



# commUNITY

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## Resistance

Each month worship, religious education, community outreach ministry, covenant groups, and Wellspring Wednesday programs will offer opportunities to contemplate, consider, contend with and discuss an intergenerational curriculum based on monthly themes. Our hope is that this approach will bind us more closely together and inform our lives in positive ways. January's theme is... Resistance.

One doesn't generally think of resistance as a theological theme, but think again. If theology is the study of the nature of God and of religious truth then how we acquiesce to or resist the forces which shape our lives becomes a profoundly theological question. Life itself is a gift and as such calls for the discipline of gratitude. Anything which degrades or attenuates our lives is an affront to the Holy and should therefore be resisted.

Let's begin at home. We don't really want young children to learn resistance. We want them to achieve a certain level of compliance before they begin to push back. But at a certain point we want our children to move beyond compliance as they develop a deeper sense of who they are and what values really matter most. We want them to resist the message that **things** will make them happy. We want our children to learn to resist the barrage of images that make them feel bad about themselves. We want them to learn to resist negative peer pressure and go it alone when their values require it. It's an uphill battle. But the struggle is well worth the cost.

Resistance is not always a positive force. We find it at play in both personal and interpersonal dynamics. Why, for instance, do we resist change even when we know we need it?

The most obvious example of the negative potential of resistance is addiction. We fall so easily into the delusion that we can fill the emptiness inside us with drugs or alcohol or

sex or overwork. And though we know that only God can fill that emptiness many of us are unable to break away from our dependence. We resist our own deep knowing. We know brain chemistry is partly responsible for addictive behavior but our unwillingness to change our lives in positive ways is also a spiritual crisis. When the recovery movement recommends that we "let go and let God," they're pointing us to an ancient truth we need very much to embrace in our times. Sometimes resistance is the way we hold ourselves back from spiritual surrender.

There are times when resistance is the only moral option. There are times when we have no choice but to stand against the tide, to stand firm and say no. Gandhi was a lawyer and a rather staid professional who finally couldn't stand it anymore. Having been exposed to Thoreau's essay "On Civil Disobedience," he saw a glimmer of possibility in nonviolent resistance. He called it "satyagraha," soul force. As a seminarian, Martin Luther King Jr. learned of Gandhi's success. He put soul force to work as part of a community of resistance comprised of women and men who would no longer acquiesce to organized prejudice.

Whether we know it or not we stand in the lineage of resistance. Every great tradition teaches us to expand the circle of family until it embraces all life. When we understand ourselves as inseparably connected, when compassion awakens us to the suffering of others, resistance becomes our birthright and our obligation.

Monthly theme resources are also available online at [www.unityunitarian.org](http://www.unityunitarian.org)

### Worship Theme Resources

#### BOOKS

**My Experiments with Truth**

BN Publishing 2008

The autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi.

**An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum**

Henry Holt & Co 1996

**Civil Disobedience**

Wilder Publications 2008

Henry David Thoreau

#### FILMS

**Star Trek: First Contact** (1996)

"Resistance is futile." But not really.

**I Am Sam** (2001) Sean Penn as a developmentally disabled man fighting for custody of his daughter.

**Good Night, Good Luck** (2005) Against the threat of Communism abroad and McCarthyism on the domestic front, Edward R. Murrow (David Strathairn) and Fred Friendly (George Clooney) of CBS News mustered the courage to take a stand against fear and ideological persecution.

**Norma Rae** (1979) Sally Field as a courageous single mother who helps to organize the plant where she works.

**The Secret of NIMH** (1982) To save her ill son, a field mouse must seek the aid of a colony of super-intelligent rats, to whom she has a deeper link to than she ever suspected. (Family)

**Amazing Grace and Chuck** (1988) Chuck Murdock is the top pitcher of the little league team. After taking a tour of a nuclear silo, Chuck decides to quit playing little league until nuclear weapons are disarmed. Can one kid's act of resistance make the world listen? (Family)

Resources for parents and children, see page 12.



## *Resistance: Unity's Monthly Theme for Parents and Children*

Resistance can be a bit of a tricky topic for people who are raising kids. For younger children, especially, *compliance* is actually a survival trait and — dare we say it? — a desirable behavior, from a parent's point of view. Even if it seems unfair, do we really want our toddler to resist her 7:30 p.m. bedtime? Even if it seems meaningless, do we really want our teenager to resist going to school or coming to church? Our children spend their young lives trying to figure out “the system” and how they fit into it, whether that system is family, school, society or the cosmos. Discerning which parts of the system merit compliance and which resistance is a skill that comes with maturity and experience. Testing the boundaries often tests parents' patience.

