

SIMPLE GIFTS

ALL SOULS UNITARIAN CHURCH OF TULSA, OKLAHOMA

MAY
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Mercy

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HAVE MERCY

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister



When I was 14 I performed one of the dumbest acts of my life. I chased a fellow student around a classroom with a can of Raid bug spray. I thought it was funny to tell him he had wasps in his hair and asked him to hold still so I could squirt them. As he ran, and I chased him laughing, I suddenly

bumped a desk and my finger pushed down on the nozzle and some spray spurted in his eyes. He ran screaming and holding his face to the nurse's office with the help of another student, and I was sent immediately to the principal. I felt stupid, and ashamed, and deathly afraid I may have blinded the boy.

The principal listened to my story and after what seemed like an endless silence he said, "Marlin, you're right that this was very foolish and dangerous, but I know you well enough to know that you did not do it with malice or intent to hurt him." Fortunately, the boy was okay and I was not punished beyond spending a class period in the principal's office. He had shown me mercy! I can only hope he was equally merciful with the teacher who was

late to class and the janitor who left the can on the windowsill.

To have mercy on someone is to forgive, to be compassionate, and to let a person off the hook for a wrong of some kind. In this way, mercy runs counter to justice. If justice requires making things fair and giving people their due, mercy involves offering love, blessings, and forgiveness even when a person may deserve, in all fairness, to be punished or shunned. Mercy, then, comes from someone with power. If I am to show you mercy, then I clearly have something to offer you that I can choose to give or withhold.



Every three years we repeat the monthly themes here at All Souls. By doing so, we hope that they can serve as markers to help us see how much we have grown personally and spiritually. Three years ago, and six years ago, when mercy was our theme, my articles and sermons focused on *giving* mercy. This time around, I want us to think about how we respond to acts of mercy done for us. What do acts of mercy we've received call us to do? How can *receiving* mercy help us change our ways? What does it mean to be given a second, or third, chance?

THE
All Souls
JOURNAL

The Quality
of Mercy



A Privilege to Show
Mercy



Mercy, Music,
and a Mission



I began this article by saying, “...one of the dumbest acts of my life...” Unfortunately, there have been many others in my 42 years. I know that the kindness my principal bestowed upon me that day, made me cherish my reputation and integrity. I’ve realized that these qualities helped save me. I’ve come to understand the importance of living with integrity, and I’ve realized that goofing around can be life-changing when the stakes are high. I am just glad it was not a gun I was toying around with, and it was not a trigger that I accidentally pressed down on

in my youthful folly. I am fortunate the boy’s eyes were okay and that the principal was merciful.

The prophet said what God wants from us is to, “...act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with thy God.” I try to act justly and to walk humbly, and I must say, I have come to love mercy. In the words of the psalmist, “May mercy and goodness follow you all the days of your life.” Amen. †

MERCY AND JUSTICE

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister



Beside Beeson Law Library on the Samson University Campus in Birmingham, Alabama, stands a statue by Glenn Acree named *Mercy and Justice*. The statue grew out of the phrase, “Seek wisdom to temper justice with compassion.” The winged Angel of Mercy is seen encouraging the blindfolded

Lady of Justice. She is staying the sword of justice to keep it from being used too swiftly, to temper its use with compassion. The artist suggests that Justice needs Mercy to assuage, to balance, to guide her hand because, in fact, Justice cannot see.

Our justice system is made up of many parts, and it functions best when everyone is well informed and diligent about fulfilling his or her particular role. The push and pull of prosecution and defense shapes the experience of the judge or jury and requires them to consider multiple angles and possibilities. Yet, I cannot ignore the recent research that points its finger at the humanness of our system.

In one study, judges’ rulings on granting parole to defendants were recorded in conjunction with information on how recently the judges had eaten. Researchers

discovered that the number of rulings favorable to defendants was much higher at the beginning of the day. Just after breakfast, the judges granted paroles 65 percent of the time. As the judges became hungry and tired throughout the morning, researchers recorded a decline until almost none of the defendants were granted parole. After lunch, the number jumped back up to 65 percent and then began gradually to decline again until the judges’ next breaks. Whether this was because of rest, food, blood sugar, or the effect of hearing one case after another in succession, really doesn’t matter. What does matter is that the study suggests that judicial rulings can be swayed by extraneous variables that should have no bearing on legal decisions. It also suggests that a savvy lawyer should strive to have his or her case heard first on the docket or wait until after lunch.

We seem to be biologically driven to be equipped with an innate sense of fairness (even if that sense is influenced by what we have for breakfast). Just notice how closely children watch how things are doled out to them or their awareness of the largest slice of cake and who gets it. Even certain species of monkeys have been shown to protest when not paid an equal share (in nuts) for equal work. We aspire to create justice and fairness in a world of infinite variables. Sociologists have connected our biological sense of fairness to an evolutionary shift to

caring for the weaker among us.

In addition to protecting the weak, our justice system – creating laws and then punishing those among us who break them – is our attempt to hold people accountable and to make sense of an unfair world. In this sense, Justice is merely retribution.

Although Justice, fair or not, is made by humanity, Mercy is divine. Mercy occurs in spite of any wrongdoing. Mercy occurs when the verdict is guilty and the sentence is letting the accused go free. Why would we do that? Under what circumstances would that be permissible? We have many human ideas about the criteria for what would constitute justification for Justice, but Mercy, like Grace, needs no justification.

