Salam: Source of Peace*

"We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature – trees, flowers, grass – grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls."

~Mother Teresa

December 3 *Ad-Darr: Creator of the Harmful*

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

~C.S. Lewis

December 4 *Al-Muqsit: The Equitable One*

"I am convinced that He (God) does not play dice."

~Albert Einstein

December 5 *Ar-Razzaq: The Sustainer*

"God, to me, it seems, is a verb, not a noun, proper or improper."

~Richard Buckminster Fuller

December 6 *As-Sami: The Hearer of All*

"Every evening I turn my worries over to God. He's going to be up all night anyway."

~Mary C. Crowley

December 7 *Al-Mughni: The Enricher*

"If there were no God, it would have been necessary to invent him."

~Voltaire

December 8 *Al-Khaliq: The Creator*

"I want to know how God created this world. I am not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know His thoughts; the rest are details."

~Albert Einstein

December 9 *Al-Jabbar: The Compeller*

"God makes three requests of his children: Do your best, where you are, with what you have, now"

~African-American Proverb

December 10 *Al-Khabir: The All Aware*

"God grant me the courage not to give up what I think is right even though I think it is hopeless."

~Chester W. Nimitz

December 11 *As-Samad: The Satisfier of All Needs*

"God loved the birds and invented trees. Man loved the birds and invented cages."

~Jacques Deval

December 12 *Al-Mu'id: The Restorer*

"God loves us the way we are, but too much to leave us that way"

~Leighton Ford

December 13 *Al-Bari': The Maker of Order*

"I don't try to imagine a God; it suffices to stand in awe of the structure of the world, insofar as it allows our inadequate senses to appreciate it."

~Albert Einstein

December 14 *Ash-Shakur: The Rewarder of Thankfulness*

"Prayer is when you talk to God; meditation is when you listen to God."

~Diana Robinson

December 15 *Al-Wadud: The Loving God*

"God loves each of us as if there were only one of us."

~St. Augustine

December 16 *Ash-Shahid: The Witness*

"Certain thoughts are prayers. There are moments when, whatever be the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees."
~Victor Hugo

December 17 *Al-Qayyum: The Self-Existing One*

"I don't know if God exists, but it would be better for His reputation if He didn't."
~Jules Renard

December 18 *Al-Mubdi: The Originator*

"The soul can split the sky in two and let the face of God shine through."
~Edna St. Vincent Millay

December 19 *Al-Baqi: The Everlasting One*

"The feeling remains that God is on the journey, too."
~Teresa of Avila

December 20 *As-Sabur: The Patient One*

"As the poet said, *Only God can make a tree* - probably because it's so hard to figure out how to get the bark on."
~Woody Allen

December 21 *Al-Warith: The Inheritor of All*

"God: The most popular scapegoat for our sins."
~Mark Twain

December 22 *Al-Quddus: The Pure One*

"But I always think that the best way to know God is to love many things."
~Vincent van Gogh

December 23 *Al-Batin: The Hidden One*

"People see God every day, they just don't recognize him."
~Pearl Bailey

December 24 *Al-Mudhill: The Humiliator*

"By night, an atheist half believes in God."
~Edward Young

December 25 *Ar-Rashid: The Righteous Teacher*

"I know God will not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish that He didn't trust me so much."
~Mother Teresa

December 26 *Dhul-Jalali Wal-Ikram: Lord of Majesty and Bounty*

"God is that infinite All of which man knows himself to be a finite part."
~Leo Tolstoy

December 27 *Al-Fattah: The Opener*

"The way to God is by our selves."
~Phineas Fletcher

December 28 *Al-Hakam: The Judge*

God is a concept by which we measure our pain."
~John Lennon

December 29 *An-Nafi: The Creator of Good*

"An honest God's the noblest work of man."
~Samuel Butler

December 30 *Al-Latif: The Subtle One*

"God is subtle, but he is not malicious."
~Albert Einstein

December 31 *Al-Wahid: The Only One*

"God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame."
~Elizabeth Barrett Browning

...on **GO**

CONVERSATIONS WITH JOHN

-by *Phil Haney*

In honor and celebration of John Wolf's 50th year here at All Souls, Phil Haney will have monthly conversations with John, then relate to us some stories that beg to be passed on – straight from the pastor's mouth.



