

SIMPLE GIFTS

ALL SOULS UNITARIAN CHURCH OF TULSA, OKLAHOMA

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Religious Authority

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WHO IS YOUR RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY?

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanbar, Senior Minister



For many centuries we have been flipping traditional religious authority on its head. If All Souls were a Catholic church, the Pope's decrees and the doctrines of the Church would have the highest level of religious authority for us. The

Bible would have the second most authority and least authoritative would be an individual's conscience. If, however, All Souls were a traditional Protestant church, what the Bible says would have the most authority, next the individual's conscience (interpreting the Bible with faith), and the doctrines and officials of the church would be the least authoritative.

Unlike the Catholics led by the Pope, the Protestant denominations have no central authority figure. And unlike Catholicism, in which there are many doctrines and rules that cannot be found in the Bible, for Protestants the Bible alone is their highest authority. Faithful Protestants interpret the Bible in myriad ways – to bolster their own



beliefs or position in a debate, Protestants often say, "...but the Bible says..." This helps to explain why there are so many Protestant denominations and why they have countless debates about interpretation and proper doctrine.

Unitarian Universalism is a product of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century. The pioneers of this faith began to question both church doctrines and authorities, and to question as well the interpretations and translations of the Bible. So in our tradition, the individual conscience became the highest authority, with the Bible (as interpreted through reason) second, and official church doctrines and decrees last. In our tradition, we read the Bible in the context of its time and through the lenses of science, academic understanding, and our own experience. For example, just because the Bible says, "be fruitful and multiply" we do not feel bound to do that in the face of overpopulation and other modern considerations. Yet, each individual is free to make his or her own choice.

Even though our church tradition does not consider the Bible to be the inerrant word of God, it is still an important source of our religious understanding. Other scriptures are also looked to for wisdom and are seen as having value, but the Bible is our historic scripture and the one that remains

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THE
All Souls
JOURNAL

*Many
Expressions*



*The Authority
of Tradition*



*Religious Authority
and Sharia*

central in our ministerial training and worship life.

One might ask, “If each individual is the final authority of his or her faith, then do you need a church to be Unitarian Universalist?” Our tradition says, “Yes, even more so.” Every individual has shortcomings, blind-spots, and temptations toward selfishness. Therefore, to follow a religion rooted in individual conscience requires having a community to help us see beyond our own self interests and experiences and one that can help hold us accountable for the conclusions we draw. It is this dynamic tension between individual belief and community that defines our church and tradition. It gives us the freedom to believe as our conscience leads us and provides a community of responsibility to help guide and inspire us.

In this issue, Phil Haney interviews All Souls’ Minister Emeritus, Dr. John Wolf, about a time in the 1960s when this church community helped a group of members to rise above their racist beliefs. These members held beliefs in white-superiority and separatism despite being

otherwise intelligent, successful, and open-minded. The story is an example of how this church functions and why it is so important for free people to have a community in which to grow in faith and understanding.

In the decade that I have been at All Souls, I have watched some individuals in this congregation honestly and passionately wrestle with their feelings and beliefs about the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons, as well as the inclusion of persons with beliefs different from their own, and even the inclusion of people who worship and sing differently from them. This congregation has repeatedly stayed true to its values and mission to be a church for all souls who are in sympathy with our statement of purpose and covenant. Only a handful of people have left the church over such differences. Mostly, I have seen numerous individuals stay and grapple with their feelings and in so doing they have grown in love and understanding. Such is the authority and tradition of the Free Church. †



CONVERSATIONS WITH JOHN

-by Phil Haney

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



We like to think of ourselves as a congregation of friends bonded in a common cause, and we are. Sunday mornings, when we settle comfortably into the pews of our church, quiet ourselves, and the service begins, a feeling of community fills my heart. I know the people sitting around me share a similar set of values. But there was a time when our common cause was not as widely accepted as it is today. There have been times past—there will be times hence—when the religious authority governing our church has been tested, challenged, times when we must know ourselves, understand our covenants and principles, and accept our limits of authority.

In 1961, a well-known couple at All Souls befriended a physician and his wife who had moved to Tulsa so the husband could begin his career as an internist. The young doctor had been trained at an Ivy League college that many of our members had attended, and the couple had become acquainted with their hosts through college connections. These new Tulsans were invited to visit All Souls to see if our “liberal” brand of Unitarian theology would fit their needs. The doctor and his wife were black.

