



# The Univoice

## Where do we go from here?

Our church has experienced significant growth in membership, program emphasis and physical facilities in the last few years, and it is important now to take stock of where we are as a church and to determine future directions we would like to move in. You, the members of our congregation, are vital to this assessment process. Your ideas will provide the basis for our new mission and vision statements. And so we ask for your participation in a congregational effort to reestablish and articulate our common purposes. Who are we now? In what directions do we want to move in the next five years?

### Church Office Hours:

The church office is open Mon. through Fri. from 10-3pm, but please call ahead to ensure access.

Please contact the office manager, Susan Stewart to arrange for a temporary key if you need access any other time.

Rev. Fees has office hours by appointment. Please call (610) 372-0928 or email [sandrafees@verizon.net](mailto:sandrafees@verizon.net), to schedule an appointment. Monday is Rev. Fees day off.

This process began on Rededication Sunday, when we asked you to write your ideas for the future of the Church on little paper sail boats. You helped to start this re-examination process by offering a variety of different ideas about our future. Among the most commonly mentioned ideas was the desire to extend our outreach efforts in our local Berks County and to find ways to aid in problems affecting the global community. Many members also mentioned the need to develop church programs that would strengthen and bring together our church community. Here are a few samples of your thoughts on our future.

“Be a positive force in our section of Reading so that it is a sustainable community - peaceful & fun!”

“Join with our neighbor congregations to make a wonderful community - schools, playgrounds, parks, streets.”

“Bring a friend each week.”

“Invite a friend Sunday.”

“Pre-church activity to lure people in, post church activity to hook them.”

“Be an inspiration for the city to flourish.”

“More classes that allow us to do creative things in small groups.”

“Initiate activities that would attract new city residents”



Walter Axsmith the cutting ribbon at the rededication ceremony on Oct. 25.

### Univoice Submission Guidelines

Email submissions by attaching a Word file or including your material in the body of an email message to [univoice@uuberks.org](mailto:univoice@uuberks.org). You may also put typewritten submissions in our mailbox in the new Chalice House in the box labelled *Univoice*.

The deadline is the 15th of each month. Please include the date, time and location of events, and the full name and phone number or email of contacts.

(I recently got married and have changed my last name. My email will remain the same, but my name in the directory has changed.)  
~Meghan Cocuzza, Editor

Our next event is tentatively scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 17th, and we are planning to solicit more ideas on the vision and mission for the Church. This will be a fun event and you will be invited to help immediately following the Sunday service. We hope to see all of you there and look forward to working with you on this very important project!

Sincerely,

The Vision and Mission Team

Doug Mealing, Jeff Woodward, Mindy Bortz, Peter Mitchell, and Reverend Sandra Fees.

## From Sandra's Study

### Home for the Holidays



As we enter the winter holidays, images of home rise up in our imaginations. What does it mean to be at home in this season of light and love? For some, it means the physical shelter and comfort of the familiar place in which you have your residence. Most humans have a need for the pleasure and stability of shelter. We all want and need a literal place to rest our heads. For some, home means spending time with family and friends, whether in our own homes or elsewhere. At the core of these images of home is the sense of belonging they bring. In our homes and with our families and friends, we seek a deeper encounter with others, with ourselves, with the earth, with the holy. To belong is to come into a deep knowing that we are at home in the world wherever we may go.

This month we'll focus our attention on the theme of shelter. It is our worship theme for December. We'll consider what it means to make a good life, a life that is satisfying and sustainable and gives us the sense of being at home in the world. We'll also reflect on those moments of compassionate ethical living that make the world a better home for all of us. And we'll explore the Mexican story, Las Posadas, which follows the journey Mary and Joseph make to Bethlehem in search of shelter. After being repeatedly turned away, they finally find a place to call home for the night. That becomes the shelter in which the baby Jesus is born.

Who will open their doors to us when we have made the long journey seeking shelter? To whom we will open our doors and our hearts when they come knocking? To whom will we offer room at the inn?  
Yours in love and faith,

Sandra

#### Guest at Your Table

It's once again time for our "Guest at Your Table" campaign. We will be taking Donations all through Dec. for the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's program to promote human rights. For more than thirty years, The Guest at Your Table tradition has helped UUs build lasting connections to UU principles and support the movement for universal human rights. It is a simple and meaningful way to incorporate "faith in action" into your life. Donations will be taken at coffee hour after church throughout Dec.

