

Simple Gifts

March 2009 *The All Souls Journal*
Vol. VI, Issue VII

Spiritual Brokenness



She came to me in tears. She loves this church. Now her relationship to the church was being threatened. The church that had become such an important and central part of her life was changing in ways that made her confused, angry and deeply, saddened. All Souls had given her back both a church community and a spiritual connection after many years of not having either. It took a lot to come back to church, and now she was afraid she might be losing her beloved church home.

She did not know that she was one of many men and women who were coming to me to explain that they had been abused (emotionally, sexually, and/or spiritually) as children in a charismatic, Pentecostal or fundamentalist church. When many of these members came to church in September 2008, and heard praise music in the 11:30 service, and saw people singing with their hands upraised, it actually reignited an old and painful trauma. These were feelings they thought they had left behind, and they were feelings that they had never felt at All Souls. As a matter of fact, they explained, they came to All Souls “to get away from all that.”

My suggestion that she come to the 10:00 am service, which had not changed, was only a partial solution,

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister

since at that time the praise music was starting at 11:00 and was at a volume that permeated the sanctuary, foyer, and fellowship hall.

I was so glad she came to talk with me! I explained that I needed time to work out some details of how the second service could work and how the church would continue to be a safe, inspiring, and meaningful place for all of us who love All Souls. I added a promise. If she stayed involved in the church during this year, I felt confident that she would grow more spiritually and personally than she had in the eight years since I have been the senior minister.

She was skeptical, but also intrigued. I asked her to trust me and to stay in conversation with me. I knew that among the many benefits of what is happening at All Souls is an opportunity for profound healing of profound spiritual brokenness.

Some of the wounds and brokenness that people are carrying from their religious past are not healing, they are only being covered up and skillfully avoided. Over the past five months I have been asking folks who say, “I came to All Souls to get away from all that” what is the “that” they were escaping? In most cases, people tell me it was authoritarian leadership, the dogma, the anti-intellectualism, the superstitious and magical thinking, the way women were treated, the homophobia, the guilt, the shame, the judg

mentalism, the proselytizing, and the sense that their community was especially privileged with righteousness and truth, and the way that other traditions and ways of thinking were demonized. None of which, I point out, has been brought into All Souls.

Regarding the woman whose story I am sharing, she is now an adult. She can trust the integrity of the ministers and community this time. She has a loving spouse and great friends by her side. There is no dogma being crammed into the spaces where her doubts and questions arise. Even though our church, during one of our weekly services, might look and sound a bit like the church of her childhood, it is profoundly different in its message, ministers, mission, and meaning.

At All Souls there is no need for her to embrace that style of music or worship again if she does not want to, but the fear and trauma that have been associated with those things finally have a chance to heal. The style and the substance have a chance to be separated. Of course, this is especially good news for those who love our worship style but had missed the music and energy of the church they left.

In a recent letter she explained what happened last week. She was in the 10:00 am service when the All Souls Adult Choir, Y.A.V.E., and the New Dimensions Chorale came onto the chancel together to sing the anthem. Her immediate reaction began in her body; her stomach tightened and her shoulders stiffened as she imagined with trepidation the song they might sing. However, when they started singing, she was captivated by the beauty, the words and the music. Before long, tears of joy and hope and healing were streaming down her face. When the song was over her husband squeezed her hand and leaned over, his eyes tearing said, "I think this is what Marlin meant when he asked you to trust him." She wrote to thank me.

If this were one isolated story I would not write about it, but similar stories are being shared with

me almost weekly from people who started this year skeptical, confused, and even angry about what was happening to the second worship service. Now they see it filled with hundreds of people for whom it meets their spiritual needs and exceeds their expectations, and they appreciate how this new diversity is starting to enliven our Sunday school classes, branches groups, meals, outreach efforts, youth programs, and other activities as well.

I look forward to sharing equally powerful stories of healing and hope that are being told to me by some of our new members. There are people who have come to All Souls who would never have thought they would attend a Unitarian church, a historically white church, or a church that is so theologically inclusive. There are heartwarming stories about how some of our newest members have found a home for themselves, their families and their spirits. There are stories from new members of how, after so much loss and rejection for what they believe, astonished they are to find a church like All Souls, one that truly embraces diversity as a gift and lives what it preaches.

In keeping with the three-year rotation of our theological themes this is the third article I have written on the theme of brokenness. In the previous two articles I focused on the brokenness of the human condition that is caused by racism, classism, religious exclusivism, sexism, and homophobia. It brings tears to my eyes and hope to my heart as I write this piece and recognize the remarkable work we have done as a congregation on those issues, and how our efforts have helped bring us to be the congregation we are today.