Although the church was considered liberal and inclusive, there were no African American members at All Souls at this time. By definition, we welcomed all souls. But Reverend John Wolf recalls that the visitors' presence in our church caused a stir. Seventeen members initiated a petition to amend the church's bylaws to change the nondiscrimination language to permit membership discrimination on the basis of race or color. At this time, our bylaws stated:

...no test or requirement as to race, creed, sex, religion, or political belief, or demand pertaining thereto, shall ever be made of any applicant for membership of this church.

This event happened before the passage of the Civil Rights Act and before All Souls became part of the more formal structure brought about by the merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church. Wolf was liberal, tolerant, and thought he was the minister of an inclusive church. He also knew that this petition constituted the first real test of his authority and his ministry. Wolf wondered what authority would prevail to decide the issue.

For Wolf, the content and purpose of the petition were completely antithetical to the covenants and principles of Unitarian church membership, and the statements of the petition raised many fundamental questions: How could a church for all souls deny some souls membership? Who would ultimately decide this contentious issue on behalf of the membership? If the bylaws were amended to allow for this discrimination would All Souls still qualify as a Unitarian church? What would happen if the minister disagreed with the outcome of the democratic process? These heady issues were front and center at All Souls then, but the story may not be known to many in today's congregation. The stakes were high.

The petition failed to gain traction, but not without lively discussion. Wolf remembers how the petitioners pleaded with the congregation to consider their feelings – that they, as members in good standing, deserved to be heard, had needs, expected the church to listen to them. Wolf also remembers being told by some members during this time that, “We don't talk about the [Tulsa] race riot.”

Having decided on another Tulsa church, the visitors did not join All Souls. The petitioners remained members of All Souls. It was some time before All Souls membership included African Americans.

(continued next page)

All Souls has been called the “conscience of Tulsa.” The tag is not ours by accident; it came from years of talking about what matters, being vocal and action-oriented about social issues, and from responsible leadership. Reverend John Wolf led us to where we are, and he did it the hard way—vigilance, seeking the truth, doubting, challenging. Our reputation in the community is Wolf’s legacy. Staying the course as a freethinking liberal religious church is a continuing undertaking.

When John Wolf retired, he left All Souls with an enlightened, educated, caring, loving congregation. Our duty is

to maintain a reasonable standard of religious authority through the congregation, continually educating members to understand love, service, sharing, and caring. †

In 2002 our bylaws were amended to:

This congregation affirms and promotes the full participation of individuals in all our activities and endeavors (including membership, programming, hiring practices, and the calling of religious professionals) without regard to color, gender, physical or mental disability, affectional or sexual orientation, age, class, or national origin and without requiring adherence to any particular interpretation of religion or to any particular religious belief or creed.

MANY EXPRESSIONS

-by Amanda Shankle-Knowlton, Chair of Adult Religious Education Board



On the evening of January 5, 2011, a crowd of more than 100 celebrated the kickoff of Winter/Spring 2011 Wednesday Connections. We shared a hearty Transylvanian feast, and enjoyed warm company and warm beverages. After dinner, Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, serving as our Master of Ceremonies, introduced

one musical or spoken performance after another. Some of the songs mentioned “God,” “Lord,” “A better home awaiting in the sky,” and other traditional religious language. One of the performers mentioned that we might not all agree with the words of the songs she sang. I would bet money that even the folks in the room who did agree with the words differed in the exact way that they found the words to be true. But nobody stood up to shout the singers down. Instead, we each celebrated the beauty that we found in the music.

At All Souls we each get the chance to write the lyrics to our own religious soundtrack. And the Adult Religious Education (ARE) Program offers inspiration and information to help you on this journey. The ARE program aims to provide an environment in which we are each

free to choose our own path, exploring many diverse concepts of religious authority. Specifically, we have the following goals:

- Facilitate religious and spiritual development;
- Provide space for open discussion of religious and secular matters;
- Reflect and serve the larger purposes of a Free Church;
- Serve as a witness to freedom and tolerance;
- Serve justice within the larger community, and
- Affirm life in its diversity and magnitude.

The Adult Religious Education Board, our Adult Religious Education Coordinator Mary Bain, and our amazing ministerial team have put together a lineup of



Great Decisions

Sunday morning and Wednesday evening classes with these goals in mind. On Sunday mornings this semester, our ministers will teach World Religions as well as lead study of the Bible. Our ongoing Sunday Circle classes are facilitator-led groups driven by discussion of religion and spirituality. On Wednesday evenings, we again offer Stacie Wheeler’s yoga class and Victor Parachin’s meditation class as ongoing spiritual practices. Tai Chi with Y. K. Lee, also an important spiritual practice for many of us, will resume in March.

