

commUNITY

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Unity

This month we mark the start of a new church year by instituting an integrated, intergenerational curriculum based on monthly themes. Each month, from September through June, worship, religious education, covenant groups and Wellspring Wednesday programs will offer opportunities to contemplate, consider, contend with and discuss a theological theme. Our hope is that this approach will bind us more closely together and inform our lives in effective and positive ways. This month's theme is... Unity.

The word "unity" points to a number of our key values. Each church year begins with a ritual at which we merge the waters of the world. On September 7, when we come together at Harriet Island to worship as one family, we will embody one essential meaning of "unity." As people who care deeply about the earth and its creatures we affirm and promote the understanding that we are part of "the interconnected web of all existence." Unity has an ecological dimension. When we recognize that everything is connected we are inspired to be mindful of the effects of our actions. Native Americans ask us to live with an awareness of seven generations. This worldview refers not only to the future but to the past and to the present as well. We are asked to remember three generations past, to imagine three generations forward and to live in the moment informed both by history and prophetic vision.

The name of our church, Unity Church-Unitarian, recalls the years when Unitarianism and Universalism were struggling with whether or not to remain within the Christian fold. In the wake of the Transcendentalist controversy, a number of young ministers inspired by

Emerson and Parker in particular, felt they could no longer in good conscience call themselves Christian. In the latter half of the 19th century

both Unitarianism and Universalism were avowedly Christian movements. Church leaders were wary of these Transcendentalist radicals and sought to exclude them from the ministry. Fleeing the confines of the Eastern seaboard, the radicals moved to the Western frontier, to Michigan, Illinois, Iowa and yes, to Minnesota. They called themselves "the Unity Men." They preached that the experience of the Holy was the same regardless of language or religious tradition. They taught that beliefs were not the essence of religion, that "deeds not creeds" were at the heart of moral life and that the three pillars of liberal religion ought to be freedom, fellowship and character. William Channing Gannett, second minister of Unity Church, and his friend and colleague, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, were the key leaders of the Unity movement within the liberal church. It was Gannett's essay *Things Commonly Believed Among Us* which finally convinced Unitarians to move beyond Christian sectarianism and embrace a larger view.

So the word Unity has an historical meaning for us which in turn points to a theological position. If one believes that the experience of the Holy is the same experience whether one is a Christian or a Jew, a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim, it's only logical to posit that God is either all or nothing. One experience. One God. Absolute unity. The minute one begins to cut creation up into pieces claiming one piece is godly and another is not, one has planted the seeds of violence and

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Worship Theme Resources

Books

American Transcendentalism (2007) Unitarian Universalist historian Phillip Gura offers a vibrant story of the philosophers and activists who shaped the American mind and led liberal religion beyond sectarian limits.

Yes to a Global Ethic: Voices from Religion and Politics edited by Hans Kung.

The Mind's Eye by Timothy Ferris. Exploring the scientific research about mystic experiences of the unity of all.

Infinite in All Directions (2004) the great physicist, Freeman Dyson, publishes his *Gifford Lectures* in praise of diversity.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965) the classic story of one man's journey from racial isolation to all embracing love.

Film

The Englishman Who Went Down a Hill and Came up a Mountain (1995) a family comedy in which the whole village responds to disappointing news.

Amazing Grace (2007) a marvelously well-crafted historical drama about the struggle to end slavery in England.

Norma Rae (1979) Sally Field stars in this film about union organizing.

Pay it Forward (2000) how one boy wants to make a real difference. Do watch it with your older children.

On the Web

Gannett's essay: *Things Commonly Believed Among Us* at www.unityunitarian.org.

PARENTS!
Check out the special worship theme activity and resources for kids on page 9.

I am part and parcel of the whole and cannot find God apart from the rest of humanity. — Mahatma Gandhi

SEPTEMBER SUNDAY WORSHIP INFORMATION

Sunday services are held at 9:00 and 11:00 a.m., and 4:30 p.m. except where noted.

Sermon podcasts and archives are available on line at www.unityunitarian.org.