Exactly how does God fit into the Unitarian religion? The question has been debated extensively, and the answer varies; there are many opinions. At All Souls Unitarian Church there is no prescription for God, no doctrine, tenet of faith, dogma or belief system that makes God part of worship. People may think that the Unitarian church is not a theistic church. But if you attend worship services at All Souls, you know better.

John Wolf says that God is the most powerful word in the English language; he uses God to get attention. Before Wolf came to All Souls in 1960, the church's worship service began with a simple invocation, followed by the Lord's Prayer. When Wolf became the minister, he says that attendance was down; that the church had disappointed some of the congregation; and that a large contingent of agnostics, humanists, and atheists were waiting to see what their church could do for them. Wolf says these persons were, for the most part, staying away from the church on Sundays. They were not excited about the Lord's Prayer, and the service was not meeting their needs.

Wolf sized up the situation quickly. Soon the pro-forma Lord's Prayer was scrapped from the order of service. But Wolf knew even then that something was missing. The service lacked

the power needed to grab the attention of the congregation. Wolf considered what might be required to make this happen; but change would need to come slowly.

Tinkering with established tradition involves risk. Wolf recognized that the service needed an overhaul. The challenge was to revise it, make it relevant, make it strong, and make it popular. Nothing had worked – at least not to Wolf's satisfaction; finding the right formula meant experimenting. Wolf began to mix it up, testing the response of the congregation.

During his early ministry at All Souls, Wolf continued to use a simple, straightforward introduction, followed by a "Call to Worship" to begin the service. It was the custom. Wolf describes the components as a "chalice lighting formality, followed by a few spoken words." Wolf knew that his sermons had power; he also knew the service structure did not fully support them. The order of service was milquetoast: Wolf didn't like it, and he sensed the congregation didn't either. Power in the order of service – power that grabs and shakes the congregation, and makes them pay attention, says Wolf, is prerequisite to talking about things that matter. Wolf knew the service could be improved.

Wolf wasn't thinking about God when he was invited to preach at Fountain Street Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1987. But God was foremost



on his mind when he returned. Fountain Street, an established 4,000-member liberal church, was Rev. Duncan Littlefield's church, and the church had prospered under Littlefield's leadership. Littlefield was well known to Unitarians, and he had heard good things about John Wolf and the work he was doing at All Souls. Littlefield was approaching retirement and Fountain Street might have been looking for a minister when it invited Wolf to preach. But, that's another story.

Fountain Street used an invocation that included the message "this is indeed a day which God has made." Something in this language – possibly in the way Littlefield said it; maybe in the response of the congregation when Wolf read it, grabbed Wolf. Suddenly he knew he had found what was missing from the order of service at All Souls. Wolf sensed that this invocation had the power required to direct the congregation to the moment. Wolf describes this as "getting down to business, setting aside the commonplace, getting ready for *things that matter*." Wolf sensed from the moment he spoke the words of the Fountain Street invocation that he was onto something. The language flowed naturally, had the capacity for the power he wanted, and seemed to focus the congregation. Would it work at All Souls?

John Wolf says preparing a congregation for a sermon is as important as the sermon itself. The key is to have a receptive congregation, "uncluttered" from the commonplace. Wolf admits – brags a little – that he uses God for this purpose, in the invocation and at other times. He knows it works. "In order to discuss things that matter," Wolf says, "the congregation needs to be reminded what doesn't matter. People can't *make the day*. It is a day *God* has made." Wolf says the word "God" gets the message across, settles the congregation for what lies ahead, for the weighty issues at hand. Wolf reinforced the power of the new invocation by the language of the Call to Worship, especially the reference in it to "...us, as children of the day..." The combination, at least with Wolf's

delivery of it, focused the attention of the congregation. After years of effort, almost by serendipity, the order of service of All Souls Unitarian Church was transformed. The experiment worked, and the message became clearer, stronger. The required power was in place.