In addition, there are opportunities to learn about various perspectives of religious authority. Randy Wymore offers a class, weekly through February 16, exploring Norse mythology and runes as a spiritual tool. In January, Joe Nurre facilitated an exploration of the *I Ching*. For two weeks in February, Dianne Bostic will outline for us the religious authority that lies within the Quaker tradition of Clearness Committees. Also in February, a three-week course led by Brian Cross will look at how great thinkers responded to spiritual questions and concepts of God after Charles Darwin published ideas about evolution in 1858.

In March, Student Minister Randy Lewis explores the significance of the Gnostic Gospels, the discovery of which sheds new light on concepts of God, Jesus, and religion. Joe Nurre leads a class in April discussing the book of *Job* and the insights that may be gathered from suffering and the transcendence of it. A complete list of classes and dates may be found on the church website, by following the “Adults” link at the top of the page, or in the ARE booklets in the church foyer.

The ARE Board celebrates our diversity of religious beliefs, and aims to offer a variety of classes so that all who come through the door can feel free to further their religious education in a manner consistent with their conscience. †

The Adult Religious Education Board welcomes your feedback. If you have an idea for an Adult Religious Education course contact Mary Bain, ARE Coordinator, at 743-2805, ext. 503 or mbain@allsoulschurch.org, or Amanda Shankle-Knowlton, ARE Board Chair, at ashankle@gmail.com or 633-1178.



Yoga



Roots



Latin Dance

THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister



Rites of passage are ceremonies which mark milestones in life – those moments of progression from one status to another, such as birth, “Coming of Age,” marriage or union, and death. Every age, place, and people have observed such events with music, dancing, and the spoken word. So too,

do Unitarians. All Souls Unitarian Church has its own customs and traditions that reflect the spiritual values of our religious community.

New Member Recognition Ceremony. Twice a year a ritual occurs during the Sunday services in which we publicly welcome and recognize those who have joined the church in the previous six months. At the conclusion of the ceremony, each member is given a rose to recognize their individual significance and the gifts they will offer to the larger community. During the ceremony the congregation participates in a responsive reading (#728) from the back of the hymnal, and the new members reply with these words:

Thank you, I accept your welcome into this historic and Free Church. In doing so I shall seek engagement more than escape, cherish the bonds of community, give generously of my resources, share my vision and heritage with this community, and honor the covenant which binds us together.

Child Dedications. Infants and children may be dedicated during or following a Sunday morning service or as arranged with the Ministers. The Ministers request that you call them well in advance of the time when you wish a child dedication. They will be glad to talk to you about its form and significance. You may invite members of your family or other sponsors to participate in the ceremony. During the ceremony the congregation is invited to participate by speaking the following words:

Now, we, the people of this church, understanding our solemn obligations to share in the upbringing of this beloved child do

hereby pledge ourselves to promote his/her welfare in mind, body and soul, to the end that he/she may grow in beauty, love and truth.

After the child’s name is spoken aloud by the parents and the minister, the child is given a rose symbolizing their unique significance and the potential gifts they bring to the community. The Minister then offers this blessing:

*May your eyes see beauty, May your lips speak truth,
May your heart know love, And may your hands do the good works of this world All the days of your life.*

Coming of Age Service. This worship service features the 9th grade class presenting their personal statements of belief, – their *credos* – which is the culmination of a year-long study of Unitarian Universalism, our church home, and their own values and ideas about faith. Each 9th grader offers his or her *credo*, receives a gift, and is celebrated by the staff, teachers, ministry team, and congregation.

Youth Sunday. A Sunday Worship entirely led by 10th, 11th, and 12th graders is a valuable opportunity for us to be led and influenced by our youth in worship. They reflect on their lives and share their gifts in a religious context. (For more information see Kate’ Starr’s article on page 12.)

Memorial Services. Saint Simeon Stylites said, “We are sprinkled three times in our lives: once with water, once with rice, and once with dirt.” The last rites, we believe, should “mark the dignity and mystery of what we call death” and celebrate the life of the deceased.