September Worship Calendar - Worship Theme: *Unity*

September 7: *Merging the Waters of the World*

One 10:00 a.m. service only at Harriet Island

Bring the water you have collected from your journeys this summer and come merge the waters of the world in a service of reunion with the whole Unity Church congregation - all on the banks of the Mississippi River. Our ministers, Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs, will conduct the service and will be joined by Director of Religious Education, Kerri Meyer, 2008-09 Hallman Ministerial Intern, Leon Dunkley, and musical guests Peter Mayer and the Eclectics. Detail for this special worship service are all on the back cover of this newsletter.

September 14: *What's in a Name?* — Rob Eller-Isaacs

The founders of our church chose their words carefully. For them the word pointed to the unity of religious experience. For us the word implies a quality of curiosity, engagement and respect. Are we living up to our name? Rob will be in the pulpit and Allen Giles will serve as Worship Associate.

September 21:

E Pluribus Unum: Our Covenant With the New Americans — Janne Eller-Isaacs

Religions have an important role to play in promoting unity in a pluralistic world, but so often they provide a divisive and divided view of society. How can the liberal church be a more effective voice for unity that also honors our diversity? Janne and Worship Associate Ann Kirby McGill will explore this important issue.

September 28: *Moral Ownership* — Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs

Who are the moral owners of Unity Church? What is the relationship between personal and institutional morality? How can we move from "charity to solidarity" in our efforts for social justice? Rob and Janne will be joined by Worship Associate Jean Olson.

'Unity' continued from front cover

undermined the possibility of peace. Some traditions portray the aspects of the Holy with a wide array of images. Hindus and Buddhists bow down before a multiplicity of images but they also recognize the ultimate unity of God. Jews and Muslims (and to a large degree Unitarian Universalists) distrusting the dance of images and fearing the dangers of idolatry, imagine one God without form while slipping all too easily into anthropomorphism by worshipping "God the Father." Unity asks that we recognize, respect and celebrate it all while always being wary of those aspects of ourselves and of the world we need to guard against if evil is to be kept at bay.

If one lives secure in the knowledge that one is part of "the interconnected web of all existence," and if one believes that the experience of the Holy is one without regard to language or culture and if one holds to the theological position of the unity of God then one has no choice but to recognize that the human condition implies and requires that we cultivate a sense of social solidarity. There is a justice dimension to the concept of unity. However flawed our practice may be, as a faith tradition and, in fact, as a nation, we have committed ourselves to "e pluribus Unum," out of many, one. Our approach to social justice embodies this message as we seek to enter into partnerships with people whose core values we share, people from whom we can learn and with whom we can work for positive change. To work toward unity is to practice mutual respect across all of the dividing lines, particularly race, class and gender identity. Understood these ways unity becomes our birthright and our obligation.

Sunday Offering Recipients

September 7 — The **Iowa Flood Relief** was established by the UUA Prairie Star District. Fifteen households from the Unitarian Society of Iowa City have been flooded. Some lost everything. In addition, a number of church members are employed by the University of Iowa which suffered millions of dollars of damage. It is likely that church members' livelihoods will be affected. Through our generosity we offer a reassuring and urgent gesture of solidarity to those whose lives have been ripped apart by the raging flood waters.

September 14 — **Project for Pride in Living (PPL) Emergency Repair Program** is a decades-old program to assist low-income and disadvantaged homeowners — such as unemployed or underemployed households, families with children, the elderly and physically disabled persons living in the Twin Cities with essential home repairs that threaten the stability of their homeownership. Several PPL staff members have given presentations at Unity Church at the invitation of the Unity Church Affordable Housing Ministry Team.

September 21 — **To be announced.**

September 28 — **AMICUS** is a Minnesota not-for-profit organization with over 40 years of experience in improving public safety by helping inmates and ex-offenders through positive relationship-building, restorative justice practices and individual transition services. Through innovative programming, AMICUS helps inmates and ex-offenders reshape their lives, reach their goals, and make successful transitions from prison into the community. AMICUS is the community partner of the Unity Church Restorative Justice Ministry Team. Longtime Unity Church member, Louise Wolfram, is president of AMICUS.



