

Simple Gifts

Sept. 2007 *The All Souls Journal*
Vol. V, Issue I

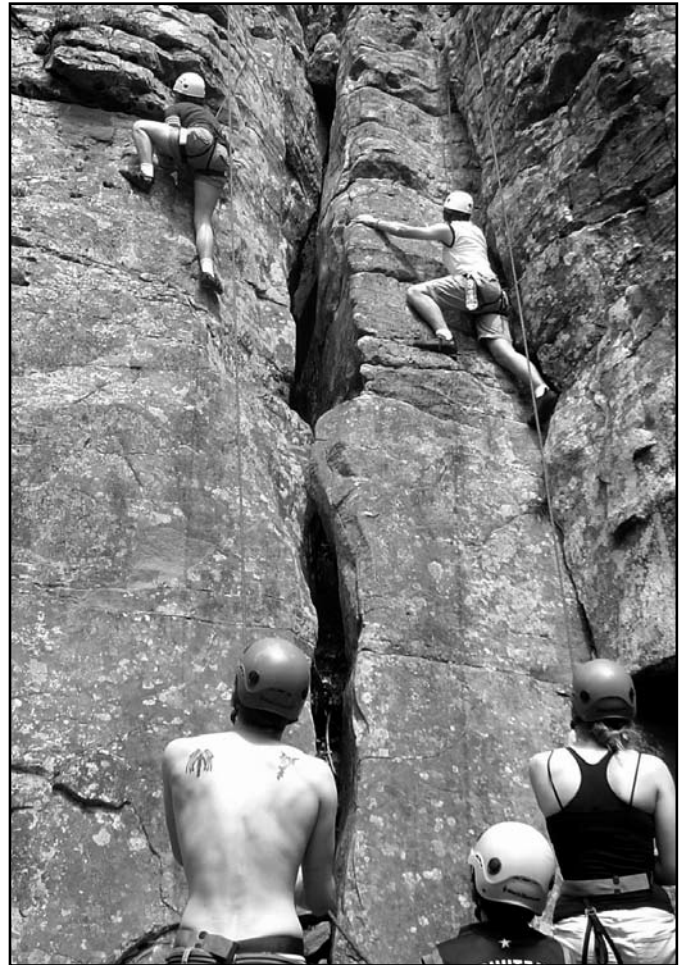
The Vision of All Souls' Monthly Themes

by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister

The church year at All Souls, September through May, includes monthly themes that give focus to worship and programming across the generations. There are three series of nine monthly themes, and this fall we are entering the third year themes for the second time.

Congregants are offered multiple ways to engage the themes through worship, classes, branches groups, newsletter articles, at home practices for individuals and families, and a reading list. The resources are provided so that each person can decide how deeply to engage a particular theme. Children maintain journals on the themes so they will have a record of their own theological understanding at various stages of their personal, spiritual and cognitive development. The themes offer the congregation (across the generations) a common set of stories, ideas, and topics to converse about each month.

The story each month is usually Bible based, but occasionally the lead story is about famous Unitarians and Universalists. Each month, stories from other cultures and religions are used to demonstrate how similar topics are dealt with in other traditions. Members are given the opportunity to increase their Biblical literacy and to develop a theology informed by many faiths and rooted in Unitarian Universalism.



Seniors on their Spirit qUuest. See article, page 10.

Why Do We Use Themes:

Themes offer our congregation a common language of faith, a common set of stories, and a clear and systematic map for developing our own understanding of theology and liberal religion. Members are given ways to engage their religious life at various levels of

Continued page 2...

Tunnel Vision † Wake Now, My Senses † Vision Personified † Holy Conversations



depth and understanding. The result is a congregation with members who are competent in the areas of liberal theology, Biblical literacy, and religious and spiritual ways of dealing with life's losses and successes.

The themes offer coordination and collaboration between the Sunday school programming for children and youth and what is being discussed by the adults in worship, classes, and small groups. Themes provide for community-building and inter-generational religious learning.

Offering such a method of theological learning in church gives people resources to prepare for challenges prior to encountering them. It is difficult to suddenly develop a spiritual life and an understanding of the most important concepts for living when one is in the midst of dealing with a major life crisis. For example, it is often when someone receives a terminal diagnosis that he begins to explore death and the meaning of life, or when she has been betrayed that she begins to try to understand forgiveness. However, when a person has an intimate understanding of major life issues prior to encountering them and also has an ongoing spiritual practice, he or she can move through life's travails with greater integrity, grace, and acceptance.

With a theme-based approach, people are able to develop resources throughout their lives, and not just at times when they are in the midst of a crisis. They carry these religious resources with them and are able to draw on them as they deal with the vicissitudes of life.

Who Created Theme-Based Ministry:

The All Souls Ministry Team and staff have been developing the theme-based ministry approach for the past seven years with the help of many lay leaders within the church. Within the past few years some other congregations around the nation have begun adopting the theme-based approach to religious life. †

The 2007 Themes:

September's theme is **Vision**.

As we discover our vocation we must develop a vision of how to use our unique gifts.

October's theme is **Creation**.