The Memorial Service is a religious celebration of the life of the deceased – and of life itself. This is not to suggest that the service is only for “religious” persons, for, indeed, anyone of any religious or philosophical persuasion (or none) is welcome at All Souls. Anyone of any creed or sect may use our facilities. The Ministers are glad to provide a Memorial Service for anyone, provided the procedures set forth are observed.

Usually, a Memorial Service is held after burial or cremation, although there are occasions when a Memorial Service is conducted before interment. A casket is never present at a Memorial Service. However, if requested, the Minister can meet with the family at home or at the graveside for a brief, private committal. In the Sanctuary and in the Chapel, only a single flower arrangement on the chancel table is allowed. All other flowers will be placed elsewhere in the Church and must be removed immediately following the service. Most Unitarians encourage memorial gifts made to named charities in lieu of flowers. Members and friends may wish to make special monetary donations to the Church Endowment as a memorial gift, or purchase a commemorative “leaf” for the Garden Room’s *Tree of Life*.

If a loved one is cremated, we can also offer an interment service. An interment is an intimate service for immediate family, where a portion of the cremains

are scattered at the base of the memorial garden tree seen through the main sanctuary window. During a memorial service, at the pronouncement, the minister leaves the pulpit and turns to face the window and that memorial garden tree as the church bell tolls honoring the deceased, and that mighty cloud of witnesses who have come before us.

It is a moving moment in the church.

Invocation. The words that welcome you into the service have become comfort to many over the years. Each Sunday in both our Traditional and Contemporary services, you will hear this invocation followed by the **Covenant** that we have spoken aloud in this congregation for as long as

anyone can remember.

This is indeed a day which God has made. Let us rejoice in it and be glad. And let us count our many blessings, Let us be grateful for the capacity to see, feel, hear, & understand. Let us be grateful for the incredible gift of life. And let us be especially grateful for the ties of love which bond us together Giving dignity meaning worth and joy to all of our days.

Love is the spirit of this church; and Service is its law. This is our great covenant: To dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love and to help one another.

Benedictions. All Souls’ called ministers have standard benedictions we use concluding the services in which we preach. Rev. Marlin Lavanhar’s comes from the words of Jesus, and is known as the *Concord Benediction*:

Go out into the world in peace. Have courage. Hold on to what is good, Return to no person evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted. Support the weak. Help the suffering. Honor all beings. [Go and be blessed, and be a blessing. Amen.]

The benediction I use is adapted from St. Theresa’s prayer, which I learned when it was printed on the program for Rev. Russell Bennett’s memorial service:

Go in peace. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born to you of gratitude and of hope. May you use those gifts that you have received and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be contented knowing that you indeed, are a child of God. May this presence settle into your bones and allow your soul the freedom to sing and dance and praise and love. Go and be blessed, and be a blessing. Amen.

This is a sampling of tradition in our rites of passage and worship. Sometimes it is in structure that we are given the freedom to grow and the familiarity to be comforted. There is a feeling when you enter our building that I believe comes from the warmth of the people within these walls, the experience of tradition that echoes through our corridors, and the vitality of our willingness to embrace the new. It is this incredible balance that makes All Souls what it has become and that will continue to propel this institution ever closer to the vision of its future. †



Daily Thoughts . . .

FEBRUARY 1

"We of the Free Church tradition should never forget, or permit our contemporaries to forget, that the decisive resistance to authoritarianism in both church and state, and the beginning of modern democracy, appeared first in the church and not in the political order."
~James Luther Adams

FEBRUARY 2

"If you wish to know what a man is, place him in authority."
~Yugoslavian Proverb

FEBRUARY 3

"The defiance of established authority, religious and secular, social and political, as a world-wide phenomenon may well one day be accounted the outstanding event of the last decade"
~Hannah Arendt

FEBRUARY 4

"You can delegate authority, but not responsibility."
~Stephen W. Comiskey

FEBRUARY 5

"In truth, there never was any remarkable lawgiver amongst any people who did not resort to divine authority, as otherwise his laws would not have been accepted by the people."
~Niccolo Machiavelli

FEBRUARY 6

"Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth."
~Albert Einstein

FEBRUARY 7

"The Free Church is that community in which men and women are called to seek fulfillment by the surrender of their lives to the control of the commanding, sustaining, transforming reality."
~James Luther Adams

FEBRUARY 8

"The authority of any governing institution must stop at its citizen's skin."
~Gloria Steinem

FEBRUARY 9

"I have as much authority as the Pope, I just don't have as many people who believe it."
~George Carlin

FEBRUARY 10

"Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it."
~Gautama Siddhartha, the Buddha