One of the most powerful examples of mercy in our lifetime has occurred in South Africa, under the leadership of Bishop Desmond Tutu. In an attempt at restorative justice, Tutu created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission where *speaking the truth* about atrocities committed under apartheid *replaced punishment for the acts*. In the face of such senseless violence, having to tell the truth became punishment enough. Whenever we show mercy, we are walking in the shoes of God.

In the Universalist tradition, God shows mercy to all of us. Universalism holds that God plays no favorites, and does not predetermine who are saved and who are damned.

Once a man came up to the great Universalist preacher Hosea Ballou, after hearing him speak for the first time.

The man said, “Brother Ballou, I am worried about my son.”

“How old is your son?” Ballou asked.



“Twenty-three,” the man replied. “He spends every evening at the tavern with his friends. I am afraid he is going to hell.”

“Friend, I think I can help you,” said Ballou. “Tonight, let’s you and I hide around the corner from the tavern. When closing time is near, we’ll prepare a roaring fire. Then when your son comes along, we’ll jump out grab him and throw him into the fire.”

“Are you crazy?” said the man “I could never do that to my own child!”

“God couldn’t either,” Ballou replied. “God couldn’t either.”

May God have Mercy on all of us, sending her often to guide the blind hand of our Justice. †

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.



Mercy is a hard case. Specific and individual, it shows up when we're down; it reaches out to us when we need it. Mercy has been around a long time; it's antediluvian – almost prelapsarian. Why can't we just grab mercy and use it like we do vocabulary or manners? John Wolf knows why: We only discover mercy from our life experience – it can't be taught. But we can prepare for it. Preparing for mercy is the way to go.

Mercy isn't for everyone. Some seem predisposed to it, others, given every opportunity, never find it. There are those who see mercy, and lose sight of it. Why is the grip of mercy firm for one, weak for another?

Humans have an ethical responsibility to each other, and Wolf believes that recognizing this opens one up to receive and to give mercy. We are distinguished by intelligence and emotion. Sentient beings, says Wolf, are capable of apathy, sympathy, and empathy. There is no single predictor of the individual inclination toward loving and caring for others. Living responsibly includes accepting and giving mercy. The Unitarian covenant can't be met without preparing for mercy.

Wolf describes accepting mercy as a form of awakening. Mercy enters our lives in times of stress and intensity; it doesn't exactly fit our life plan. To the contrary, Dr. Wolf knows better than most that the tendency is to dodge mercy – to remain insensitive, faddish – to avoid hard thinking about what moves us to care for another.

Mercy often comes with loss, guilt, shame – when one is what Wolf calls “ground down.” Mercy is associated with criminal guilt, juxtaposed with justice in a holy balance of love against the odds. Mercy is compassion forbearing punishment – even when justice demands it. Accepting mercy is a core feature of 12-step programs

for good reason – it's the second chance not deserved. Miscues and relapse abound when it comes to mercy. There are lots of offers, few takers. Mercy isn't for everyone.

Wolf asks the tough questions: *Why does a person overlook mercy? What allows mercy to enter one life, and keeps it from another? What dashed hope keeps a man down in the presence of mercy?* During his ministry at All Souls, Wolf remembers William Blake's *The Divine Image* as a favorite poem recited by the congregation or sung by the choir. Wolf says the poem is a strong message of mercy, and that reading it and speaking it, help us to receive the gift of mercy and understand how to share it:

*To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love All pray in their distress;
And to these virtues of delight Return their thankfulness.
For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love Is God, our father dear,
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love Is Man, his child and care.
For Mercy has a human heart, Pity and a human face,
And Love, the human form divine, And Peace, the human dress.
Then every man, of every clime, That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine, Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.
And all must love the human form, In heathen, Turk, or Jew;
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell There God is dwelling too.*

Wolf has seen mercy come into lives at All Souls. He recalls that in the early days of the Care Team a church member was dying of AIDS. Team members comforted the young man, whose parents were no longer involved in his life. The family was religious, but fundamental, and to them the idea of an alternative lifestyle was anathema; they had disowned their son. Wolf recalls that the team determined that a plea for mercy was appropriate. The parents were told: *Your son is dying; you have to come now; he needs you, he desires and deserves your love.* The father and mother responded to the impassioned call; they came to their son and told him they loved him. They ex



exercised the human ethical responsibility. They accepted and gave mercy, and the experience reunited the family.

So many never experience mercy; others don't accept the gift well, or benefit from the experience of it. It is human nature to relapse; the gift of mercy can be transitory – it will have a short shelf life if not used wisely. Each of us has an ethical, inexorable duty to exercise empathy,

compassion, love, and mercy.

Wolf says the All Souls Care Team is a dynamic reminder of mercy at work and a standard-bearer of ethical responsibility for others. We do well to bear witness for this good work, and to remember the words of *The Divine Image*. †

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

-by Barbara Prose, Resident Minister



The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from
heaven upon the place beneath. It is
twice blest: It blesseth him that gives
and him that takes.

~Shakespeare The Merchant of Venice

I have been learning a lot about the quality of mercy as I have been getting to know the army of angels who are the Pastoral Care Program here at All Souls. Whether they lovingly knit a shawl that will later be delivered to a member in the hospital, or pick up a life-saving prescription and deliver it to a member's home, our volunteers embody the core nature of a merciful divine reality on a daily basis.

"His dementia is worse I'm afraid. He did not recognize me. But I will go back later this week and see if I can catch him at a different time of day." When I followed up with this particular *Friendly Soul*, an angel disguised as an All Souls member, she told me, "It was a wonderful visit. This time he knew me and we talked for a long time, first about politics and then about family. I'm so glad I returned."

From the moment of birth, we are dependent on the care and mercy of others in order to survive. This fundamental truth defines us until the moment of death.

Later that week I saw the e-mail Dick Lieser, the organizing angel for a battalion of volunteers called *Helping*

Souls, has sent out. "Mrs. Jane Doe had a small stroke. She will need rides to appointments with her doctors this week. Please let me know if you can help." As I read the responses, I was reminded that when compassion leads to action, the reality of our daily lives is transformed.

Wendell Berry wrote that, "The smallest unit of health is the community." His words remind us that no one survives alone and that we need each other to thrive. Whole health is created and maintained on many levels: the physical, intellectual, emotional, psychological, and spiritual.

The work of our *Life Decisions Committee* is a good example of how health, wholeness, and mercy weave together through the work of All Souls' Pastoral Care Program. Just as we strive to live well, this committee is dedicated to the idea that we can make choices that help us die well. Rather than push away thoughts of illness, loss of control, and debilitating pain, these committee members are committed to sitting down with you, and helping you talk through your deepest fears, while you prepare consciously and conscientiously for death. Just as some times it may be merciful to spare a life, it may also be merciful at other times, to allow a life to end with dignity and grace.

The volunteers in our Pastoral Care Program are not really disguised at all. They are embodied angels whose acts of compassion bring real healing. Because of them, we are privileged to see the human face of Mercy in our midst, and to feel the gentle rains of heaven fall. †

A PRIVILEGE TO SHOW MERCY

-by Heather Forsyth, Newcomers' Board



As spiritual beings, mercy is a quality which we often seek to receive. Yet most of us can exercise the privilege of granting mercy, as well. Doing so can be both uplifting and humbling. The Newcomers Board felt this intensely during the delivery of dinner to the Day Center and Night Shelter for the

Homeless in downtown Tulsa on February 3.

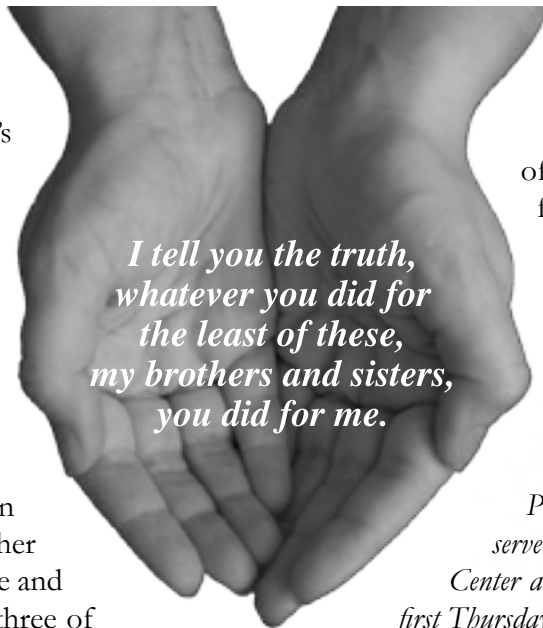
As spring returns to our gardens and parks, it seems incredible that just a few short weeks ago we were in the midst of “snowmageddon” or the “snowpocalypse” as many have referred to the snow and ice storms that nearly shut Tulsa down in early February. Certainly as February 3 approached, many of us wondered if it would be possible to deliver on our promise to provide dinner for more than 100 homeless souls in weather that would ensure that more people, rather than fewer, would be looking for a warm, nourishing meal.

Our plan of gathering in the church kitchen to bake pans of shepherd's pie and homemade biscuits was no longer feasible. One of us made a quick call to Reasor's – on a day when it was operating with only two employees – and arranged to pick up boxes of fried chicken and pans of macaroni and cheese from the store the following day. One of us made pans of green bean casserole and baked 150 corn muffins, one dozen at a time, in her home kitchen. Laden with the above and fresh fruit, brownies, and iced tea, three of us (plus a conscripted husband with a 4-wheel drive vehicle) made our way through the snow and ice-covered streets into downtown Tulsa. Along the way, we pushed less well-equipped cars through treacherous

intersections. It was all so worth it.

When we arrived at the Center, we were greeted by nearly 140 homeless and hungry folks who waited patiently while we unloaded and set up. They were incredibly grateful to see a hot meal. This was day three of the storm, and they'd been eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for two days, and expecting nothing more. We received many “bless yous,” warm smiles, and expressions of near disbelief that these “angels” had delivered in the storm.

Of course, it is indeed a privilege to show mercy. We “angels” all had homes, jobs, cars, bank accounts, medical care, family, and friends. It is an easy place from which to deliver kindness and compassion. Some say that mercy has the most value when it's given at the most difficult times. That was certainly true for those of us who served dinner that night. We felt so able, so strong, so generous! Yet, as we looked at the long line of people waiting for dinner, someone said, “There but for the grace of God...one never knows how fortunes will turn.”



No doubt many of us practice mercy with the hope that a kind of cosmic equalizer will return the favor if we are ever in need. (Not expectation; but hope.) Should that day come, the souls at the shelter have taught us to receive it with grace. †

And Service is its Law...

As a way to live our Covenant, All Souls Programs and Committees each prepare and serve a meal for the residents at the Tulsa Day Center and Night Shelter for the Homeless on the first Thursday of their assigned month.

RISING FROM THE ASHES

-by Jean Ann Fausser, Religion & Arts Board



As dormant plants are bursting forth renewed and invigorated, it is fitting we should host an art exhibit featuring young artists from the *Phoenix Rising* program. The phoenix is a mythological bird appearing in the lore of many cultures in various guises symbolizing the cycle of rebirth.

The phoenix is said to be consumed in flames and reborn anew from the ashes.

The *Phoenix Rising* program is made possible for the adjudicated teens who are not attending public school, due to suspension and/or truancy, by a partnership between the Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa and the Tulsa Juvenile Bureau. It provides the opportunity for these students to create works of art through glassblowing, metalworking, clay work, mural painting, and theatre. These teens have not had opportunities to participate in the arts and are extraordinarily creative and interested. Most of the kids in Phoenix have had virtually no opportunities for success (academically and otherwise) and are suffering from extremely low self esteem. After completing their art projects many have experienced, for the first time, a sense of accomplishment and a new sense of self-worth. It is through the mercy of the Juvenile Justice System that these teens have been given this chance to succeed at something and experience a sense of pride in their accomplishments. Many of the experiences of the youth in the program have been transformative, changing lives filled often with hardship and grief.

Ethicist Jacob Appel has noted a decline of mercy, and a concomitant increase in retribution, in American public life. Appel has written:

One of the glaring – yet too often overlooked – failings of contemporary American is that we have become a nation obsessed with justice and retribution. We claim to be The Land of the Free, yet we have lost sight of what it means to be imprisoned: denied liberty and access to one's family, subjected

to isolation and violence and unspeakable boredom. We have come to believe, in the most pernicious way, that people should get what they deserve. What a sea change it might be in our public discourse and our civic life if we focused instead upon mercy and forgiveness. A merciful and forgiving culture might find itself with less anger, less social disruption, even less crime.

The journey for the students in this program begins with a merciful court and continues by giving them an experience through art that reaches places within them that nothing else has or can. Their art says so much about who they are and where they have been, but more important, about the possibility of where they will go in life. †

ALL SOULS' RELIGION & ARTS BOARD PRESENTS:

THE Phoenix Rising

ART SHOW

EXHIBIT OPENS
MAY 1
11:30 AM – 2:30 PM
ROOM 207

Phoenix Rising
is a community-based arts program that provides alternative forms of expression for high-risk youth as a means to build trust, self-confidence, discipline, problem-solving skills, and the ability to work in a team.

The program empowers youth to create new and positive life patterns and become effective members of the community.

EXHIBIT WILL REMAIN ON DISPLAY THROUGHOUT THE MONTH OF MAY

Daily Thoughts...

May 1

We shall show mercy, but we shall not ask for it.

~Winston Churchill

May 2

The quality of mercy is not strain'd, It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

~William Shakespeare

May 3

Compassion is the desire that moves the individual self to widen the scope of its self-concern to embrace the whole of the universal self.

~Arnold Toynbee

May 4

The human spirit is not dead. It lives on in secret. It has come to be believed that compassion, in which all ethics must take root, can only attain its full depth if it embraces all living creatures and does not limit itself to mankind.

~Albert Schweitzer

May 5

It is not the receiver that is blessed, but the giver. Be thankful that you are allowed to exercise your power of benevolence and mercy in the world, and thus become pure and perfect.

~Swami Vivekenanda

May 6

Compassion is the basis of all morality.

~Arthur Schopenhauer

May 7

Too much mercy... often resulted in further crimes which were fatal to innocent victims who need not have been victims if justice had been put first and mercy second.

~Agatha Christie

May 8

Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill.

~William Shakespeare

May 9

Fire, water and government know nothing of mercy.

~Anonymous

May 10

Compassion is the antitoxin of the soul: where even the most poisonous impulses remain relatively harmless.

~Eric Hoffer

May 11

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

~Psalms 23:6.

May 12

Much that we call evil is really good in disguises; and we should not quarrel rashly with adversities not yet understood, nor overlook the mercies often bound up in them.

~Horace Mann

May 13

All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom; justice; honor; duty; mercy; hope.

~Winston Churchill

May 14

I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.

~Abraham Lincoln

May 15

1st Principle of Non-Violence: Non-violence is a way of life for courageous people. It is active non-violent resistance to evil. It is aggressive spiritually, mentally and emotionally. It is always persuading the opponent of righteousness of your cause.

~Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

May 16

2nd Principle of Non-Violence: Non-violence seeks to win friendship and understanding. The end result of non-violence is redemption and reconciliation. The purpose of non-violence is the creation of the Beloved Community.

~Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

May 17

3rd Principle of Non-Violence: Non-violence seeks to defeat injustice, not people. Non-violence recognizes that evildoers are also victims, and not evil people.

~Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

May 18

4th Principle of Non-Violence: Non-violence holds that suffering educates and reforms. Non-violence accepts suffering without retaliation. Non-violence accepts violence if necessary, but will never inflict it. Non-violence willingly accepts the consequences of its acts. ~Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

May 19

5th Principle of Non-Violence: Non-violence chooses *love* instead of hate; resists violence of the spirit as well as the body. Non-violent love is spontaneous, unmotivated, unselfish and creative. Non-violent love gives willingly, knowing that the return might be hostility. ~Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

May 20

5th Principle continued: Non-violent love is unending in its ability to forgive in order to restore community. Non-violent love does not sink to the level of the hater. Love for the enemy is how we demonstrate love for ourselves. ~Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

May 21

6th Principle of Non-Violence: Non-violence believes that the universe is on the side of justice. The non-violent resister has deep faith that justice will eventually win. Non-violence believes that God is a God of justice. ~Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

May 22

Mercy is the compassion in our hearts for another person's misery, which drives us to do what we can to help. ~Thomas Aquinas

May 23

Until he extends the circle of his compassion to all living things, man will not himself find peace. ~Albert Schweitzer

May 24

Make no judgments where you have no compassion. ~Anonymous

May 25

'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; It becomes the throned monarch better than his crown; His sceptre shows the force of temporal power, The attribute to awe and majesty, Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings; But mercy is above this sceptred sway; It is enthroned in the hearts of kings, It is an attribute to God himself; And earthly power doth then show likest God's When mercy seasons justice. ~William Shakespeare

May 26

Being all fashioned of the self-same dust. Let us be merciful as well as just. ~Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

May 27

In separateness lies the world's great misery, in compassion lies the world's true strength. ~Siddhartha Gautama Buddha

May 28

Compassion is no substitute for justice. ~Rush Limbaugh

May 29

No man is a true believer unless he desireth for his brother that which he desireth for himself. ~Muhammad

May 30

Each of us in our own way can try to spread compassion into people's hearts. Western civilizations these days place great importance on filling the human 'brain' with knowledge, but no one seems to care about filling the human 'heart' with compassion. This is what the real role of religion is. ~Dalai Lama

May 31

Among the attributes of God, although they are all equal, mercy shines with even more brilliancy than justice. ~Miguel de Cervantes

...on *Mercy*

MERCY, MUSIC, AND A MISSION

-by Kathleen Garrison, Childrens' Choir Board



Last summer, at the church leadership retreat, a few members of the Children's Choir Board discussed how to align their work with the church's new vision statement. One way, they decided, was to change the focus of the choir trips to be more about helping others.

Every year since 1983, children's and youth choirs have gone on recreational and performance trips all over the U.S. and abroad. In the current economy, an international trip was impractical this year. To reduce the cost of the trip further, they considered destinations that could be reached by bus. New Orleans was proposed because of its international flavor – rich in culture, music, food, flair, and racial diversity – it could be reached by bus, and the city offered many helping opportunities. The board was surprised when Senior Minister Marlin Lavanhar, synchronistically, brought up the same idea with the kids at choir camp.

Our church has many ties to New Orleans. First Unitarian Universalist Church of New Orleans is a congregation that we have made a commitment to help recover from Katrina. Marlin went to college in New Orleans, and several young people from our congregation currently attend colleges there. One of All Souls' previous ministers, Suzanne Meyer, was the first woman minister at First Unitarian Universalist Church, and the choirs visited New Orleans in 1991.

This June the choirs will again visit First Unitarian Universalist Church. The congregation has been dealing with Katrina in some very creative and positive ways. When members entered the church after Katrina hit,

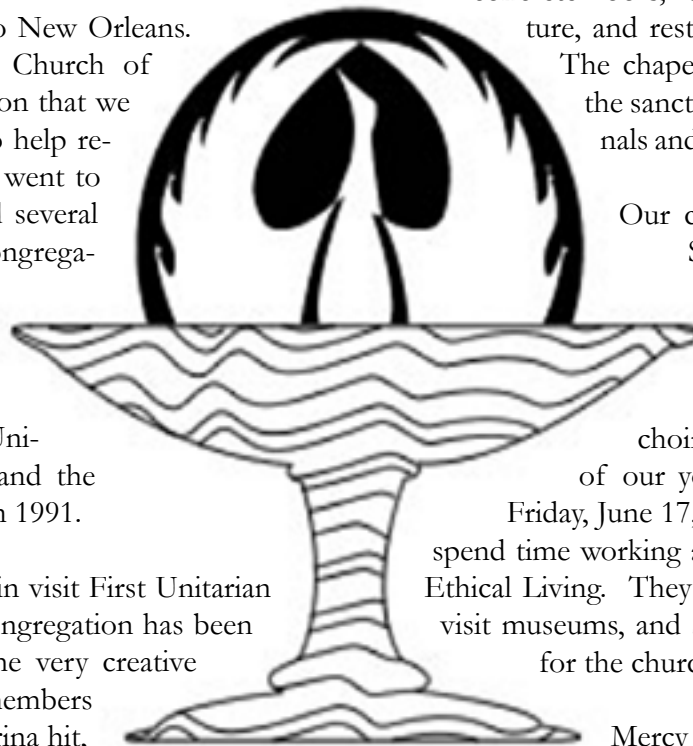
they discovered a hymnal open to *Blessings of the Earth and Sky*. That was the first hymn they sang when they returned to church. Since then, members have been putting in long hours doing the physical work of fixing up the building. Some of the work has included removing mold, gutting the building, and fixing the roof again – it had just been done before Katrina.

In conjunction with other churches, they also formed the Center of Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal. This center “strives to empower, inform, and help build a sustainable, equitable, and inclusive community.” It educates volunteers and connects them with those who need help. The work ranges from rebuilding homes to planting gardens. The church has transformed part of their second floor to a 50-bed unit to house volunteers. Two other examples of creativity arising from adversity are a musical play written by a member, and a labyrinth painted on the church sanctuary floor.

Now, five years after Katrina, First UU still has scarred concrete floors, rooms with no ceilings or furniture, and restrooms with non-locking stalls. The chapel has no electricity or seating, the sanctuary has no pews, and the hymnals and library have not been replaced.

Our children's choir director David Smith, accompanist Kent Dennis, Youth Director Kate Starr, and Marlin, will make the trip with 34 children from the youth and children's choirs, 13 adult chaperones, and 7 of our youth. The travelers will leave Friday, June 17, and return June 21. They will spend time working at First UU, and the Center of Ethical Living. They will also go on walking tours, visit museums, and Sunday morning they will sing for the church.

Mercy is the theme for the month of



Greater New Orleans Unitarian Universalists
www.gnouu.org

May. This trip will enable the children and their chaperones to experience their ability to show mercy, which often has been defined as compassion in action. It will show them that they indeed have the power to use physical work and music to assist others in recovery from an overwhelmingly tragic situation. Music is a powerful healer. It is fundamental to healing in “the birthplace of jazz.” Working with our hands is another way of showing mercy. The children will see a tangible result of their work. The next time they learn of a disaster like the recent tsunami in Japan, they will know that there are actions they can take to help.

Having mercy means demonstrating our great covenant that Love is the Spirit of this Church and to perform Service, which is our Law. To dwell together in peace, means to be present with others, and to stop seeing them as “others.” To seek the truth in love could include learning the truth of what happened, and is still happening, in New Orleans,

and all over the world. We can do this by listening to the stories of pain and suffering and the stories of healing, while working to assist the healing. To help one another includes helping those outside our church walls. There is no greater teacher than experience. We say and hear the covenant regularly; this trip will be an opportunity for our children to live it.

Note: In 2005, The City of New Orleans was devastated when the levee system broke and flooded 80 percent of the city. Hurricane Katrina caused 1,836 deaths and was the costliest disaster in US history. Suffering was increased by slow reaction by the federal government to help. Hit hardest by the tragedy were African Americans, the poor, and the elderly. Unity (a nonprofit agency which focuses on helping the homeless) reports that currently New Orleans has approximately 11,000 homeless people – the highest number in the nation – many struggling with mental illness, substance abuse, and disabilities. Unity also estimates 43,000 residential properties need to be demolished or reconstructed.

ALIENS OR NEIGHBORS?

-by Marlin Lavanhar & Barbara Prose



There are 11 million or more unauthorized people in the United States today. They pay taxes, spend money, start businesses, work hard, and value family like the rest of us. In fact, in 2010, unauthorized immigrants in the U.S.A. collectively paid \$11.2 billion in state and local taxes.* It is neither practical nor

moral or economically beneficial to try to have a forced march, or Trail of Tears of undocumented workers back to Mexico. Instead, there must be a trail of new legislation leading us to a new, inclusive, economically vibrant, morally responsible, United States of America.

If justice is about making things fair and giving someone his due, mercy is about having compassion and offering forgiveness, even when a person may rightly deserve to be punished (or in this case deported).

Right now in Oklahoma, there is a major civil rights

struggle happening. The 14th amendment of our State Constitution is being threatened by proposed legislation which aims to intimidate and punish the fastest-growing and most recent unpopular minority group (Hispanics), through discrimination. Whenever racial profiling is becoming the law of the land, resistance is our responsibility.



New laws being proposed would allow authorities to ask Oklahomans for documentation to prove citizenship. Consider who will be stopped on the roads, in the streets, and in other places, and be asked to show papers? White, Anglo-Americans are unlikely to be stopped. Hispanic American citizens, and other U.S. citizens who are in the minority, whose cars are pulled over for a traffic violation or in other situations where police are called in, will likely be asked to show documentation to prove their citizenship. This would make Oklahoma a hostile

environment for anyone who may look like they could be from a foreign country.

When laws begin to separate children from their parents, and spouses from each other, and when laws threaten the freedom of American citizens, these laws need to be resisted and defeated. This is the case with immigration-related bills being considered right now in the Oklahoma Legislature (HB 1446, SB 908, SB 905, SB 683).

Mercy is important to society because trying to right every wrong and trying to punish all who have acted unjustly is futile. History has proven this futility to us in South Africa after apartheid, in the Middle East, in Ireland, and in our own backyards. When righting every wrong would destroy a society, being merciful becomes a higher form of justice.

There are times when in the face of human suffering and human need, the law must bend. *People* are sacred, not human laws. Laws are written and enforced to protect or

assist human beings. It is not difficult to find examples in our history when certain rules, regulations, and behaviors were legal, popular, and unjust.

We know that strong families are the foundation of successful communities and so we must support policies that support families and improve the health, education, and well-being of all Oklahoma children.