One unique human quality is the capacity to imagine, create, and bring new things into being.

In November we explore **Democracy**.

Democracy is born of the revolutionary idea that individuals can govern themselves and can choose to put the common good above their own self-interest.

Then, in December we will explore concepts of **God**.

January's theme is **Evil**.

We will explore the role of real and perceived evil in our lives.

February's theme is **Religious Authority**.

Is it possible that the final authority in religion is oneself?

March will lead us to **Freedom**, a concept intrinsic to our faith as well as to our country.

April will offer us **Redemption**.

The possibility for redemption after we have made a mistake or caused harm is a great blessing.

We will end in May with **Mercy**.

Even at times when justice is beyond our reach, there is the possibility for mercy.

Tunnel Vision



About four times a week, you'll find me running along the Arkansas river with my dog and a friend on the Riverparks trail. Many of you know this; I almost always see someone from the church on these outings. There is something very

comforting about that: knowing there are others who tread the same path, with shared interests and values. After so long, I have come to expect to see these faces, as well as other familiar faces and dogs with nothing more to our relationship than the persistent showing up. That counts for quite a bit in my book.

I am training for a half marathon. I like to have a goal or I am not as consistent in my exercise as I would like to be. Although you may not believe me, my pace is steady and slow. I have never been much of a sprinter. I commit to the task and plow ahead, checking in regularly with myself and the environment to make sure I do no harm.

Occasionally, I have felt myself getting heavy, and my peripheral vision narrowing to only the path and the few feet ahead of me. It is not a good feeling to see

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Assistant Minister

the world in such a way. There is so much to miss on the periphery that can be brought into focus. I have learned from years of running that this happens most often when I am not taking proper care of myself: when I am not sleeping enough, or eating enough protein, or drinking enough water.

Recently I realized how metaphorical my experience is. When we are not caring for ourselves we develop tunnel-vision, only able to see the next task to be done, the next few feet along the path. As this metaphor unfolded for me, what I noticed in the periphery brought to center stage were the values of the river - words stenciled all along the path on the water mains - patience, tolerance, persistence, timeliness, thoughtfulness...

When we have treated ourselves with intention, it is easier to be patient, to see our persistence, to recognize another's thoughtfulness, to rule time instead of allowing time to rule us.

As you go through your week, think about how you might widen your visual field by taking care of yourself first. It is not selfish; it is healthy. †

Holy Conversations

-Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister

This fall our congregation will engage in a series of "Holy Conversations" in which we will discuss a vision of who we are, what's important to us, what we are called to do, and what we believe is within our capacity as a faith community. These conversations grow out of our desire for All Souls to continue to maintain its historic and formative role in helping shape this city and fashion people's lives.

In such conversations people risk saying what they believe and what's meaningful to them. With more and more people finding All Souls to be an inspiring church home, we know that to maintain the quality of experience and ministry that we appreciate will require courageous vision and bold leadership. As we continue to bear this proud tradition that has been handed on to us, we look to the future with hope and great expectations. I encourage broad congregational participation in these conversations. †

Vision



It's September. Welcome to our ingathering from summer's diversity of experience. I am mindful that for some of us, the summer has been long and difficult – because of pain and struggle with the loss of a loved one, illness, relationship concerns, job issues, or money matters. However, I am hopeful for those of you to whom some or all of this applies that you have received comfort and support from the staff and members of our church community. I am also mindful of the happy surprises, joys, and adventures that summer frequently brings: vacations that renew our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits. No matter what age you are, no matter what your circumstance, summer offers opportunities to slow down and take a look around.

As we celebrate the beginning of another church year, I am reminded of the trite but true exercise that greeted me during my grade school years - the required initial essay entitled, "What I Did on My Summer Vacation." My family couldn't afford to travel much. That meant I needed to be creative. My essays included bird watching, organizing neighborhood softball games, bike riding, and building a clubhouse from found wood and rusty nails. From that experience, I learned that the vision of possibilities does not require lots of money; it requires openness, attention, imagination, and persistence.

As a child I exercised my inner vision when I interpreted the things my eyes saw. I told myself stories. These stories helped me make sense of my world and gave me a feeling of freedom and power. For instance, I recall riding my blue bicycle around and around the large field at Oklahoma Methodist Manor. I sang every song I could remember from the *Sound of Music* – at the top of my lungs. Then my bike and I rested beneath a great elm tree. I imagined this tree had heard and accepted my singing,

-by Rev. Debra Garfinkel, Minister of Pastoral Care

just as it did the songs of cardinals, blue jays, and mockingbirds. I felt comforted and protected by this large and (to me) ancient tree. It stood through wind and weather, deeply rooted in the sandy clay, rocky soil mix and continued to reach high into the sky. My heart, mind, and soul could see beyond what my physical body perceived. In my childhood, my anxieties found rest and relief in looking to nature as an example of the timelessness of community and cooperation. Of course, I wouldn't have used those words but I felt that I was part of something much larger and stronger than myself. It is a beautiful vision that is available to us all.