FEBRUARY 11

"To punish me for my contempt for authority, fate made me an authority myself."
~Albert Einstein

FEBRUARY 12

"All authority belongs to the people."
~Thomas Jefferson

FEBRUARY 13

"Persecution is not an original feature in any religion; but it is always the strongly marked feature of all religions established by law. Take away the law-establishment, and every religion re-assumes its original benignity."
~Thomas Paine

FEBRUARY 14

"Anyone who in discussion relies upon authority uses, not his understanding, but rather his memory."
~Leonardo Da Vinci

FEBRUARY 15

"Every great advance in natural knowledge has involved the absolute rejection of authority."
~Thomas Henry Huxley

FEBRUARY 16

"There are two kinds of [people] who never amount to much: Those who cannot do what they are told, and those who can do nothing else."
~Cyrus H. Curtis

FEBRUARY 17

"The struggle between Liberty and Authority is the most conspicuous feature in the portions of history with which we are earliest familiar; particularly in that of Greece, Rome, and England"
~John Stuart Mill

FEBRUARY 18

"It is not wisdom but Authority that makes a law"
~Thomas Hobbes

FEBRUARY 19

"I believe in a lively disrespect for most forms of authority."
~Rita Mae Brown

FEBRUARY 20

"Doctrinal tests are not the way to determine the character of a Free Church community, but if the community possesses no recognizable form and criterion, except that it offers absolute freedom, then it will be utterly unacceptable. It will degenerate into faithful and ethical neutrality."
~James Luther Adams

FEBRUARY 21

"Intolerance of ambiguity is the mark of an authoritarian personality."
~Theodore W. Adorno

FEBRUARY 22

'Rebellion against tyrants is obedience to God.'
~Benjamin Franklin

FEBRUARY 23

"Everyone must do his own believing and his own dying."
~Martin Luther

FEBRUARY 24

"Heresy is another word for freedom of thought."
~Graham Greene

FEBRUARY 25

"It is a truism that almost any sect, cult, or religion will legislate its creeds into law if it acquires the political power to do so, and will follow it by suppressing opposition, subverting all education to seize early the minds of the young, and by killing, locking up, or driving underground all heretics."
~Robert A. Heinlein

FEBRUARY 26

"The heresy of one age becomes the orthodoxy of the next."
~Helen Keller

FEBRUARY 27

"The family is the basic cell of government: it is where we are trained to believe that we are human beings or that we are chattel, it is where we are trained to see the sex and race divisions and become callous to injustice even if it is done to ourselves, to accept as biological a full system of authoritarian government."
~Gloria Steinem

FEBRUARY 28

"By religion I mean a set of beliefs held as dogmas, dominating the conduct of life, going beyond or contrary to evidence, and inculcated by methods which are emotional or authoritarian, not intellectual."
~Bertrand Russell

on Religious Authority

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND SHARIA

-by Muneer Awad, Executive Director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations



In America, the word *Sharia* has been exploited and abused. The political and religious debate surrounding American Muslims and anti-Sharia laws has persisted without defining the word “Sharia.” This article hopes to explain from where Sharia derives, and how this religious authority accommodates

different social, political, and cultural settings.

The two main sources of authority in Islam are the Quran (holy scripture believed to be the word of God) and the Hadiths (examples of how the Prophet Mohammad practiced Islam). However, these sources alone do not offer a complete authority in Islam. Islamic jurisprudence has been developed to apply in areas where the Quran and the Hadiths are inapplicable. Scholars have been developing this jurisprudence since before the Quran was recorded in ink, and this evolving history of interpretations and philosophies guides Muslims in many ways that the Quran and the Hadiths do not.

Understanding the Quran, the Hadiths, and Islamic jurisprudence entails rigorous training in the different interpretations of Islam, full comprehension of the history of Islam’s development, and an understanding of the social, political, and cultural settings of the respective eras. Sharia – literally “path” – serves as the body of rules derived from using these sources to help Muslims apply their faith to nearly every single aspect of life.