In a free, forward-looking nation, the federal government will take responsibility for secure borders and create clear paths to citizenship. Then all people will have reason to be thankful for the energy and hard work, loyalty and passion that our immigrant brothers and sisters contribute to our country.

We must adopt a humane approach to a new reality. The way we treat immigrants should demonstrate our commitment to a free society, with liberty and justice for all. Immigrants have been an important part of our strength, success, and prosperity throughout history.

Sometimes, the only way to justice, is on the wings of mercy. †

*Unauthorized immigrants collectively paid \$1.2 billion in personal income taxes, \$1.6 billion in property taxes, and \$8.4 billion in sales taxes in 2010 according to the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) Report April 18, 2011.



*Do not neglect
to show hospitality
to strangers,
for by doing so some
have entertained angels
unawares.*

(Hebrews 13:2)

CAMP EVOLUUTION IS FOR YOUU

-by Shannon Boston, Children's Religious Education Administrator



Are science and the divine mutually exclusive? Can mystery, wonder, and awe be reconciled with the theory of evolution? Is there a way to explain scientific facts while maintaining respect for the transcendent?

Absolutely! Our place in the natural world and the marvelous story of how we came about is one of the greatest stories a child can learn. While school boards bicker, text books are edited, and individual teachers decide what they are willing to teach, at All Souls' Camp Evoluution, we will provide a coherent, science-based cosmology that traces our way back to the origins and mystery of the Universe and the awesome purpose of our existence.

All Souls' Children's Religious Education Department is hosting its second annual week-long, summer day camp during the first week of August. Last year's very successful camp, Know YoUUr Stuff, focused on the environment – how we affect it and what we can do to make a positive difference in our world. This year we are excited to announce Camp Evoluution based on the *Universe Story Trilogy* by Jennifer Morgan. Campers and counselors will explore lessons about the beginning of the universe, the birth of the earth, the first animals, and how we came into our present life on Earth. You can find detailed information about this curriculum at www.universestories.com.

While providing our first through sixth graders with an in-depth and scientifically accurate picture of the origins of the Universe and the Theory of Evolution, we will engage their minds, bodies, and spirits in a week of fun and friendship. Along with the science that will naturally be a segment of this topic, camp will include drama, art, music, team-building, and outdoor activities.

A camp experience gives children the opportunity and time to make new friends and to deepen existing



relationships. Kids representing Tulsa schools both public and private, Jenks, Union, Broken Arrow, Sand Springs, and even more far-flung districts come to our weekly Sunday school program. Giving them an intensive opportunity to bond can help create community and foster desire to come to church throughout the year.

Last spring, when a team of Children's Religious Education Board members began planning All Souls' first summer camp we thought this might be the case,

we had no idea of the overwhelmingly positive response we would receive from the kids. Camper comments repeatedly overheard included, “Why can’t we have camp every week?” and “I can’t wait for Sunday!”

In addition to building relationships with their peers, campers also get the chance to bond with our youth. Junior Counselors (grades 10-12) and Counselors in Training (grades 7-9) work closely with small groups of campers. This arrangement is mutually beneficial; it furnishes our youth with an impetus to be positive role models and provides our children with mentors in the church community. Now the youth, rather than disappearing into the Sponge Room every Sunday, are sharing high-fives and fist-bumps with the children. †

Camp EvoJUtion is open to children entering first through sixth grades in fall 2011. In addition, Linda Caldwell, coordinator for the pre-kindergarten program at Grimes Elementary School, is leading “mini-campers” for children entering pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. Both programs are from 9:00-3:00, August 1-5, at a cost of \$125 if you register by May 22. An additional \$25 fee will be charged for registration after that date.

Junior Counselors and Counselors-in-Training receive a day of training on Saturday, July 30 and are in programming from 8:30-3:30 during the week of camp. To apply for a JC or CiT position, pick up a packet in the family room or contact Shannon Boston. Completed applications are due May 22, and the registration fee of \$50.00 must be paid by July 20, 2011.

Our Summer Camp is possible thanks to the committed adult volunteers who dedicate time, talents, energy, and heart to make the week a success. If you are interested in the subject matter, have experience in the classroom, or have talent in art, drama, music, group games, or something we haven’t thought of that might fit right in, please contact Shannon Boston to fill out a volunteer application. Volunteers may enroll their children 3-years old and younger in our childcare program. There is no charge for these younger campers.

To register for camp, go to the SummerCamp Registration link at www.AllSoulsChurch.org. For more information contact Shannon Boston, Children’s Religious Education Administrator, at 918-743-2805, ext. 321 or [email](mailto:shannon@allsoulschurch.org).



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

Recommended Reading on Mercy

Hunger and Happiness: Feeding the Hungry, Nourishing Our Souls

by L. Shannon Jung

Chapters address particular aspects of a global food policy that insures cheap food for some at great expense to many others. Jung considers the psychological and theological implications of such policy and after assessing the moral ramifications of cheap food, offers possibilities for alleviating physical hunger in the world and spiritual malaise in our lives.

Touching the World: Christian Communities Transforming Society

by Dan McKanan

From the days of the apostles to the present, Christians have formed intentional communities. While some withdraw to avoid contamination from "the world," others reach out in loving service. Dan McKanan advocates the latter approach: Christians must be willing to "touch the world" in order to unleash the transformative potential of their communities. In this book, McKanan explores two contemporary community movements that touch the world by honoring the diverse spiritual and vocational paths of the families and individuals who join them.