I invite you to look with new eyes upon that which makes All Souls a caring community. It is our history and our legacy that lives within us and binds us together. Whether you have been a part of this congregation your entire life or are just becoming acquainted with us, may you experience the roots that anchor us in mutual care and respect. And may you also experience the many branches of our ways of being human, and the joys and challenges that enable us to stretch into the lively, unknown sky. Let us commit ourselves to taking the time we need to connect with nature through walks, floats, sits, or drives. Our ability to care for others increases with our ability to care for ourselves. So, I invite you to claim at least ten minutes every day for yourself. Reflect upon an aspect of the natural world that brings you comfort, strength, hope, joy, and peace. Then, when you are ready, you will see the world with shining, new eyes. I will look forward to greeting you and your shining eyes as we embark on our new church year at All Souls.



2008 Stewardship Campaign Branches Out

-by Kathy Keith, Executive Director

Taking on raising over a million dollars might sound monumental, but Alisha Loftin has approached it with enthusiasm. She's gathered a diverse committee of church members who are sharing their gifts and talents in this year's fundraising effort and getting off to an early start toward funding programs and operations for 2008.



Alisha and Richard Loftin, 2008 Stewardship Chairs, with their sons, Connor and Evan

To end the campaign, an all-church celebration on Oct. 14, "Association Sunday," organized by Stacey Craig, Kathleen Pataki, and Gunilla Bachenburg will feature a picnic on the grounds, music and festivities with a special appearance by Unitarian Universalist Association President Bill Sinkford.

The campaign will officially launch on Sept. 23, but pledges are already flowing in. Those who pledge on or before the 23rd will be recognized for their commitment with a commemorative pin reflecting the "staying rooted, branching out" theme. Individual church boards are encouraged to compete for participation. Both initiatives were engineered by Rain Johnson.

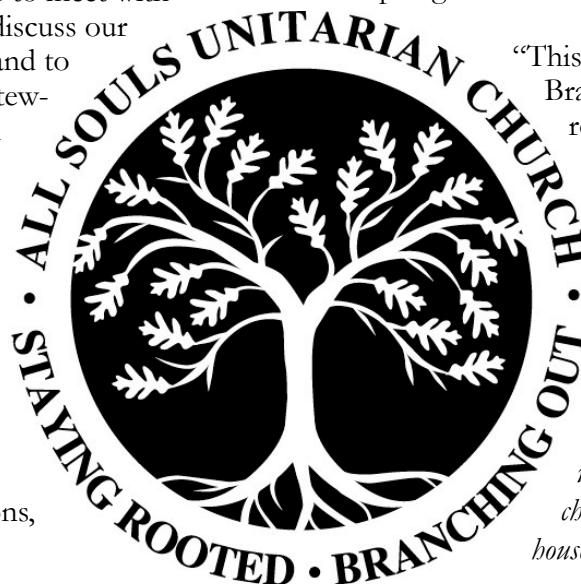
"Richard and I look at supporting All Souls as one of the necessities of life, budgeting for our contribution just as we budget for mortgage, utilities, and other household needs," said Alisha.

"In order to help support this important decision, we'll offer opportunities to meet with stewards in small groups, to discuss our pledges at cottage meetings, and to visit individually with those stewards, supported and recruited by Annie and Michael Simpson, Dallas Ferguson and Greg Bledsoe."

For more holistic financial planning resources, Brenda Berry has recruited nationally-known financial advisers for a four-week Personal Financial Planning course during Wednesday Connections, beginning Sept. 19.

A new stewardship video created by Ben Ihloff featuring 14 members of our congregation and music by Rick Fortner and Laurel Williamson is available on a DVD and on YouTube. Bill Ainsworth, Suzy Reeves, and church staff members Heather Hollingsworth and Laurel Williamson worked with Pam Rice creating the logo, text, and visual materials for the campaign.

"Unitarians seem to be able to talk about anything but money. We have to have money to have a church, and we have to be able to talk about money in order to fund it. Our goal this year is 100% participation – for every household to make a commitment – and for each to increase its pledge as much as possible" said Alisha. "In the pre-campaign effort, pledge increases have ranged from 3% to 178%."



"This year's theme, 'Staying Rooted, Branching Out,' honors the deep roots of our members and congregation and celebrates the many ways we're branching out. Richard and I are honored to branch out by chairing this campaign. Please join us by pledging early and enthusiastically." †

Pledge cards are available online at www.AllSoulsChurch.org, or from the church office. Pledge packets for each household will be available Sept. 9.

Spiritual Exercises



Prayer beads are an important part of almost every major religion of the world: Catholics pray the Rosary; Hindu Sadhus* chant mantras on their malas; Buddhists sit in silence with their beads; and Sufis

recite the names of Allah. These beads are often used to center one's self, to meditate, and to pray. In most traditions the beads are used by repeating a sacred word, name, or prayer on each of the beads. The words can be ancient mantras or something as simple as "peace" or "for the liberation of all beings."

This autumn I will teach a class that explores all of these great traditions, and includes a workshop in which everyone will have an opportunity to create their own personal strand of prayer beads and spiritual exercises in which to use the beads. I encourage everyone who is interested in world religions, the mystical path, or spiritual exercises, to participate in this three-session class.