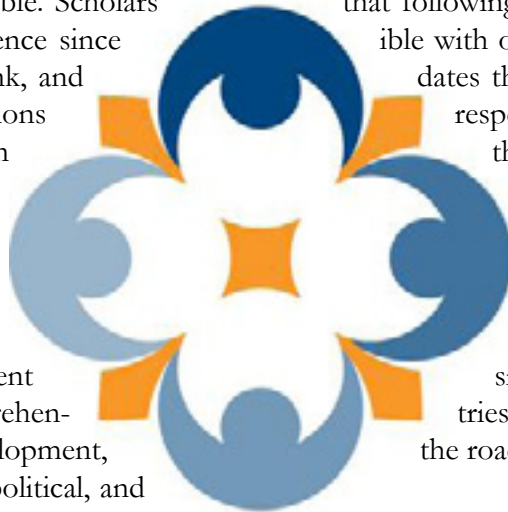
Sharia was, and is, developed to be dynamic and flexible in practice, in order to achieve two main goals, and protect six main principles in society. The two goals are to bring benefit to and repel harm from one’s community. The six principles protected under Sharia are life, family, religion, education, property, and human dignity. Sharia

guidance must then change as needed with respect to its social, political, and cultural settings in order to ensure that these two goals are achieved, and that these six principles are protected through the practice of Islam.

Throughout history the rules mandated by Sharia to achieve these goals and protect these principles have differed among various eras, communities, and leaders in Islam. Although this could lead to great diversity in practice, the religious authority of the scholars who develop Sharia is recognized and respected throughout the Muslim world. Muslims may adhere to different rules of Sharia based on which scholars, philosophies, or interpretations they follow.

Understanding the potential diversity behind Sharia and its various interpretations is the first step in realizing that following Sharia in America is not incompatible with our Constitution. In fact, Sharia mandates that Muslims practice their faith while respecting the law of the land in which they reside. Thus, Sharia rules that allow polygamy based on social factors in other countries do not apply in lands where polygamy is forbidden. Further, as Sharia rules preferring one use the right side of a trail would not apply in countries where travelers use the left side of the road.

Today America has Islamic scholars of its own, scholars who can offer religious and authoritative opinions about practicing Islam with an understanding of the values and laws espoused in our own Constitution. Sharia in America is meant to promote America’s goals, protect its principles, and do so in harmony with our Constitution. Although religious authority in Islam may vary in practice depending on the social, political, and cultural setting, it should never vary in its commitment to foster closeness to God while benefiting the specific community in which it is practiced. †



ALL SOULS READS...



It has been said, the closest thing to a sacrament for Unitarians is reading. Reading is a spiritual practice for many UUs, no doubt. Given the widely held value of this activity, wouldn't it be rewarding if everyone in the church were reading the same book? This premise is put before you as the sincerest of proposals. Many of you are in reading groups and you don't have time to join another. Oh, but consider this group:

- The selected book will accompany the monthly theme of the church.
- The book selections will explore the human condition when encountering and overcoming oppressive circumstances.
- The lens through which we will analyze these works will be the conceptual framework put forth by Allan Johnson in his work, *Privilege, Power and Difference*.

In a safe environment, with our covenant "to dwell together in peace, seek the truth in love, and to help one another" underscoring our communication, you are bound to go away from each session renewed in our walk together.

We meet on the fourth Sunday each month at 1:30 pm in room 201. We select the books from our recollections, reviews, and recommendations from others. The selections are influenced by a sentiment expressed by Allan Johnson:

We all know that a great deal of trouble surrounds issues of privilege, power and difference in this society; trouble relating to gender and race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability status, social class. A huge store of knowledge, from scientific research to passionate memoirs, documents this trouble and leaves no doubt that it causes enormous amounts of injustice and unnecessary suffering. For all that we know, however, we still don't seem to have an understanding of the trouble we're in that allows us to

-by Rev. Gerald L. Davis, Adjunct Minister

do something about it. We are, both individually and collectively, stuck in a kind of paralysis that perpetuates the trouble and its human consequences. All of us are part of the problem. There is no way to avoid that as long as we live in the world. But we can also make ourselves part of the solution, if we know how. [Privilege, Power and Difference] allows us to see not only where the trouble comes from but also how we as individuals are connected to it, which is the only thing that gives us the potential to make a difference.

Dr. Johnson quickly adds that his book and our responses are not about blame and guilt. Blame and guilt keep us in a paralysis preventing us from taking the steps required in becoming part of the solution.

So, we are reading with a purpose. The January theme of Creation found us reading Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*, a touching story set in 1962 Jackson, Mississippi, where oppressed African-American maids and a "border-walking" daughter of the South come together for a dangerous but righteous "function at the junction."

February's theme is Religious Authority and our book is, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by the author of *Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini. It takes place in Afghanistan where modernity comes face to face with extremist followers of Islam. Though this book is a novel, the story is, in reality, continuing each day.