I thank You God
for this most amazing day:
for the leaping greenly
spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;
and for everything which is natural
which is infinite
which is yes

Wolf agrees that God fits in just fine at All Souls. He is quick to add that he did receive criticism regarding the use of "God" over the years, but says that those eager to disabuse any notion of God at All Souls simply have reinforced his method.

In addition to the power of the invocation, Wolf reminds us there are many occasions when we are unburdened of our commonplace distractions. One in particular, when the choir sings the beginning lines from an e.e. cummings poem, *I thank You God for this most amazing day*:

*I thank You God for this most amazing day:
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;
and for everything which is natural
which is infinite
which is yes*

This, according to John Wolf, is God at All Souls. †

A MIGHTY CLOUD OF WITNESSES: RICHARD LLOYD JONES

-by Kathy Keith, Executive Director



I am happy to resurrect this little feature, but with a tweak. I have not actually known any of the people in these stories. They are our spiritual forebears, pioneers of the All Souls mighty cloud of witnesses, whose words and deeds were discovered in the files and piles and boxes of our church archives.

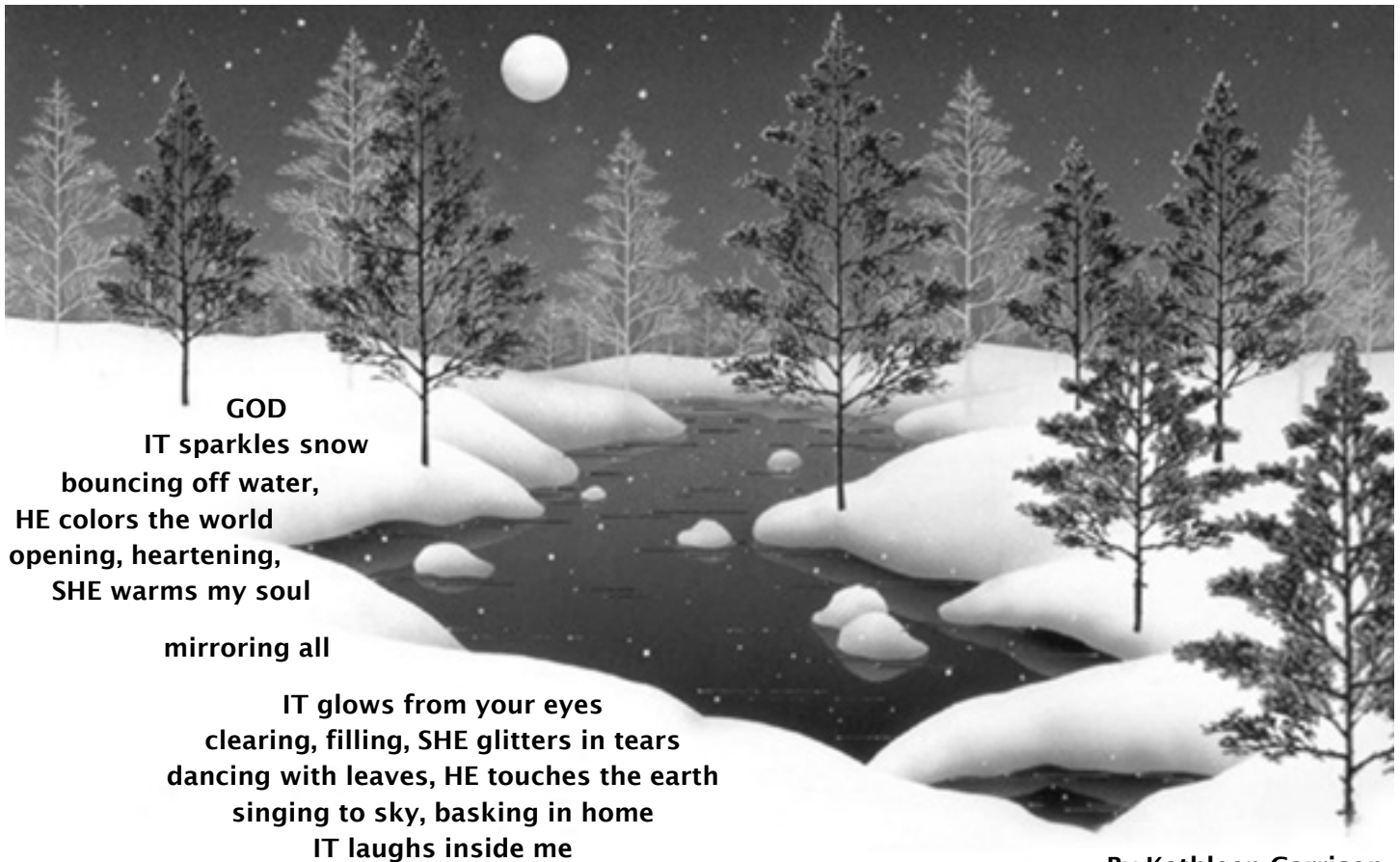
Richard Lloyd Jones and his wife, Georgia, came to the bustling oil-boom town of Tulsa, Oklahoma, to ply the newspaper trade. They had purchased the *Tulsa Democrat* and quickly changed its name to the *Tulsa Tribune*.