For those of you who cannot wait, I offer this advice to begin experimenting with this powerful practice. Prayer beads are best made from natural substances. In any bead, craft, or art shop you are sure to find beads made from wood, glass, semi-precious stones, or seeds; plastic or resin beads may also be used. Choose cord made from cotton, leather, hemp, paper, or synthetic material. Prefabricated tassels are typically made from cotton, although they can be created from whatever cord you use to string the beads.

Making prayer beads is an activity easily adapted for most ages, and appropriate spiritual practices and prayers can certainly be created for everyone in the family. It is fun to first draw what the beads might

-by Jeremy T. Elliott, M.S.S.A., Ministerial Intern

look like—are they a single color or multiple colors, a single size or multiple sizes—and then see if you can find the materials you need to create the strand of beads. The search for the beads, cording, and other materials can become a spiritual pilgrimage for your family.

Choose colors, designs, patterns, and symbols that mean something to you. A friend of mine who connects with the divine through the earth used blues and greens to remind her of her favorite memories of rivers and forests. A Buddhist friend uses clear beads to remind him of emptiness and the light of awareness. Put time into making the prayer beads meaningful to you.

You can make multiple strands of beads for different purposes. I have one strand that I use to remind me of the presence of the divine, another that I use to meditate upon death, and a third for devotional chanting. It is a good idea, however, to start with one strand that you put a lot of time, thought, and energy into.

As you string each bead, offer a blessing to the bead. This blessing might incorporate the reason you are creating the beads, their purpose, or the prayer(s) that you plan to use with the completed strand. Say a final prayer when you complete the strand and offer thanks.

These practice tips are only the beginning. Sign up for the Adult Religious Education Class - Prayer Beads, Malas, and Rosaries. It will be a lot of fun and may result in a lifelong devotional spiritual practice. I look forward to seeing you in class. †

*Sadhu is the Sanskrit word for Holy Person.

Email jelliott@AllSoulsChurch.org for more information.

Vision Personified

-by *Kate Starr and Rev. Tamara Lebak*

Vision lives in a two-story house
with lots of windows and glass doors
that sits on a hill
overlooking the lights of the city on one side
and a dark, undeveloped landscape on the other.
Vision likes to be between
what's already been accomplished,
and the blank palette of possibility.

Every night before bed,
Vision kisses his wife Creation
and goes outside
to smoke a pipe and gaze at the stars.
A retired astronomer who explored
the far reaches of the universe,
the vastness of the nighttime sky fills Vision
with a sense of power and gratitude
for the abundance of the universe.
At the same time, the infinite
can make him feel insignificant
(a good practice,
as he tends to have a rather large ego).

During the day, Vision often joins Creation
in her greenhouse.
He loves to watch things grow.
He uses a jeweler's loupe
to examine the flowers in detail
taking him ever farther down the rabbit hole
to the galaxies within a single grain of pollen.

To relax, Vision loves to fly fish.
Tying his own flies teaches him patience.
Being in nature keeps him grounded.
He tried yoga, but found it difficult
to hold the positions for very long
and too much focus in the guided meditations
often made him astral project.

Although in college, Vision was diver
on the swim team,
these days he prefers to be carried along
by the cool, green water of the river where he fishes,
not far from his home.
He still likes to dive deep below the surface,
but now he also likes to go with the flow.

Vision knows he wasn't a very good Dad
when his kids Hope and Calling were small.
Hope has abandonment issues, and
his son will most likely repeat these mistakes with his
own children
if Calling also continues to spend more time
making plans than being in the moment.

Vision's eyesight isn't as good as it used to be,
but he feels he has earned his bifocals
as well as his gray hair.
He finds he spends more time at home now
reading (mostly historical fiction),
creating
little pieces of improvisational jazz on the piano
watching the cardinals through his binoculars
or categorizing his kaleidoscope collection:
first by length, then their content,
then personal preference.

Sometimes, after dinner,
Creation puts on
old records
and persuades
Vision to dance
with her.
He knows he's not a
very good dancer,
but it makes her
happy. †



Personal Vision of All Souls

-By Phil Haney

All Souls is a church with a building, but without walls.

I see All Souls as the place in Tulsa for acceptance of thought, deed, action, and faith of all stripes. The church is an incubator of progressive religious debate, a crucible of social conscience, and a transparent consequence of liberal religious association. In my vision of the church I see results, changes, growth, understanding, and tolerance. I see inclusion, and through inclusion, I see diversity. I see diversity as prerequisite to progress and at All Souls I see every kind of progress. I see smiles and happiness. I see satisfaction.

My vision finds All Souls available and accommodating for others who have not discovered yet, as I have, how their questions about religion and needs for association can be fulfilled here. My vision is that there are many others waiting to discover All Souls and to be connected somehow to the church. My vision is that the church will be conscious of this need and address it.