At All Souls, we are not simply expounding lofty religious ideals, we are becoming the world we hope to see. It is not easy, nor is it always comfortable, but it is the most gratifying and hopeful experience of community and religion I have ever known.



Paper Bag Mountain

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister



In the book *The Faith Club*, Priscilla, one of the three women of different traditions who come together to talk about their faith, tells a poignant story that her father told her when she was a child. Her father used adaptations of the Yiddish stories that his father told him. In *Faith Club*, Priscilla recounts what she calls *The Paper Bag Story*.

Her father asks her to imagine taking all of the problems that we have from the most mundane to the most catastrophic and placing them in a paper bag. Then to imagine that every person on the planet did likewise. Think of how many paper bags there would be—a mountain of them! “If you were told that you could pick any bag of problems and take it home with you, do you think you’d want someone else’s problems?” she writes. “You’d be scampering like crazy to find your own bag in that mountain of brown paper.”

I am fascinated by this concept and find it to be completely true. Is it the comfort of the familiar? Have we indeed befriended our own troubles? Or is it because of our chances, based on demographics and privilege, we likely would end up worse off?

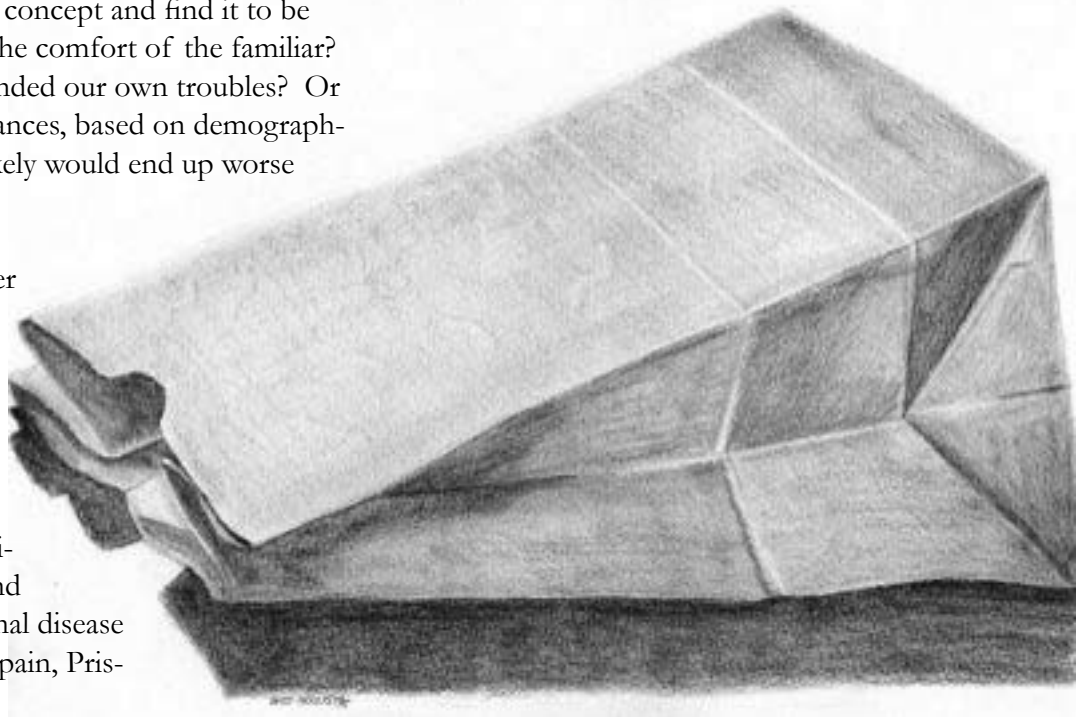
Priscilla’s father told her this story during one of the most difficult periods of his life when his business was going bankrupt. Much later after he had in fact lost his business and his fortune and had developed a terminal disease that caused him much pain, Pris-

cilla asked him “If you had it to do all over again, would you still want your own paper bag?”

Without hesitating, her father said yes. And Priscilla concluded, “...the fact that my father accepted the final challenge he’d been dealt gave me the courage later in life to think that I might be strong enough to face my own paper bag of challenges.”

It is in knowing that others have survived being broken that we gain the courage and the strength to tackle our own brokenness. It is from knowing that everyone has been or will be broken in life—that everyone has a bag to fill with brokenness—that we begin to befriend what we can learn from our own brokenness.

May the image of a paper bag mountain comfort you as you befriend your trials in this world. †



An Amazing Place

-by Rev. Debra Garfinkel, Minister of Pastoral Care



Grandmother Sophia told this story to the children one night before they went to sleep:

Once upon a time, there was a place called Far. Far was perfectly beautiful. It was perfectly wonderful. Do you know why? Far was seamless – totally and fluidly connected. Far flowed on and on and on like a beautiful stream-river-ocean-rain-puddle-creek-stream. All Beings lived in Far and were perfectly happy and healthy. All Beings shared everything – they shared their toys and their food and their clothes. They shared their houses and their work and their play. When one of them stubbed a toe or whacked an elbow, they all felt the pain and helped make it better. When one of them couldn't find the words to speak, they all fell silent until there was Understanding. Time was precious. It really was an amazing place.