Richard's father, the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones, was a prominent Unitarian minister in Chicago where he founded All Souls Church and, later, the Abraham Lincoln Center. Richard had grown up around famous and interesting people – below he is pictured as a child with his family's guest, Booker T. Washington. Later, Richard's cousin, Frank Lloyd Wright, designed and built the Lloyd Jones family a home in Tulsa, called Westhope



As a newspaper correspondent, Richard had covered the trial of Albert T. Patrick, the accused murderer of William Rice. It was at an early church organizational meeting at the Lloyd Jones home that Richard recognized Patrick as he exited a cab to attend the meeting that would result in the formation of our church. Patrick too, became a charter member of All Souls.

Serving as first president of the congregation, Richard later chaired the "Resolutions Committee," responsible for the construction of our first building. Richard reached into the community for financial help in the construction of our first building, eliciting contributions from non-members including Waite Phillips, C.C. Cole, J.A. Hull, and H.O. McClure. Without Richard Lloyd Jones, Tulsa might have been without an All Souls. †



GOD
 IT sparkles snow
 bouncing off water,
 HE colors the world
 opening, heartening,
 SHE warms my soul

mirroring all

IT glows from your eyes
 clearing, filling, SHE glitters in tears
 dancing with leaves, HE touches the earth
 singing to sky, basking in home
 IT laughs inside me

By Kathleen Garrison

All Souls Holiday Events

Dec. 3 Soulful Sundown 7:00 pm
 "Unwrapping God" Explore the theme of God
 with percussionist Jeff Porter & Friends.

Dec. 5 Arts & Crafts Fair 9:00 am - 1:00 pm
 Shop for handmade items created by Unitarian Universalists
 and benefit the Youth Department

Dec. 5 Hanging of the Greens 12:45 pm
 Following the second service, join us to adorn our building
 for the holidays. Lunch will be provided for the Decorating
 Volunteers.

Dec. 6 Tree Trimming Party 5:30 pm
 Intergenerational ornament-making and tree trimming party,
 hosted by the Children's Religious Ed. Board, begins with a
 soup supper and ends with cocoa, cookies and carols.

Dec. 12 Congregational Meeting 11:00 am

Dec. 12 All-Choir Concerts 3:00 & 6:00 pm
 Come enjoy our eight wonderful choirs: the Cherub, Children's
 and Youth Choirs, the Young Adult Vocal Ensemble, Capriccio,
 Counterpoint, the Adult Choir and New Dimensions Chorale.

Dec. 15 Holiday Memorial Chapel 6:30 pm
 Honor the memories of loved ones who have died, with a spe-
 cial tribute to those who have died in the past year.