I imagine All Souls progressing with communication and outreach, continuing to offer classes and programs designed to meet the challenges of its con-



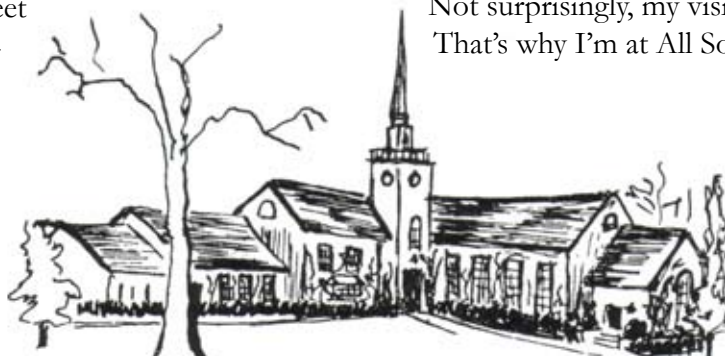
gregation and visitors. My vision finds All Souls responding to the growing need for its presence in the religious community, responsibly and ethically addressing the demands of intellectually curious and progressive individuals. I see the philosophy of the church answering disenchantment with structured religion.

I see a bright future for the church. I see a community at All Souls stepping up to address and resolve the issues of a complex society. I see knowledge and understanding resulting from strong leadership in contemporary thought. I see the ministers and staff at All Souls accepting their responsibilities with grace and dignity, and getting good results from their actions.

I see myself at All Souls, and that vision is especially uplifting. I see personal growth through service. I see living my parents' legacy at All Souls. It is a vision of maturity that gives me comfort, through which I sense many pleasures will derive, and from which I know I will give more to others.

My vision of All Souls is marked by pride and enthusiasm. My sense of the church's direction is one of uncertain destination with certain travel.

Not surprisingly, my vision matches my needs. That's why I'm at All Souls. †



Our Vision for Compassionate Care

-by Rev. Debra Garfinkel, Pastoral Care Minister

“All Souls is such an awesome church.” Remarks such as this one might be made when a visitor experiences worshipping with our community. They might also be made by teens who experience our youth program or by children in our religious education program. I’ve heard this remark or something very similar from people of all ages and backgrounds, following special programming, dinners, support groups, and memorial services. Fellow ministers frequently use these very words.

All Souls is awesome. Underlying this sentiment – this magnification of thought and feeling – is the sense that All Souls is a caring community. With the faithful vision of our senior minister, Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, our board of trustees, our staff, and our congregation, All Souls recognizes that the heart beat of every strong faith community is its ministry of compassion and care.

I am honored to serve as your minister of pastoral care. As we begin our new church year, I invite you to consider how we support each other through sickness and health, and for richer or for poorer.

These aren’t just words; ours is a covenant community. Through the generous spirit of All Souls, we strive to be our best selves.

The pastoral care ministry at All Souls operates with a trained lay pastoral care team. These church members are dedicated to continuing to learn how best to support All Souls congregants through pastoral care emergencies that cause grief, pain, and anxiety. Some team members specialize in certain areas. Currently, All Souls provides support for people experiencing grief, Alzheimer’s disease, living single (All Soulos,) and health issues (Parish Nurses). There is also a group known as Caring Souls who offer non-emergency support.

Please watch for articles that will provide information and education about these areas of caring and more. Also, look for our display tables in Emerson Hall on Homecoming Sunday. On behalf of the Care Team, please allow me to express our humble gratitude for the opportunity to be of service to our church community. All Souls is awesome because we all care. †



Care Team co-chairs:

Carol Burleigh and Dick Lieser

**For pastoral care emergencies, please phone
724-8326 (724-TEAM)
24/7**

Support Group Contacts:

Grief Support:

Ann Jackman

Alzheimer’s Support:

Nancy Wilder

Singles Support: Adam Sherman

Parish Nurses: Sally Percy

A Dream Come True

by Kate Starr, Youth Director



A vision, once realized, usually doesn't look exactly like the original idea. I thought I was going to start my own company for outdoor adventure, team building, and self-discovery. My husband even designed the logo for my business cards. Dovetail Experiential Retreats: Exploring personal and professional interconnections – naturally. I'd gotten my master's degree in Human Relations, taking various classes in environmental studies so I could use nature as a metaphor for systems theory in families and companies. I became a ropes course facilitator and trained in first aid. Then I had a baby and my plans were put on hold. That's when I met Kathy Keith at a corporate training gig I was facili-

tating. Over the course of several discussions, she encouraged me to shift the perception of my vision. Couldn't I do those things under the umbrella of All Souls? What if I created a high adventure camp for our high school seniors so they could exceed their self-perceived limitations before they left for college? At first it was difficult to let go of my original vision. But slowly I came to realize that when a dream comes true, it rarely looks like the first picture you had in your head. It's usually better.

Following is an article about the first annual Spirit qUUest written by Channing Rusher, the least outdoor adventurous of the group of high school seniors, and the new Spirit qUUest spokesperson. †

Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway

by Channing Rusher

What do flying through the air and crawling underground have to do with spirituality? For me, everything.

Last June I traveled to Arkansas with 11 other seniors and four spiritual elders for the first ever All Souls Spirit qUUest. We participated in eye-opening, boundary-pushing, activities from flying through the air on an 800-foot zip line to exploring a cave and lots in between. Spirit qUUest made us face challenges best described by Thomas Williams as “an amazing juxtaposition of being alone together.” I think we each changed, and know better who we are as a result.



All Souls Senior Class of 2007

After a pre-dawn opening circle blessed by Tamara, we were off to one of the most beautiful places any of us had ever been. As soon as we arrived, we were pushed out of our comfort zones and given an opportunity to conquer our fears by horizontally scaling a rock face using natural and made-made hand- and footholds. (Oh, Kate Starr was serious about this!) Known as a Via Ferada, or iron road, this element was originally designed during World War II to transport supplies across difficult terrain. Until the All Souls Spirit qUUest, this particular Iron Road had only been tested by the ranch staff. Though there were tears, cries of help, near nervous breakdowns, and a white-knuckle

fall, we all made it across. Sean Blair said it best. “I don’t think I would have been able to make it across without someone to follow who showed me the way, someone to push me from behind, and support from below.” What a metaphor for life.

Each new day started at dawn with inspiring quotes and solo journaling at a sacred place we had selected. We watched the day turn to night with solo journaling at sunset there too. Some of the most memorable times were when we gathered around the campfire for worship. Each night, Kate told part of a three-part tale followed by in-depth conversation about the themes of the story. It was Chelsea Davenport’s favorite time. “The thing I’ll cherish most from our long weekend together is the time we spent at the campfire, watching the moon rise over the hills.”



Sydney McNulty reaches beyond her limitations.

How lucky we are to have conversations like this, and four adults who ask questions and listen. Sarah Markland said, “Our class has always been really close, but this was the perfect time for us to let down all guards. I felt so authentic.”

There were many fun times on this trip that are hard to explain, a Love Quiz by Oprah, a thwarted midnight excursion. You’ll have to go on the trip for yourself and see what amazing things I’ve left out. But definitely go.

As Thomas Williams says, “Hey, if you can face your fear and scale a rock wall, you can face your fear of college. If you can jump off a 60-foot cliff and zip 800 feet across a canyon, you can take other leaps of faith and trust the results will be good.”

And I think we all take that approach to life a little more now. †



Spirit qUesters emerge from underground

Re-Visioning E. Bellamy's *Looking Backward*

-by Susan Tillman

In *Looking Backward 1887-2000*, Edward Bellamy writes a book narrated by Julian West, a former insomniac whose most recent memory begins one hundred years ago in what was previously his sleeping chamber located in the basement of his home. West has been awakened from a hypnotically induced sleep of nearly a century by Dr. Leete, one of the gracious current inhabitants of what used to be the site of West's house. Since Bellamy writes in 1881, this future world in which he has placed West is a future Bellamy is unlikely to see.

In 2000, in the world in which West wakes, Bellamy has imagined umbrellas for everyone. When it starts to rain, they pop out over rolling sidewalks. He imagines a monetary system based on a debit procedure instead of cash. This system is similar to our credit cards, only better, because the user has the money/credits *before* using it.

Bellamy creates a society in which everyone takes turns doing the garbage route, waitering, growing food, and other not so glamorous work that has to be done to keep a community rolling. He envisions an egalitarian world for people in the future, a world that has done some reasoning during the previous century and worked out for itself a social, economic, and technological plan based upon satisfying human needs through egalitarian means.

He conjures up inventions, such as rolling sidewalks,

as literary devices to get across his thesis which is encapsulated in still another literary device embedded in the book – “The Parable of the Cart.” This simple story claims if society were to shift priorities to value individuals over class and cash, a lot of needless poverty and suffering would be eliminated. In fact, Bellamy argues that society creates many of the conditions that perpetuate pain and suffering. “The Parable” shows society does so through the ways we live and work – or who rides in the cart, who pulls it, and the ruts in the road it travels. “The Parable” says that these aspects demonstrate the perspective that humanity (as society) has of “the individual.”

“The Parable” and the book as a whole say in modern terms all of this: the way we go about doing things is a social construct, an invented thing, so

let's do whatever it takes to change it. For Bellamy, the operative term here is “change.” The cart and the cool inventions are metaphors he uses to capture 19th century readers' attention and help them grasp the world as it was then and as it could be if other practices, based on the idea that all humans are the priority, were to be realized.

The public response to his book was phenomenal. Even though Bellamy was the son of a minister, and thus somewhat accustomed to the public gaze, he was a shy man. From his point of view events in his personal life took an



ironic twist. Members of the public formed Bellamy Clubs so they could withdraw from the world and create enclaves that could and would live the metaphors he had used in his novel.

People came in droves to Bellamy's door to consult him. In some sense they tried to re-create him as a character in the book. He was appalled and disappointed that a faction of his readers had missed the point and withdrawn to live in the metaphorical world he had created as an argument for change. He wouldn't go for it, did not want to be in a Bellamy Club, and even began to consider the little book and its vision to be somewhat of a failure.