Once upon a time, there was a place called Close Enough. Close Enough was beautiful. Close Enough was wonderful. Close Enough was perfect. It was different from Far. Do you know how? Some Doings lived there. Even though Close Enough was seamless – totally fluid and connected – Some Doings just didn't see it that way. There were Some Doings who only liked one creek and one river. There were Some Doings who only liked one ocean. Oh, they knew that there was a connection and therefore a relationship, but Some Doings liked to do separate things. Some Doings used their heads and their hands and their hearts and their minds to think smaller and smaller and smaller. It was so much fun! Some Doings worked very hard to keep things in a certain order. Some Doings cared about each other but because they were very busy keeping things in order, they sometimes weren't aware when one of them stubbed a toe or whacked an elbow. They sometimes didn't wait for Understanding.

Time was precious. It was a really amazing place.

Did I tell you that All Beings and Some Doings could fly like birds and swim like fish? Oh, and did I tell you that Far was very near to Close Enough? It's true. So, it was just a matter of time until someone from Far and someone from Close Enough would bump into each other. That's what happened. "Ouch!" cried One Some Doing when he bumped heads with All Being One.

All Being One crooned, "Ooooh," and the air filled with a melody of "Ooooh" from all of Far.

One Some Doing felt very odd. "Why did you do that?" he asked All Being One.

"Do what?"

"I don't know what you did exactly but I feel better somehow."

"Yes. We all feel better now," smiled All Being One.

"Why? How?" One Some Doing was a bit muddled. There was silence. "Are you going to answer me? I've got things to do!"

All Being One remained silent.

"I don't have time for this!" And with that, One Some Doing jumped in the nearby river and swam away.

"Time is All That Is," All Being One spoke upon the wind.

"Ooooooh," went the melody from all of Far.

Grandmother Sophia was quiet. "But Grandmother, what happened?" asked Tina, the tiny one.

“Yes, Grandmother, did All Being One go to Close Enough?” asked Henry, the oldest one.

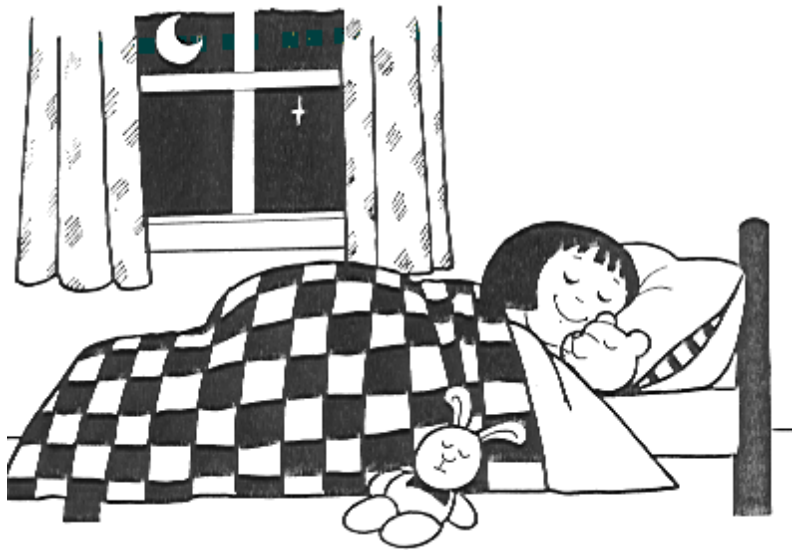
“What do you think?” asked Grandmother Sophia.

“I think that this is one of your stories to make us think about how we treat each other,” said Sylvia, the quiet one.

“Go on,” encouraged Grandmother.

Sylvia looked at Tina and Henry. “Remember how we were fighting over who gets to play in the clubhouse we just built?”

Tina and Henry nodded just a little bit.



“And remember how we kept shouting at each other and pushed each other until...”

“until we broke the walls down!” finished Tina. “That hurt!” she added.

Sylvia paused thoughtfully. “We were playing in the land of Close Enough, weren’t we?” she asked.

“Does that mean that we should be perfect and never fight?” Henry was not convinced.

Here’s what Grandmother Sophia said:

“You are perfect the way you are. I will always, always love you. You are a part of me and I am a part of you. We are part of each other. No matter where you go, no matter how far away, we will always be together.”

The children were very quiet. They were also very sleepy.