#### Splinters from the Board

The Board met Nov. 10th and spent time working on the agenda for the upcoming congregational meeting on Dec. 6th. They again discussed the Chalice House shortfall in order to have options ready for the congregational meeting. Doug gave an overview on the current status of the Vision Team which is planning an activity for January 18th to solicit input from the congregation for a new vision and mission statement. There was some discussion around disaster planning for the Church, but it was felt too large a task to handle at this time, so it was tabled for now. Jeanne again expressed concern in her written report over the low balance in the primary account and her desire to have an emergency fund. The Board also discussed a new policy regarding staff and their spouses and relatives who may be on the Board in order to be proactive if a situation ever arises.

#### When UU should stay home

Winter months provide many joyous events; the holidays, the New Year, etc. However, unfortunately, the cold is notoriously known for flu season. With all of the fun and exciting events happening, it is disappointing when we have to miss church and other social events. However, if you do fall victim to the flu or a cold please do not try and attend church. When to stay home and rest: coughing, sneezing, achy, severe headache, vomiting, and/or just feeling sick. By staying home you are helping to contain illness and also helping yourself to heal faster.



## Membership input on Chalice House debt tops agenda for Dec. 6 meeting

By Gene Goodwin

Berks UU members will have their say about the estimated \$80,000 debt from the Chalice House project at the congregational meeting set for 11:45AM Sunday, Dec. 6.

Our Board of Directors has wrestled with the problem, but wants input from the membership before agreeing on how to proceed. Board President Joe Plageman has said he will call town hall style meetings in January and February, if necessary, to assure that all ideas and options have been heard.

Members are asked to note the early 11:45AM starting time for this Dec. 6 meeting, and are urged to bring their coffee cups (but not food) into the sanctuary so that the meeting can start on time.

The shortfall on finances for our new addition is just one of the important items on the agenda for this semiannual meeting. The agenda, which was mailed to church members along with a detailed report from the Board, also includes:

- Report on a Vision and Mission statement for our church (details in article on page one in this issue of Univoice.)
- Vote on which local organizations should benefit from our special Sunday plate collections this spring.
- Report on the diversity workshops and where we should go from there.
- Reports from Building Keepers and recommendations for special projects.
- Report from our minister, the Rev. Sandra Fees.

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## Next steps for Social Justice

By Carla Mannix

**“Out beyond right and wrong, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.” -Rumi**

A diverse group of twelve people gathered for the Social Justice Team’s last Weaving the Fabric of Diversity workshop on Saturday, Nov. 21st. We shared stories from different ages, classes, abilities, and backgrounds.

We all agreed that pursuing cultural diversity in our congregation solely for the sake of diversity is probably not the way to go. We are not seeking to change who we are, but how to communicate our Principles in ways that people of diverse backgrounds can “hear” it, in ways that will touch them spiritually. That may mean looking at our worship style, our communications, and even revisiting our theological tolerance.

We have studied the “-isms” so that we are better prepared to receive people of different backgrounds without “over-welcoming” them. In that vein, however, we recognized our need to strengthen our internal capacity to follow-up with the visitors and attendees we already get.

In terms of next steps, we agreed that our church needs to expand opportunities for sustained interaction. We want to internally:

- **Host periodic pot lucks again**

- **Strengthen circle groups ministry**
- **Specifically nurture young adults in our midst (pre-family)**
- **Be a haven for interracial/mixed heritage families in the same way we are for interfaith families.**

In terms of an outreach project that would excite the congregation, we agreed that we want to:

- **Tie in with existing organizations (no new programs)**
- **Get people into our venue**
- **Market our Principles to seekers and the “unchurched”**
- **Advertise our services and availability of our facility for use**

Given the desires and goals, many participants wanted to explore further the idea of joining Family Promise, whereby we would join 16 other churches who host a homeless family in the church for a week four times a year. We also discussed involvement with other groups including Spectrum and Habitat for Humanity.

Do you know a group that you’d be excited about our church actively supporting? Please contact Mike Szajna at [miszja@verizon.net](mailto:miszja@verizon.net).

We look forward to hearing your input at the Congregational Meeting!

## Religious Education

Dear Friends,

Our Dec. worship theme is Shelter. In many countries and cultures, this month of long, cold nights and sparse daylight hours is a time to celebrate home, hearth, light, and family.