From where we sit though, *Looking Backward* is the sweetest little book. The fact that readers of the day were so inspired they started Bellamy Clubs based upon his ideas of egalitarianism and possibility buoys us up. Geoffrey Sauer, who wrote the 2000 foreword of the Fiction: E Server edition, puts it well when he points out that the book "provides solid ground" of social progress from the 19th to the 20th century. Bellamy would have approved that more than one hundred years later many of his visions are fact and in some places people's priorities are grounded in the needs of humanity. †

Theological Diversity at All Souls

-Introduction by Davis D. Joyce

It should come as no surprise that a church without a creed, a church that emphasizes freedom/reason/tolerance as basic principles, would incorporate a lot of different theological positions. And All Souls does. Herewith we continue the series expressing some of the many different theologies that exist in our church. We will continue this over the next few months, then run the entire collection - plus some additional ones - in a special section of the forthcoming 85th Anniversary history of the church. Stay tuned. †

Religious Humanist

-by Sue Forney

I believe I'm a Unitarian because I don't really fit any other school of religious thought. I never thought Jesus was God, so I cannot be Catholic or Protestant. I don't believe everything I've read or heard about any other religion either. I accept what I believe is Humanism, but it has never been enough for me.

Instead, I look for what I call the "inspired word" wherever I find it. Often, it's from the Bible, Judaism, words of the Dalai Lama, the Koran, or a Native American Indian, or poem. When I read or hear words that strengthen compassion, justice, and love, these are words from the Divine speaking to me through others. So I'm happy to be a Unitarian! †

<p>Our church program-year (September-May) is fashioned around nine theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church's offerings each month are by no means limited to the themes. However, these topics provide an axis around which many elements of church life gain more meaning and depth. They provide us with a set of common stories and ideas that become elements of an ongoing community conversation. Be warned: Seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!</p>	<p>September - Vision October - Creation November - Democracy December - God January - Evil February - Religious Authority March - Freedom April - Redemption May - Mercy</p>
--	--

Wake Now, My Senses

-by *Jeremy T. Elliott, M.S.S.A., Ministerial Intern*

I have always found the ritual of waking in the morning to be miraculous. We rise from the depths of sleep, from a state of oblivion, to a state of awareness. There we are lucid; we find sights and sounds, and the first rays of the morning sun calling us to the day. Often, I wonder, “Is this the first day that I’m really alive? Was everything else only a dream?” Sometimes, as that first beam of sunlight strikes my eyes, I imagine hearing the jarring words, “LET THERE BE LIGHT... and there was evening and there was morning, the first day.” Out of nothing, something has been created; out of the darkness, we have been called.

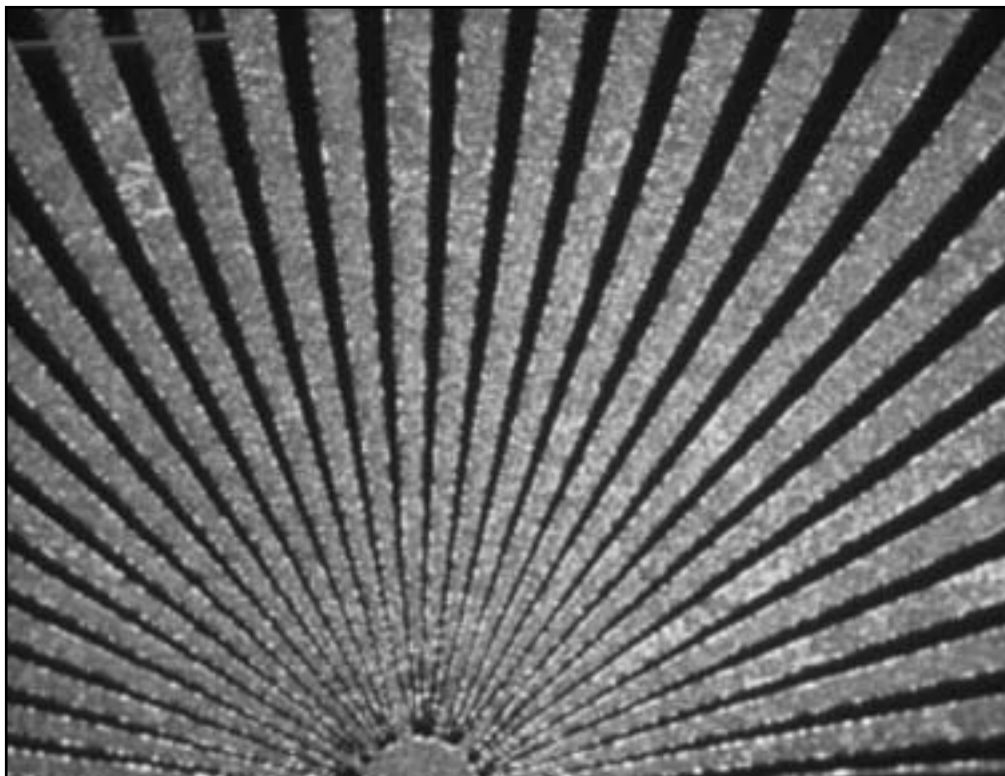
The “something” that we have been given, the new day in which we find ourselves, is a spectacular gift. It is a chance to step into the mystery of the world and to live again as though it is the first day. In many ways, I feel like I have been awakened since coming to All Souls as your Intern Minister. I have come to worship, to grieve, to celebrate, to learn, and to work with each of you. I cannot

imagine a better place or better people to be with on this journey. Like each morning, I see this opportunity as a gift.