Yet, the world into which our children are growing up is filled with forces that we hope they will resist: oppression, hatred, injustice, violence. We feel compelled to hold up lives of extraordinary courage, examples of Resistance (with a capital “R”), so that our children might be inspired to live out their own values in a similar way.

There are countless historical figures who resisted systems of injustice and violence who, without fail, fascinate kids as they grow and learn. Another important form that Children's literature offers excellent retellings of the lives of resisters.

Books on the subject of resistance:

- Becker, May Lamberton. *Youth Replies, 'I can': Stories of Resistance*. Knopf, 1938. (Ages 10+) This hard-to-find classic collects folktales, fiction and history from around the world in read-aloud format
- Demi. *Ghandi*. Scholastic, 2001. (Ages 7-10) A beautifully illustrated chronicle of Mohandas Gandhi's leadership
- Beals, Melba Patillo. *Warriors Don't Cry*. Simon Pulse, 2007. (Ages 12+) The autobiography of one of the Little Rock Nine

- Rappaport, Doreen. *No More!* Candlewick, 2005. (Ages 9-12) Stories and songs of slave resistance
- Scott, Sharon. *How to Say No and Keep Your Friends*. A guide for adolescents navigating peer pressure

Films for families:

- *Veggie Tales: Rack, Shack and Benny*. Big Idea, 2002. DVD (not rated). A retelling of the Bible story that celebrates resistance to peer pressure
- *Ruby Bridges*. Disney, 1998. DVD (not rated). The true story of an African-American child during integration
- *Au Revoir, les Enfants (Goodbye, Children)*. A French film about a Catholic school that hides Jewish children during WWII (available from Netflix)
- *Breaking Away*. 20th Century Fox, 1979. DVD/VHS (rated PG) An adolescent coming-of-age story about a would-be bicyclist who refuses to conform to his family's expectations

### Our Own Resisters Martha and Waitstill Sharp



Youth who have learned about the Holocaust may be interested in learning more about the Sharps, founders of the Unitarian (Universalist) Service Committee. Unfortunately, there aren't any books written for young readers about these two Unitarians, but the UUSC has a documentary in post-production.

From the website of *Journey to Freedom*, ([www.journeytofreedomfilm.com](http://www.journeytofreedomfilm.com)) the upcoming film about the lives of these two Unitarian heroes:

Just days prior to the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, Waitstill Sharp, a Unitarian minister, and his wife Martha, a social worker, left their young children

in Wellesley, MA, to embark on an uncertain journey. At a time when most Americans were either ignorant of or indifferent to the clouds of war gathering over Europe, this unassuming pair of New Englanders plunged into the storm. Armed only with their faith and determination, they helped feed and shelter thousands of refugees and matched wits with the Gestapo to help anti-Nazi dissidents and Jews escape to safety. When the Nazis forced them to close their operation, they briefly returned to the embrace of their family and congregation in the U.S., only to leave for France where they would once again put the well being of their fellow human beings ahead of their own comfort and safety. Who were these ‘American Schindlers’ and what is their legacy for us today?

When Waitstill and Martha Sharp were recognized as Righteous among the Nations at Yad Vashem — the highest recognition accorded by the state of Israel to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the World War II — they became only the second and third Americans to be so honored among more than 21,000 others from around the world. Theirs is a unique, compelling story that reveals an almost unknown chapter of Holocaust history and shines a new light on America's relationship to it. The era between the wars was one of disillusion and difficulty for religious liberals. Economic hardship prevailed. Isolation and intolerance were on the rise. Racist and anti-Semitic demagogues enjoyed enthusiastic radio audiences. Few American voices were raised as Hitler consolidated power, codified his violent anti-Semitism and methodically began to envelop his neighbors. It was from this America that the Sharps departed for Prague in early 1939 to help a beleaguered Czech Unitarian colleague, whose plea had been, “Don't send money, send Americans.”

Our symbol, the flaming chalice, comes to us out of their unwavering stewardship of the fire of justice and their lives' work as beacons for human dignity.