Peaceful Action, Open Heart: Lessons from the Lotus Sutra

by Thich Nhat Hanh

After exploring both the historical and ultimate chapters of the Lotus Sutra, Thich Nhat Hanh defines the "action dimension." As he puts it, "We can help people of the historical dimension get in touch with their ultimate nature so that they can live joyfully in peace and freedom." This is the bodhisattva path, and here he offers concrete practice examples for living as a bodhisattva within the modern world.

Social Justice Handbook: Small Steps for a Better World

by Mae Elise Cannon

Social Justice Handbook is a long overdue work. Despite the resurgence of interest in justice by many churches, there has been a noticeable lack of available resources on this topic. Mae Cannon gives us the biblical framework that can spur churches to action as well as giving us practical tips and real-life models and examples of how justice can be lived out in our world. For any individual, Christian fellowship or church wanting to grow in the area of biblical social justice, this is the book you want to get.

To Do Justice: A Guide for Progressive Christians

Edited by Rebecca Todd Peters and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty

"An excellent way to begin to understand the social, economic, and political issues facing this country, whether as a read-alone, or, even better, among adult discussion groups at church or in one's neighborhood." - www.forwardreviews.com

My Mercy Encompasses:

All The Koran's Teachings on Compassion, Peace & Love

by Reza Shah-Kazemi

"Shah-Kazemi notes that in Islam, love is seen as the fountain-head of creation. 'I was a hidden treasure,' God declares, 'and I loved to be known, so I created the world.' God's love is infinite and reflects the pre-eminence of God's Mercy over all things, even anger. Shah-Kazemi concludes that "whenever God is described in terms of compassion and peace and love, it is always implied that the soul is being called upon to assimilate these qualities." - www.spiritualityandpractice.com

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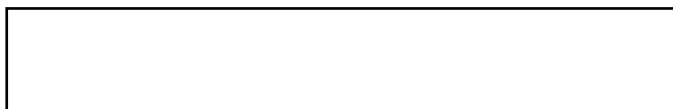
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May Highlights

- May 1 All Souls 303
Congregational Meeting
Phoenix Rising Art Show
- May 5 Senior Game Day
- May 6 Soulful Sundown - **Sisters of Mercy**
- May 8 Flower Communion / Mother's Day
- May 10 Open Women's Group
- May 12 Day Alliance
- May 14 Supper Club (offsite)
- May 15 MUSIC WEEK BEGINS: Cherub, Children's, &
Youth Choirs perform in both worship services
- May 18 Last **Wednesday Connections** until Fall
Newcomers Board
- May 20 Parents' Night Out
Last **Evening of Praise** until Fall
- May 21 Young Adult Ropes Course
Karaoke Carnival
- May 22 Blood Pressure Screening
All Souls Reads
Adult Music Concert
- May 24 Evening Alliance
- May 25 High Def Praise
- May 26 Board of Trustees

SEE INSIDE FOR

PARISH NOTES

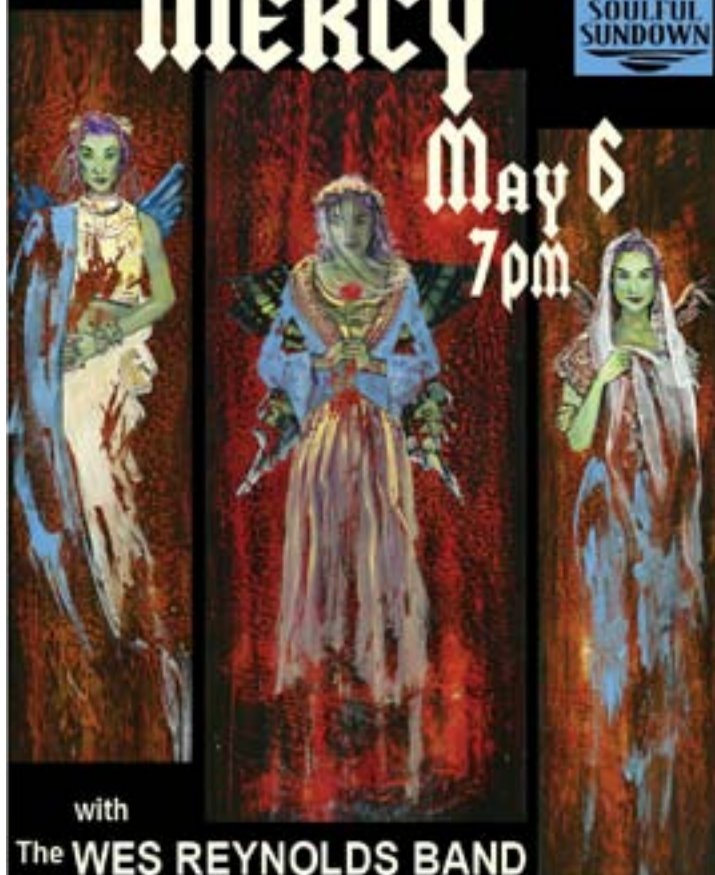
The All Souls Weekly Bulletin

Explore the intersection of music, arts, & spirituality

Sisters of Mercy



May 6
7pm



with
The **WES REYNOLDS BAND**
featuring **KRYSTAL LACEY**