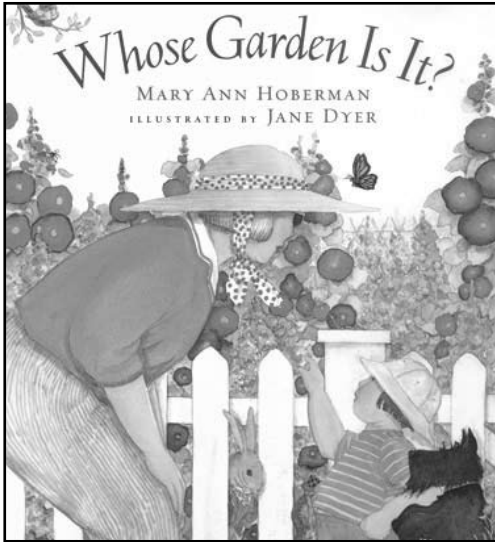
Just as the day calls us to itself, so too, we are called as a religious community to an exciting future. Sometimes I get caught up in my own expectations, patterns, and assumptions; they limit my vision of the world and cause me forget the sea of potential in which I really exist. It’s like those first moments in the morning when we think, “Where am I? Who am I?” And then slowly, everything that we forgot in the night comes rushing back; the schedules, the obligations, the limits—they all come rushing back.

Part of our task as a visionary religious community, and as individuals, is recognizing that our potential can transcend every limitation. After we awaken, we must remember that who we are—the children of God—and where we are—this sacred existence—is wild and holy, and beyond any

restraint or boundary we may try to place upon it or upon ourselves. When you wake in the morning, give yourself a few moments to bathe in the sunlight, to soak up the shadows, the colors, the textures, all of the beauty you almost forgot, and step with it, and with us, into this new church year. †



Stories for All Ages: VISION



Whose Garden Is It?

Easy picture book by Mary Ann Hoberman, illustrated by Jane Dyer 2004. All the garden inhabitants plus and sun and the rain claim the garden as their own.

Making the World

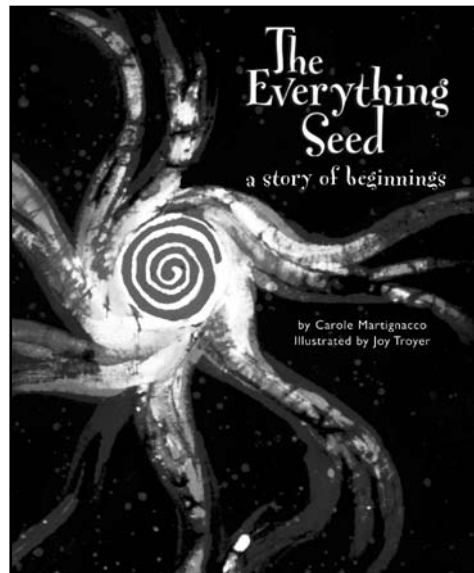
Easy picture book by Douglas Wood, illustrated by Yoshi & Hibiki Miyazaki. Here's a secret that almost nobody knows: the world isn't finished yet.

The Everything Seed: A Story of Beginnings

Easy picture book by Carole Martignacco, 2006. Depicts the beginning of the universe as the sprouting of a seed.

The Wonderful Happens

Easy picture book by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Coco Dowley, 2000. Describes some of the things that bring happiness and awe into our lives.



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

Editorial Team

copy editor
Judy Jarvis

managing editor
Heather Hollingsworth

staff
Rev. Marlin Lavanhar
Rev. Tamara Lebak
Rev. Debra Garfinkel
Jeremy Elliott
Kathy Keith
Kate Starr

feature writers
Phil Haney
Channing Rusher
Susan Tillman

When submitting articles for church publications:

- 1) Submit your text electronically via email. Plain text is best.
- 2) Include your name and daytime number.
- 3) Not all submissions will be published. Submissions may be edited.

Questions?
Call Heather Hollingsworth at 743-2363.

Find these and other interesting family books in our RE Library, across from the Family Room.

Sept. Highlights

- Sept. 9 Homecoming Sunday, 10:00 & 11:30 am Worship Program and Activity Fair in Emerson Hall
Children's & Youth Programming Resumes
- Sept. 12 Wednesday Connections: Frosty Troy
Dinner and Chapel Resume
- Sept. 13 Day Alliance
- Sept. 16 Special Guest Nick Page - 10:00 & 11:30 am
- Sept. 19 Wednesday Connections Classes Resume
- Sept. 23 Branches: Try Before You Commit!
Sunday Bridge
- Sept. 25 Evening Alliance
- Sept. 27 All Soul Acoustic Coffeehouse:
The Fred Eaglesmith Band

Sunday Service Times:
10:00, 11:30 am

Soulful Sundown:
7:00 pm, First Friday

Wednesday Connections:
Supper 5:15, Chapel 6:30, Classes 7:00 pm