Tina said, “I’m sorry I hurt you, Sylvia. I’m sorry I pushed down the wall, Henry.”

“I’m sorry I yelled at you, Tina,” said Henry.

“I’m sorry for being mean to you both,” said Sylvia. “Let’s try again tomorrow. Maybe we can make our own Far Land.”

Grandmother Sophia tucked each child into bed, kissed them on the foreheads, and said, “Good night. I love you.”

The children fell asleep, dreaming their own stories of All Beings and Some Doings. Perhaps you will do the same. A story is just a story – you have the power to give it meaning and make it real. May you dream of an amazing place – a world of beauty and connection.

May you tell your story and make it so. †

Getting the Good from the Bad

-by Kate Starr, Youth Director



One of my first and fondest memories of what this church community does to help us live more fully happened as a result of shattered illusions.

I was following behind two ministers on their way to

Wednesday night chapel. One minister asked the other if she had food in her teeth and bared them at him in a clenched-tooth grin. The other asked how to pronounce a word from the reading he planned to deliver in mere moments. Then the woman lifted her robe slightly to adjust her clothing underneath, while the other loudly cleared his sinuses.

“Excuse me. I’m behind you,” I said, thinking that maybe, like the Wizard of Oz, they didn’t realize the curtain had parted and I could see behind the scenes, “and you’re shattering my illusions.”

“Good,” said the elder.
“That’s our job – to shatter your illusions and help you live in reality.”

What a gift!

And, just recently, I was on the other end of a similar circumstance. During youth group, one of my young charges told everyone that last year I had made her do something she hated me for – something that seemed to her undoable, unreasonable,

and perhaps even a cruel demand. It was a difficult task, but one I thought essential to her mental and perhaps even physical health, and I was willing to risk her opinion of me to help her.

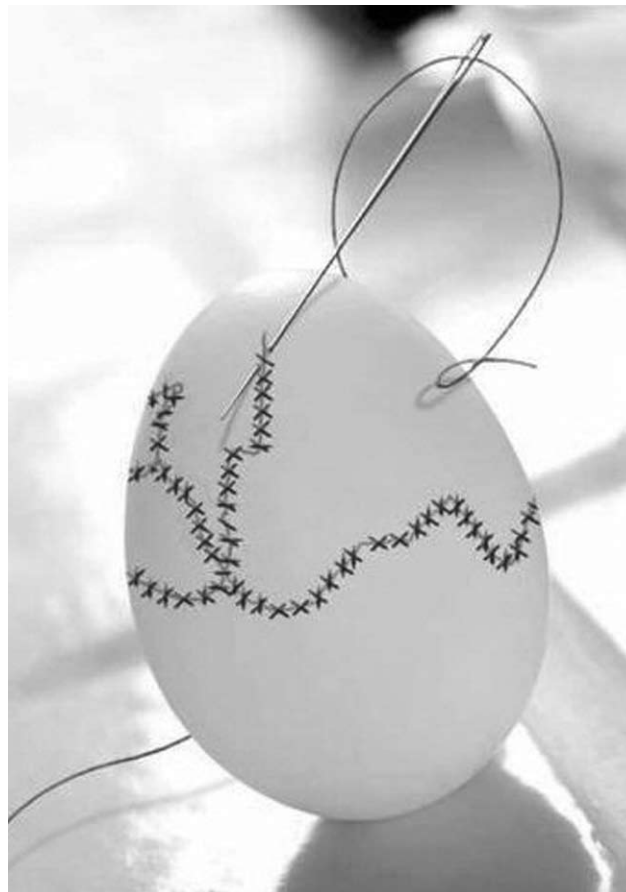
“I really hated you then, and I am so thankful now,” she said. “I think it might be why I’m happy today.”

We’ve all heard example after example of blessings coming from adversity, of being broken down and rebuilding something even better, of that which doesn’t kill us making us stronger.

After a devastating ice storm that destroyed ancient trees in our yard, we have a better view. The place where my daughter’s arm broke is the strongest part of the bone. My girlfriend with metastatic cancer says for the first time she is living in the mo-

ment and appreciative of life’s simplest pleasures. I became more compassionate and empathetic after my mother’s early death.

No one would wish adversity on anyone, but it does seem to be what connects us, what makes us real, human. It is when we hit bottom that we can push off and rise above our original circumstance to a place even higher and greater. From crisis comes renewal, from adversity comes strength, from brokenness comes healing and growth and wisdom. †



How All Souls Responds to Brokenness

-by Ann Jackman



Brokenness manifests itself in many ways: brokenness of the body either through illness or injury; brokenness of the mind when the chemicals of the brain run amok; brokenness of the heart when a loved

one dies unexpectedly or we anticipate such a loss. Unexpected blows can make us feel as though our connectedness with others has been broken, resulting in loneliness and isolation. Knowledge of unspeakably terrible things in our world can result in spiritual brokenness as we ask, "Where is God?" and find no answers. While in these states of brokenness, blessings seem impossible to discern.

How the church responds to this brokenness defines the character of our ministry. We must show up. All Souls has developed a way to respond to personal crisis. A Care Team member is available to take calls from members of the congregation 24/7/365. Care Team members listen, sometimes visit, assess personal needs, transmit information to appropriate staff, and make referrals.

An offshoot of the Care Team is the Parish Nurse program which is available to make assessments, visits, and referrals. They also do wellness education, check people's blood pressure, and are now assisting in the Pound-for-Pound Challenge.

Two other groups have been developed in response to needs the Care Team has identified. Helping Souls is a group of volunteers who help with short-term acute needs such as meals, prescription pick-up, or medical transportation. Friendly Souls relieve isolation by establishing relationships with those who are homebound or in long-term care facilities.

Now comes the important part—how YOU can participate. In spite of the team's best efforts, sometimes a member of the congregation is sick, grieving, or in need of contact but we are unaware of it until after the fact. When you hear of such a need do not assume that the Care Team or ministers know about it. Although we contact each hospital each weekday, recent privacy laws have made the accuracy of the information we get uncertain. We would rather get 20 calls about the same need than for a member to be neglected and feel that their faith community doesn't care. When you, a family member, or an All Souls friend checks into a hospital, list the church preference as ASUC so that when we call, they will confirm that you are there. Or, better yet, call the Care Team directly to let us know.

Each Sunday, the Care Team staffs a table with information and forms to let us know of your concerns. You will also find cards for people who currently need to be remembered. People have told us repeatedly how much these cards mean to them—even when they do not personally know the signers. So stop by that table and sign those cards.

Finally, if you would like to volunteer for either Helping Souls or Friendly Souls, call the Care Team for more information. Each of you is critical to the success of this ministry.

All Souls Pastoral Care Team

available by phone 24 hours
for pastoral emergencies.

724-TEAM
or
724-8326

2009 National Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship Revival At All Souls

-by Rev. Ron Robinson



What is the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship (UUCF)?

The UUCF is a national organization founded in 1945 in Boston for the purpose of supporting Unitarians and Universalists

who consider themselves to be Christian and who seek Christian resources and fellowship within a UU context. Since most UU churches today have a diversity of theologies, the UUCF is a way for those who consider themselves Christian to have a connection with others around the country. The UUCF publishes essays, books and other resources for learning and worship about UU Christianity and history. They have their annual meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly (GA) each year. There are other national UU organizations, such as UUs for Jewish Awareness and the UU Buddhist Fellowship, that offer resources from their own theological and historical perspective.

Who is in the UU Christian Fellowship?

There are UU clergy and laity from all over the United States who are members of the UUCF. Currently no ministers from All Souls in Tulsa are members of the UUCF. But our former Associate Minister Rev. Suzanne Meyers is on the UUCF Revival Team and our former Interim Minister of Pastoral Care Rev. Felicia Urbanski is on the UUCF Board, and I, a former intern, am the Executive Director of the UUCF, with the national office currently in Turley, Oklahoma. Anyone can become a member by signing up and making a membership contribution. For more information go to www.uuchristian.org.

Why do they hold a national revival each year?

The UUCF held its first national revival in 1999 at

First Unitarian Universalist Church of New Orleans. The experience was powerful and inspiring for those who attended. Subsequently, the UUCF decided to hold an annual revival in UU churches in different parts of the country once a year. There are smaller regional UUCF revival meetings.

Why in Tulsa in 2009?

I have been trying to bring the UUCF Revival to Tulsa for a few years. All Souls has an excellent facility for a national gathering of this nature. In 2008 the UUCF proposed holding their next meeting at All Souls in Tulsa. Over the years All Souls has taken its turn hosting conferences for the UU Southwest Conference, the UU Young Adult Network, and the Conference on the Free Church.

How did Bishop Carlton Pearson become the 2009 UUCF Revival keynote speaker?

Once the decision was made to hold the gathering in Tulsa, the UUCF Board contacted Bishop Pearson to see if he would be the keynote speaker. At the time, Bishop Pearson was leading New Dimension Church services at Trinity Episcopal Church in downtown Tulsa. To that point, the idea of New Dimensions meeting at All Souls had never been discussed or considered. Coincidentally, four months after agreeing to speak at the UUCF Revival, New Dimensions Church began holding worship at All Souls in Tulsa.

Can anyone attend the keynote address and worship on Saturday Mar. 28 from 10 am to noon without being registered for the entire conference?

Yes, the UUCF is opening that service to the public. An offering will be taken to support the UUCF.

For more information about the 2009 UUCF Revival please go to www.uuchristian.org/revival or click on the Revival link at the home page of www.uuchristian.org. †



\$1,500,000

Budget

\$1,213,522.41

Where we are



FIRST IN OUR LIVES,
FIRST IN OUR GIVING.

All Souls clearly is first in many, many lives! Our services are setting records, attendance in children's and youth programs has doubled since 2007, the nurseries are full and the shuttle service from remote parking is busy! With much diligence and hard work, we ended 2008 on budget. Please join the other members and friends who support our beloved community by being generous in your commitment to our 2009 Operating Budget, passed by our congregation in December. Pledge cards are available online, in the backs of pews, in the foyer and the church office, or you may simply phone the church office, 743-2363. Calls will soon be made to all households that have not yet made their financial commitment. If you have extenuating circumstances that prevent you from giving this year, please contact the church office to make an appointment to speak with a minister.

Linda & Steve Caldwell

ALL SOULS UNITARIAN CHURCH STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN 2009

NAME(S): _____

ADDRESS: _____

HOME PHONE: _____

ALTERNATE PHONE: _____

EMAIL: _____

SIGNED: _____

DATE: ____ / ____ / ____

MY/OUR 2009 PLEDGE IS \$_____ PER MONTH OR \$_____ PER YEAR

WE PLAN TO PAY: _____ MONTHLY _____ QUARTERLY _____ ANNUALLY

| MONTHLY GIVING GUIDE | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME | 10% PER MONTH | 5% PER MONTH | 3% PER MONTH |
| \$ 20,000 | \$167 | \$83 | \$50 |
| \$ 30,000 | \$250 | \$125 | \$75 |
| \$ 40,000 | \$333 | \$167 | \$100 |
| \$ 50,000 | \$417 | \$208 | \$125 |
| \$ 60,000 | \$500 | \$250 | \$150 |
| \$ 70,000 | \$583 | \$292 | \$175 |
| \$ 80,000 | \$667 | \$333 | \$200 |
| \$ 100,000 | \$833 | \$417 | \$250 |
| \$ 125,000 | \$1042 | \$521 | \$313 |
| \$ 150,000 | \$1250 | \$625 | \$375 |
| \$ 250,000 | \$2083 | \$1042 | \$625 |

AUTOMATIC DEDUCTION FROM CHECKING OR SAVINGS

(PLEASE ATTACH A VOIDED CHECK OR DEPOSIT SLIP)

PLEDGE AMOUNT TO BE DRAFTED PER MONTH \$_____

MONTH TO START DRAFTING _____

(TRANSFER TAKES PLACE AROUND THE 20TH OF THE MONTH)

AUTHORIZATION FOR CREDIT CARD PAYMENT

CARD NUMBER: _____

___ VISA ___ MasterCard EXPIRATION DATE ____/____

PLEDGE AMOUNT TO BE DRAFTED PER MONTH \$_____

DOES YOUR EMPLOYER PROVIDE A DONATION MATCHING PROGRAM? ___ YES ___ NO

Further Reading: Brokenness

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister

When Bad Things Happen to Good People, by Harold S. Kushner, Avon Books, 1983.

Poems to Live By in Uncertain Times, edited by Joan Murray, Beacon Press, 2001.

Helping Someone with Mental Illness, by Rosalyn Carter, with Susan K. Golant, Times Books, 1998.

The Healing Choice: Your Guide to Emotional Recovery After an Abortion, by Candace De Puy, Ph.D., & Dana Dovitch, Ph.D., 1997.

Miscarriage: Women Sharing From the Heart, by Marie Allen, Ph.D., & Shelly Marks, MS, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1993.

Bereaved Children & Teens: A Support Guide for Parents & Professionals, Edited by Earl A. Grollman, 1995.

Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic, by James Gilligan, M.D., Vintage Books, 1997

Bridging the Class Divide and Other Lessons for Grassroots Organizing, by Linda Stout, Beacon Press, 1996.

Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us, by Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, Beacon Press, 2001.

Kitchen Table Wisdom, by Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D. Stories of hope and healing by an oncologist who works with cancer patients.

It Must Have Been Moonglow, by Phyliss Green. A book on widowhood after a long loving marriage by a woman who was married 50 years.

Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice, by Paul Kivel. New Society Publisher, British Columbia 1996.

Earth Prayers from Around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems and Invocations for Honoring the Earth, Edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon. Harper Collins, San Francisco 1991.

Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World, by Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown. A book about reconnecting to the earth and its creatures (including humanity and ourselves) so that we can help heal the world and not be overwhelmed by the pain we feel for the world situation.

Healing Grief, by Victor M. Parachin, Chalice Press, St. Louis 2001. A wonderful little book with simple steps through the process of loss and healing. †



Let the Children Sing

-by Erik Collins



Zoltan Kodaly said that “the voice and musical feeling of children is so excellent that they can perform artistically anything that fits their physical and emotional development, however difficult the

task.” Here at All Souls, we have nothing short of an amazing choir program for our children and youth. From the time I was 11 years old, I have taken advantage of the wonderful musical opportunities provided by our church. I have come to realize that through the teachings of our esteemed music staff the children of All Souls can demonstrate their knowledge and perform their understanding of music.

By producing something together, the children feel a great sense of community and teamwork. The choir program provides a wonderful means of self-expression. Our children learn how to express a wide range of ideas and emotions described by composers and, perhaps, begin to relate some of those thoughts and feelings to their own experiences. Singing challenges our children to a disciplined practice of art, affording an opportunity to stretch the mind and feeling to full capacity. The essence of music education is artistry—an opportunity to make music beautiful.

A varied repertoire makes our choir program unique. By singing in the choir program, the children get the opportunity to learn great masterworks of choral literature from all periods, as well as spiritual, folk, gospel, jazz, and contemporary works from our American heritage. Teaching diverse musical

styles not only enriches the knowledge and experience of the children but also promotes understanding of other peoples and cultures.

While working with the children’s and youth choirs of All Souls, I have had the pleasure of watching the singers flourish. The All Souls Children’s Choir Program exists to provide children with the opportunity to participate in a musical experience that is challenging, rewarding, and enjoyable. Through the process of practicing and performing choral music with excellence and artistry, the choir program helps to foster the personal, musical, and social growth of each child, promoting self-esteem and self-discipline.

The All Souls Children’s Choir Program inspires children to a lifelong passion for singing through teamwork, diligence, and the performance of fine choral literature and to achieve choral success and musical excellence! †

Erik is a talented musician who grew up in our choir program and now serves as their paid accompanist.



Spiritual Practices: Staying at the Table

-by Sarah Gettie Burks, Intern Minister



What is brokenness? The obvious answer seems to be that brokenness is the opposite of wholeness, the opposite of attunement with and feeling a part of the world around us.

Brokenness can, unfortunately, invade our lives in a wide variety of ways. At the personal level, we can experience a sense of brokenness within ourselves when we feel as though we aren't living our lives with integrity. Brokenness can prevail in our homes when relationships are at odds or become abusive and degrading. Personal and interpersonal brokenness can manifest in addictions – alcohol, drugs, sex, food, consumerism, etc. – and all too often leads to a sense of further division both within the self and within external relationships. On a global level, brokenness can express itself in social injustices, environmental degradation, community violence (crime), and war.

Thus, it seems that brokenness is anything that challenges an integrated unity both within ourselves and with our world at large.

The good news is, brokenness doesn't have to be permanent. This month, I encourage you to reflect on the brokenness of interpersonal relationships. Are there relationships in your life that are broken? If so, might they be mended? I don't know about you, but when someone pushes my buttons, often the first thing I want to do is to run away – to get up from the table and physically walk away, to hang up the phone, to cut someone off mid-sentence, whatever it takes to stop my discomfort. And yet, while a flight-or-fight response is very human and serves well to keep us safe from danger, it is not a very effective coping mechanism for building stable, healthy relationships of connection with one another.

Sometimes it is necessary to end relationships in our lives if they are abusive. Sometimes to find a sense of wholeness for ourselves, we have to make the tough choice to walk away from relationships with individuals who are treating us in a way that is only harmful. But most of the time, with a little work, love, and tenderness, we can heal the brokenness that comes between us.

When I'm in a difficult discussion with a loved one or even just a casual acquaintance, I try to practice what I call "Staying at the Table." Staying at the table means not getting up and running away. It means not hanging up the phone or cutting someone off. It means committing to stay in relationship with the other person. It means being willing to risk discomfort rather than putting up walls and emotionally distancing yourself from the other. Here are some steps for how you might "Stay at the Table" in your relationships:

Recognize the Problem

The first step in healing a wound is acknowledging one exists. Did someone say something that hurt you? Did you say something to someone else you wish you wouldn't have said? Talk about it with the other person. Let them know in a non confrontational way that your feelings were hurt, or admit that you're uncomfortable with your own words or actions.

Talk About Your Feelings

Rather than starting the conversation with "you did..." or "you're so..." begin by talking about your own emotional experience of the situation. Try "I feel..." statements. Be assertive and address the problem without blaming the other person.

Listen

When it's the other person's turn to talk, listen deeply and with compassion. What was her experience of the situation? How is she feeling? What does he need to feel safe and supported?

Be Willing to Compromise

It's important to know your own needs and to state them. Most of us have a few needs that we aren't willing to compromise and that is perfectly fine. However, most of our needs are compromise-able and it's a matter of taking a step back and asking yourself, 'Is this something of absolute necessity to me, or is it something I'm willing to compromise on? If so, how much am I willing to compromise for the sake of the other person?'

Be Loving and Supportive

When you care for other people, you enjoy watching

them succeed. You wish for good things to happen to them. You support them when they are in need. You stay in relationship with them, even when they're having a bad day. Instead of reacting to their hurtful words or actions you try to understand what is really going on beneath the surface. Why are they

having a bad day? What are their personal struggles? As you both feel heard, loved, and understood, you will open up to one another more and more.

Beyond just staying at the table, your connections will grow even deeper and will blossom into something beautifully whole. †



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 - Faith*
- October - Death*
- November - Forgiveness*
- December - Hope*
- January - Justice*
- February - Love*
- March - Brokenness*
- April - Transformation*
- May - Transcendence*

Brokenness Personified

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister, & Kate Starr, Youth Director

Simple tasks take excruciating effort.
Brokenness uses all her energy
just to hold herself together,
to put on make up to face the world.
She believes no one else can see the scotch tape,
the masking tape, the duct tape,
the band aids, the stitches
and threads that bind her up.

No matter how hard she tries
Brokenness can only see the unfinished,
the scratched, and the scarred.
For her the forest always looks like
a wounded army.
Branches snapped, bark bruised,
limbs weighed down even by its own growth.

On her bedroom shelf
are two childhood dolls.
One is a beautiful antique china doll
passed down from her mother.
With a perfectly painted face, rosy cheeks,
and the full lips of a geisha
she wears a beautiful red kimono.
Her hands, feet, and face shine
through a glaze of thin spider web cracks.
Brokenness can count the number of times on one hand
she has dared take that doll out of the glass case that holds her.

Propped up against it is the other one.
This rag doll has one button eye left.
Her faded white dress is torn.
The embroidered heart is no longer there,
but the yellow shadow of where it used to be
remains.
Brokenness doesn't know why she keeps that
despicable remnant of her past.
Her mother, Redemption, says that doll used to be Brokenness' favorite.
But she just can't see it.

14 She can't see anything right now.



Brokenness is fighting for her very life,
just to hold herself together
so she doesn't disappear.

But her mother knows
her daughter's only chance
to really live
is to go
to the depths
she avoids,
to listen to the screams
she tries to silence
the voice that calls out to her
from her very soul. †

All Souls' Shawl Ministry

-by Claudia Arthrell



Started in the summer of 2006 by Rev. Tamara Lebak, the All Souls Unitarian Church Shawl Ministry has grown to include more than 25 members who have knitted or crocheted more than 50 shawls for church members who are recovering from illness.

Members say they mentally send a message of "hope, health, and love" as they knit or crochet their shawls. It is with this intent that they are made and given.

Care Team members help determine when a parishioner needs a shawl and ministers deliver them. Some of the knitters and crocheters have made shawls especially for friends to be delivered on behalf of the church.

Each shawl includes a note from the maker, and the poem, *Nine Blessings*, by Cathleen O'Meara Murtha, DW. The ministry keeps a log listing the shawl, its creator, and the recipient.

The shawl ministry welcomes donations of acrylic (washable and soft) yarn, knitting needles, and crochet hooks. Patterns and kits are made available for anyone wanting to make a shawl. Many of the group's members serve as mentors to new members who are learning to knit and crochet.

Keep an eye out for yarn at garage sales, and come join us. If you have questions, contact Claudia Arthrell 747-3800.

"Nine Blessings"

By Cathleen O'Meara Murtha, DW

*I call nine blessings from above
In the name of the Spirit: the comforter,
the consoler, the sustainer of life.
I knit a mantle of caring
I knit a mantle of protection
I knit a mantle of wholeness
I knit a mantle of strength
I knit a mantle of healing
I knit a mantle of patience
I knit a mantle to enfold you
I knit a mantle to encircle you
I knit a mantle to empower you.*

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

editorial board
Phil Haney
Susan Tillman

church staff
Rev. Marlin Lavanhar
Rev. Tamara Lebak
Rev. Debra Garfinkel
Sarah Gettie Burks
Kate Starr

contributors
Claudia Arthrell
Erik Collins
Ann Jackman
Rev. Ron Robinson

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.

March Highlights

| | |
|-------------|---|
| March 1 | KISS/Joining Sunday |
| March 6 | Soulful Sundown |
| March 8 | Youth Sunday |
| March 10 | Program Council |
| March 12 | Day Alliance |
| March 20 | All Soul Acoustic Coffeehouse: Greg Trooper |
| March 22 | Heritage Sunday |
| March 24 | Evening Alliance |
| March 26-29 | UUCF Revival |

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