Come join us on **February 27** at 1:30 in Thoreau Lounge. Julie Skye, Dr. Tami Moore, and I facilitate the discussion and keep us on the trail. †

YOUTH SUNDAY

-by Kate Starr, Youth Director



We teach our Unitarian children from an early age to use reason and common sense to develop their beliefs. We hope that we

also encourage them to balance head with heart – reason with love – and then to check the validity and usefulness of their belief systems within the context of a safe and loving community like All Souls.

One way we adults get to see and hear how successful we’ve been in accomplishing this goal, is through the annual event known as Youth Sunday. On Feb. 27, 2011, our 10th, 11th, and 12th graders will take over the chancel and communicate their Unitarian Universalist values through their own cultural expression. During both services,

10:00 and 11:30 am, all of the music will be created by our youth. The sermons will be written and delivered by our graduating seniors.

*“Believe nothing,
no matter where you read it
or who has said it,
not even if I have said it,
unless it agrees with
your own reason and
your own common sense.”*

~Buddha

The theme they selected this year for Youth Sunday is “Tight Knit/Loosely Woven.” This theme aptly describes the 2011 graduating class – they are a tight-knit group, but very much individuals. Many of them have been friends their whole lives, but they are not exclusive – new people are welcomed into their group. The theme also frames their exploration of the balance between our own self-interest and the needs of the community – a lifelong practice for us all.

If you want to be entertained, inspired, and relieved about the future, join us in the sanctuary on **Feb. 27** for Youth Sunday. †



WHENCE RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY?

-by Ann Jackman, All Souls Care Team



I recently had a discussion with atheist friends which compelled me to re-examine my experience of the divine.

Having an unusual visual impairment, I wear two pairs of contact lenses. When I began this protocol, for the first time I could see during the night. Last year, I looked out the bathroom window. A full moon shone behind the huge sycamore in my back yard. What I saw – for the first time in my life – was the pattern of lacy branches on new-fallen snow. The sight was breathtakingly beautiful! I had this overwhelming sense of being at one with the Universe. I experienced the *holy*.

It is 3:00 am. The telephone rings, and the caller says tearfully, “They just called a code and I don’t think he’s going to make it.” I am at the hospital by 3:30 where her son – the one good thing that has *ever* happened in this good woman’s seemingly godforsaken life – has died. We sit with her dead son – she touching him, I touching her. She frequently glances at the clock, waiting for her church to open at 8:30 am. I suggest that her minister might want to respond to this crisis *now*. She calls both ministers and the church secretary. No one answers. She leaves messages and continues her interminable wait. Then I think of All Souls’ Care Team, which prevents such a scenario. Through its work I experience the *sacred*.

My religious authority comes from our simple (but *not easy*) covenant:

Love is the spirit of this church; and Service is its Law.

This is our great covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another. †



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!

- September* - VISION
- October* - EVIL
- November* - DEMOCRACY
- December* - GOD
- January* - CREATION
- February* - RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY
- March* - REDEMPTION
- April* - FREEDOM
- May* - MERCY

A MIGHTY CLOUD OF WITNESSES: ESTHER KETCHUM

-by Kathy Keith, Executive Director



I met Esther Ketchum in 1992, when I joined the staff of All Souls. She was living in one of our Conservage

houses, and even in retirement she was our resident source and authority on “how we do things here” as she would cross the street to observe and advise the staff.



Esther (center, right) and the Needlepointers

The Ketchum family joined the church in 1951. Esther taught Sunday School. She and George were active through the Baby Boom years that brought All Souls to the brink of adding on to our edifice, then voting to seize the moment of opportunity when the availability and the wherewithal to acquire the land on South Peoria – our present-day site – arose.

In 1961, Esther was hired as our first professional business manager. Not only did she take care of the bills and the bookkeeping, she attended to the business of running the church smoothly, right down to creating carbon-copied pages of detailed instructions on how to use (and clean up) the kitchen.