R.E. Parent Orientations

Mark your calendar and attend one of the following orientations:

- Wednesday, September 10
7:15-8:15 p.m. (After Wellspring Wednesday Dinner)
- Saturday, September 13
10:00-11:00 a.m. (After the Pancake Breakfast)

Whether you've been involved with Unity for years or months, you'll benefit from this hour-long orientation which includes an introduction to staff and lay leaders as well as information on the following topics: Unity's theological framework for R.E., tips for a positive worship experience with kids, the congregation's commitment to and expectations of R.E. families, and basic faith development stages. Time will be reserved at the end of the session for questions and answers.

Childcare will be provided; only one parent need attend. We hope you will take advantage of this great opportunity to meet other R.E. parents and acquire valuable information about our Ministry with Children and Youth!

Bless the World: Teach R.E. at Unity!

Teachers are needed in the following program areas:

9:00 a.m. Service:

- Drama and Art Workshop Leaders (6 weeks, Fall or Winter)

11:00 a.m. Service:

- Spirit Play preschool teachers (10 Sundays throughout the year)
- Journey Guides, Grades 1-2 and Grades 5-6 (September - January)
- Drama, Art and Music Workshop Leaders (6 weeks, Fall or Winter)
- High Feasts and Holy Days Junior High teachers (September - January)
- UU History and Identity Junior High teachers (September - January)

4:30 p.m. Service:

- Spirit Play preschool teachers (10 Sundays throughout the year)
- Workshop Rotation teachers (6 weeks, Fall, Winter or Spring)
- High Feasts and Holy Days Junior High teachers (September - January)

Religious Education Begins September 14!

Our Sunday School programs begin the 14th and continue through mid-May. Children must be registered for classes by September 7 in order to participate in the first Sunday of classes. Children registered after September 7, will be warmly welcomed on Sunday, September 21. Confirmation letters and calendars were mailed out in early August; if your family didn't receive a letter, your children may not be enrolled - contact Kerri at the Church Office.

On the first Sunday of R.E.:

- Escort preschoolers directly to their Spirit Play classroom
- At 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., escort Workshop Rotation children to the Ames Chapel
- At 11:00 a.m., attend the first part of worship in the Sanctuary with your Workshop Rotation students and, if necessary, help them find their Journey Guide when they are blessed out to Sunday School
- Junior High youth can find their own way to and from their classes

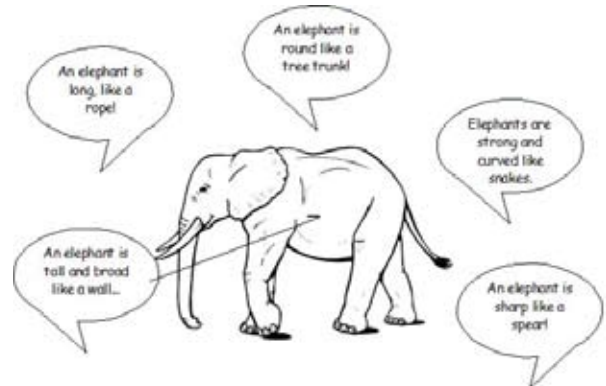
UNITY for Kids: One Big Elephant!

Can you remember all the way back to last September? Our Sunday School lessons were about the story, *The Blind Philosophers and the Elephant*? This old story from the Hindu faith talks about how sometimes we think we know what a BIG thing is when really, we can only feel one SMALL part.

Our Unitarian ancestors thought that God was like that great elephant in the story. One person can only know a SMALL part of God, but even if everyone we meet seems to feel something different, we're actually all touching the same BIG thing that is God. Arguing about the small parts didn't help the blind philosophers figure out the ONE BIG thing, did it? See if you remember the whole story well enough to tell it to your parent.

The picture at right might help you remember parts of the story. Can you connect what each philosopher thought an elephant was to the part of the elephants body that he or she was touching?

Unitarian Universalists believe that every religion, every source of wisdom, no matter how different, is all about ONE THING. That's the idea of unity that our church is named after. We're glad you're part of Unity Church – Unitarian – you can help us figure out something about God!



Books for children about the idea of 'Unity':

The Everything Seed, by Carole Martignacco

Stone Soup, by Jon J. Muth

Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez, by Kathleen Krull

God In Between, by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso