



# Universalist Society of Strafford

Member of the Unitarian Universalist Association

May 2017 Newsletter

*"Peace is every step. It turns the endless path to joy." Thich Nhat Hanh*

**ALL ARE  
WELCOME!**

**Services**  
1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays  
at 10 am

*Childcare and  
spiritual exploration  
offered for our  
young ones.*

*Coffee &  
Conversation  
following services*

We hold our  
**Summer Services**  
in our Church at  
2 Justin Morrill  
Highway, Vt. Rte. 132  
in South Strafford.

**Fall and Winter  
Services** across the  
street at Barrett Hall.

**Contact Information**

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**2016-2017  
Church Officers**

Moderator –  
John Freitag  
Assistant Moderator –  
Marissa Mazzucco  
Treasurer –  
Suzanna Liepmann  
Secretary – open  
Trustees – Fred Wolfe,  
Andrew Lane, and  
Dick Josler

**WORSHIP SERVICES held at Barrett Hall**

**Sunday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 10am. *Our History Meets the Present* led by Rev. Telos Whitfield.**  
Let's explore the roots of our tradition, the leaders and the communities that worked to forge and strengthen liberal religion and find their voices, and look to strength and insight we can draw on for today's complicated and changing times when our voices are still needed!

**Sunday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 10am. *Roundtable Discussion* led by Tara Bamford.** In the winter of 2012/2013, members and friends of our congregation gathered for a series of discussions to try to put into words how we see ourselves as a congregation, our vision for the future, and goals for the next five years. On the Third Sunday in May we'll take a fresh look at the narrative, discuss any changes desired, celebrate our accomplishments toward our goals, and identify next steps. Whether you were part of this effort or are new to our community, we want to hear your voices and ideas.

*Message from our Minister*

*"Alone in the world, I was beset by confusion and emptiness in my soul - so much busyness and pettiness, so little depth or connection, I shriveled inside from want of real spiritual bonds and my soul cried out for meaning.*

*Then I came into community, a religious community of hope and love. Here I found support and encouragement, depth and diversity, and the power of sharing the journey. And together we saved my life."*

[Douglas Taylor, from For All That Is Our Life]

I believe many of us can relate to Taylor's words. He speaks to those moments that have come upon me when I finish listening to a particularly difficult report on the radio of violence or struggle, and allow myself to forget that I am a part of something much larger, a force more powerful, a community that has held a vision for thousands of years. Our Unitarian Universalist faith has roots that go back hundreds of years and we draw on sources that are ancient. From the earliest pagans whose relationship with the earth and the cycles of the seasons was powerful and directed their lives. From the followers of the early Christian communities who recognized the power of their relationship with their faith and their community in equal measure. Our path hasn't always been light-filled and we have fallen short of our principles; we have struggled to re-invent who we are and remember what we believe. There were early women ministers founding churches in isolated communities of the mid-West in the 1800's. We hail from the transcendentalists - Emily Dickinson, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson working to elevate both the intellect and physical labor to create communities of unity.

And since then, we have marched and worked for social justice causes, the rights of women and people of color and the GLBTQ community, causes of peace and nuclear disarmament, animals and the environment, all while working to build and sustain our congregations and our faith. These leaders and workers, writers, poets, and activists have given us a history to reflect on and to celebrate, and to learn from. The work of matching action to vision, of holding fast to what it is we believe in the face of struggle and confusion isn't easy. Sometimes we haven't seen or forgotten what the true purpose might have been, lost the vision along the way or let fear get in the way. Our own denominational leaders have come face to face with struggle and are in a process of transition, and reconciliation around our relationship with racism and power. This work takes courage and faith, and as Taylor reminded us, it takes realizing you are part of a community. We might not be revolutionaries, coming face to face with the larger threats but there are ways to be radical that help heal divisions, quell violence and encourage peace. It is the small daily connections that can identify and honor our faith. It may not take much energy or any great amount of courage to take a few minutes to ask how a neighbor is doing but it might make the real difference to them. In his reflection "Civility, Democracy and Multiculturalism", William Sloane Coffin wrote these words: *"Let me start with a few words about diversity. Clearly, God is more comfortable with diversity than we are. After all, She made it! We, on the other hand, tend to fear our differences more than we celebrate them. In fact, diversity may be the hardest thing for a society to live with and perhaps the most dangerous thing for a society to be without."* Our country has become more and more diverse and faith communities are being challenged to not only open their doors wider but to explore what fears and resistance might be there. Perhaps every social justice movement has had to come face to face with this question - what are we afraid of? Coffin continues: *"The challenge is to seek a unity that celebrates diversity, to unite the particular with the universal, to recognize the need for roots while insisting that the point of roots is to put forth branches."* Let us remember and celebrate the strong and inspiring roots of our tradition while also looking to what new growth and vision we want to encourage in Strafford, Vermont and beyond. The song *Peace, Salaam, Shalom* that we sang on Easter morning was written by Pat and Sandy of Emma's Revolution as a prayer and rallying call for the crowds gathered in New York City following 9/11. They created diversity by offering the song in Arabic, Hebrew and English. They are modern activists singing their way to justice. And there are so many ways we, even as a small community can support each other, encourage our voices and work to further unity and diversity in a time when a small gesture does matter. *We are* in this experience together!

Blessings, Rev. Telos

### *Our Unitarian Universalist Principles*

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

*We didn't hold a Business Meeting in April so  
Our Next meeting will be Wed. May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6:30pm  
at John Freitag's home. Everyone is welcome to join us!*

*Holy Days, Days to Remember*  
Sat. May 6 - Green Up Vermont Day  
Sunday, May 14 - Mother's Day  
Monday, May 29 - Memorial Day

*From an conversation with Ralph Nader in The Center Post, a journal of UU Rowe Center*

Ralph Nader was asked this question: "You're an admired exemplar of American social and political activism, and in your latest book *Animal Envy: A Fable* you also display what might be called a spiritual perspective, asserting the sentience and wisdom of animals as our fellow beings on the planet. Do you view your social activism in any way as a form of sacred activism, strengthened and illumined by spiritual insight? What role do you think spirituality can play in efforts to achieve social justice?"

Ralph Nader responds: "Well, when it reflects peace, justice, community, respect for austerity, it plays a great role. Look at the Civil Rights Movement: people were jailed but it was their spiritual commitment that kept them going. And nuns in Central America. Or nuns going in to halt nuclear submarine construction or atomic bombs. All justice movements have a spiritual content. It doesn't have to be associated with organized religion, but it does mean that it's driven by a motivation beyond self-interest."

*[Social and Sacred Activism in the Age of Trump What do we need to do? How do we need to be?*

*Conversations with Ralph Nader, Andrew Harvey and Starhawk, pg. 17.]*

*Ralph Nader will present "Unstoppable: A Master Class for Citizen Action,"*

*May 12 - 14 at Rowe UU Conference Center, [www.rowecenter.org](http://www.rowecenter.org)*

*Don't just walk  
in someone's shoes  
walk in their feet...  
blisters and all  
Stumbling, tripping, rambling  
through life until I found  
something that mattered  
It wasn't something  
that I could touch, taste or smell  
but it was more solid somehow  
What a community can give-  
intangible, but more real  
than anything I'd ever known  
and the benefits, better  
than being alone  
isolation didn't appeal anymore*

*(part of a Community Compassion Poem written by the citizens of  
the Springfield, Greene County community during the "Building Common Ground:  
Charter for Compassion, A Civility Project Event, on March 2, 2012)*