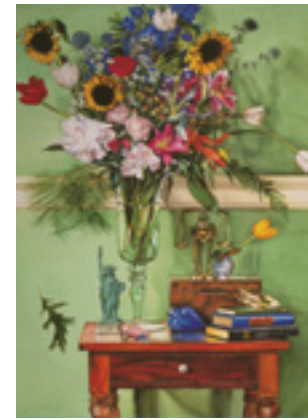
Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Candlelighting Services
 Traditional Bible readings and carols, with Cherub Choir at
 4:30, Children's Choir at 6:00, and Youth Choir at 7:30 pm.
 Wassail and cookies will be served in Emerson Hall after the
 4:30 and 6:00 services. Each family is asked to bring one
 dozen cookies to share.

*Remember All Souls Unique Products
this Holiday Season!*



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Past Christmas Eve orders of service adorn these lovely cards.
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CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHTING SERVICES

4:30 PM 6:00 PM 7:30 PM



All services include traditional Bible readings and carols.

Cherub Choir at 4:30
Children's Choir at 6:00
Youth Choir at 7:30

Alumni Choir members may sing *Lo, How a Rose*. (Warm up in choir room at 7:00 pm.)

Wassail and cookies will be served in Emerson Hall after the 4:30 and 6:00 services.

Simple Gifts is published monthly by All Souls Unitarian Church, 2952 S. Peoria Ave. Tulsa, OK 74114 (918) 743-2363 www.AllSoulsChurch.org

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Contact Laurel Williamson lwilliamson@allsoulchurch.org

- 1) Submit your text electronically via email in plain (unformatted) text. 500 word limit.
- 2) Include your name and daytime number.
- 3) Not all submissions will be published. Submissions may be edited for length.

Dear God,

Dec. 26, 20-10

Source of All, Light of Eternal Hope, Font of Divine Inspiration, Great Comforter, Loyal Confidant, Counselor, Compassionate One, Sacred Synergy, Positive Energy, Synchronicity, Great and Powerful Osmosis, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omni-Presence, Everlasting Epiphany, Awakened One, Creator, Master Potter, Invisible Director, Wizard of Wisdom, Ancient Androgen, Holy Father-Mother, Earth and Sky, Spirit that dwells within and beyond and connects us all, Alpha & Omega, Mystery beyond all our naming (but not beyond our trying to name):

*Thank you for the thoughtful gifts. They are so unique!
Both fun and functional - just the combination I like.
To be honest, though, I haven't figured out how to use all of them
and could use some insight when you have time.
Thanks again for thinking of me. You're awesome!*

All my love,

*Kathryn (Kate, Kathy) Elizabeth Martin Sanford Gaspard-Starr, Wife,
Mother, Daughter, Sister, Aunt, Friend, Neighbor, Youth Director,
Emerging Elder, Spiritual Pilgrim, Wounded Healer, Flawed Perfectionist,
Serious Humorist, and Complex Person beyond all our labels
(but not beyond our trying to label)*



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December Highlights

- Dec. 3 Soulful Sundown - *Unwrapping God*
- Dec. 5 Arts & Crafts Fair
All Souls 303 - *Joining the Church*
ROOTS begins
Hanging of the Greens
- Dec. 6 Tree Trimming Party
- Dec. 8 Open Branches Meeting - *God*
- Dec. 9 Day Alliance
- Dec. 10 Coffeehouse - *Patty Larkin*
- Dec. 11 Supper Club (offsite)
- Dec. 12 All Souls 101
Congregational Meeting
All Choir Holiday Concerts (3:00 & 6:00 pm)
- Dec. 14 Evening Alliance
- Dec. 15 Holiday Memorial Chapel
- Dec. 17 Parents' Night Out
Evening of Praise & Worship
- Dec. 19 LGBT & Allies Potluck
- Dec. 24 Candlelighting Services (4:30, 6:00 & 7:30 pm)
- Dec. 25 MERRY CHRISTMAS

Unwrapping
GOD
with Jeff Porter & friends

SOULFUL SUNDOWN

Explore the intersection of music, arts, & spirituality

DEC. 3, 7:00 PM

Reserve Childcare by calling 743-2805, ext 308
All Souls Unitarian Church 2952 S. Peoria, Tulsa, OK 74114 www.AllSoulsChurch.org

SEE INSIDE FOR

PARISH NOTES

The All Souls Weekly Bulletin