Esther and the Parish Notes Ladies

Her keen eye caught areas where attention was needed and her organizational ability created results. Notable among those efforts was her decision that the faded and worn upholstery on the two chancel chairs had to go. She solicited contributions, then recruited gifted needlewomen Faith Neumann and Corinne McCollum to co-chair the Chancel Chairs Committee. They recruited 17 more needlepointers who hand-stitched the upholstery for the chancel chairs we enjoy today. The names of those women are stitched on the back of the chairs – turn them around and see for yourself the names of those who labored to fulfill Esther’s vision. †

Recommended Reading on Religious Authority

The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, And Authority

By Lee Martin McDonald

This is the thoroughly updated and expanded third edition of the successful The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon. It represents a fresh attempt to understand some of the many perplexing questions related to the origins and canonicity of the Bible. - Amazon

The Lost Christianities: the Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew

By Bart D. Ehrman

A well-crafted, scholarly tale of forgeries, burned books, doctrinal feuds, and other episodes in the making of the New Testament and the early Churches. - Kirkus Reviews

Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas

By Elaine Pagels

This luminous and accessible history of early Christian thought offers profound and crucial insights on the nature of God, revelation, and what we mean by religious truth. A source of inspiration and hope. - Karen Armstrong, author of A History of God

The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity

By Elaine Pagels and Karen L. King

Elaine Pagels and Karen King are both highly regarded yet unorthodox academics, from Princeton and Harvard, respectively. The professors attempt to recast the fallen disciple using the initial translation of the Judas document recently unveiled by the National Geographic Society.

Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire

By Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker

Brock and Parker urge readers to see church history in a new light. By re-emphasizing early Christians' focus on paradise, the kingdom of God on Earth, the authors are convinced they are reclaiming authentic 'traditional' Christianity. It's a controversial thesis, deserving of debate and study. - Douglas Todd, Religion News Services

From Jesus to Christ

DVD or online at: www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/

An intellectual and visual guide to new and controversial historical evidence which challenges familiar assumptions about the life of Jesus and the epic rise of Christianity. - PBS

Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History

By David E. Bumbaugh

Bumbaugh provides an overview of Unitarianism, Universalism, and Unitarian Universalism from their beginnings in Europe to the end of the twentieth century, and he tells the story in a readable and accessible way. - UUA Bookstore

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www.AllSoulsChurch.org

Editorial Team

managing editor

Laurel Williamson

copy editors

Judy Jarvis

Kate Starr

editorial board

Phil Haney

Judy Jarvis

church staff

Rev. Marlin Lavanhar

Rev. Tamara Lebak

Rev. Gerald Davis

Kathy Keith

Kate Starr

contributors

Muneer Awad

Phil Haney

Ann Jackman

Amanda Shankle-Knowlton

Have an idea for a submission?

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.



LOVE IS THE SPIRIT

ALL SOULS UNITARIAN CHURCH
2952 S. PEORIA AVE. TULSA, OK 74114
WWW.ALLSOULSCHURCH.ORG

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February Highlights

- Feb. 3 Social Seniors
- Green Team Meeting
- Feb. 4 Soulful Sundown - *The Bible on Broadway*
- Feb. 6 All Souls 303 - *Joining the Church*
Leadership Council
- Feb. 7 Sweetheart Ball
- Feb. 9 Open Branches - *Religious Authority*
- Feb. 10 Day Alliance
- Feb. 12 Coffeehouse - *John Gorka*
- Feb. 13 All Souls 101
- Feb. 14 Open Women's Group - *Religious Authority*
- Feb. 18 Evening of Praise
Parents' Night Out
- Feb. 19 Elizabeth Gilbert Lecture - *Committed*
- Feb. 20 Roots series begins
LGBT & Allies Potluck
- Feb. 22 Evening Alliance
- Feb. 23 High Def Praise
- Feb. 24 Board of Trustees
- Feb. 26 Garage Sale - *Children's & Youth Choirs*
- Feb. 27 Youth Sunday

SEE INSIDE FOR

PARISH NOTES

The All Souls Weekly Bulletin



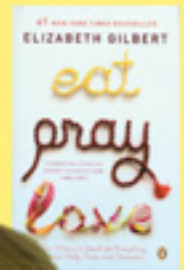
BookSmart Tulsa and the
Adult Religious Education Program
are proud to welcome:

Elizabeth Gilbert

Author of **EAT, PRAY, LOVE**

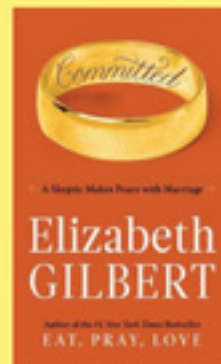
February 19 7:00 pm

All Souls Unitarian Church
2952 S. Peoria Ave.



Liz will discuss her
new book
"Committed."

FREE AND OPEN TO PUBLIC



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