In keeping with the Shelter theme, we are planning a special All Ages evening to celebrate the Mexican tradition of Las Posadas. This special holiday celebration is usually observed every evening from Dec. 16 to 24. These gatherings commemorate Mary and Joseph's cold and difficult journey from Naza-

reth to Bethlehem in search of shelter. "Posada" in Spanish, simply means lodging or shelter.

Each one of the nine nights before Christmas, a party is held in a home in the neighborhood. There is plenty of food and drink, with candies and fruit for the children. At dusk, all the guests gather outside the house. A small child dressed as an angel leads, followed by children carrying figures of Mary and Joseph. Boys and girls dressed in silver and gold robes join the procession, followed by the adults and musicians. Everyone sings holiday songs as they walk along, carrying their lit candles. When the procession reaches the house, the group divides in two. One half remains outside and begs for shelter from the other half, which is inside the house. The doors are then opened and the fun begins. The happy end to each posada has always been the piñata.

**Our celebration on Saturday, Dec. 12 at 5:30 PM will be a modified-UU version, after all, it would be hard to get people to come to church nine nights in a row! We will share a Mexican food potluck dinner, make clay nativity figures, and create our own version of the traditional procession, and break a piñata.**

During the Christmas-week worship service, the children will recreate the procession during the regular Sunday service.

Enjoy your holidays,

*Elizabeth*

RE Committee: Lisa Wilder (Chair), Emily McNulty, Susan Stewart, Kent Gutzler, Stephanie Elliott, Tracy Brant, Celeste Galanos (Youth Representative)



Elizabeth Kaufmann (pictured above with daughter)  
Director of Religious Education

## Religious Education Calendar of Events

**Creative Arts Vision Quest: Saturday, Nov. 28- Sunday, Nov. 29**

Beginning 1 PM on Saturday and continuing until Sunday morning, there will be a lock-in for older high school youth and recent graduates. Joanna Groebel, Dance Therapist and Susan Lazarchik, a talented local artist will facilitate a Creative Arts Vision Quest using Painting from the Source techniques and Trance Dance. Contact Joanna Groebel at 610-370-5713 for more information.

**Family Holiday Event Planning Meeting: Sunday, Dec. 6, 2009 12-12:45 PM**

Special meeting of those members of the RE committee and anyone else interested in helping to plan the family holiday event to be held on Dec. 12.

**Holiday Family Event—Celebrating Las Posadas:**

**Saturday, Dec. 12, 5:30 PM**  
See article at the top of the page for event details. Please RSVP to Elizabeth Kaufmann.

**Holiday Pancake Breakfast: Sunday, Dec. 13, 9:15 am**

Mark your calendar for the first pancake breakfast of the year! Come to church early for a delicious breakfast, hosted by our teens. Proceeds will help to fund their field trip to St. John the Divine Cathedral in New York City for the annual Winter Solstice Concert.

**Teen Field Trip to Winter Solstice Concert in NYC: Saturday, Dec. 19, 2009**

From the concert web site, <http://solsticeconcert.com/> comes the following description from musician Paul Winter:

*Traditionally, Solstice has been a time of reflection, gratitude, forgiveness and renewal. My aspiration is that the audience will come away with their spirits awakened, and with a deepened*

*sense of relatedness to the family of life, to the Earth, and perhaps even to the cosmos. Please join us, along with our special guests Russia's Dmitri Pokrovsky Ensemble and New York's Forces of Nature Dance Theatre, as we celebrate the rebirth of the sun.*

We have tickets for the 2 PM show. If you didn't get a chance to sign-up, contact Barry Groebel or Elizabeth Kaufmann as we ordered a few extra seats (price range: \$35-50). We will be traveling by rental van, driven by Barry. We'll have some time before and after the concert to explore NYC. Departure time to be announced.

**All-Ages Winter Holiday Worship Service "Shelter":**

**Sunday, Dec. 20, 2009, 10:30 PM**  
No regular Religious Education classes. Nursery care will be available.

**All-Ages Christmas Eve Candlelight Service:**

**Thursday, Dec. 24, 2009, 5 PM**  
Nursery care will be available.

**RE Teacher Meet-Up (For all RE Teachers and Sunday Helpers): Friday, Jan. 8, 2010, 6 PM**

Beat those post holiday-blahs with a friendly gathering to meet with your teaching team, review classroom progress for the year, discuss any issues or concerns, and fill out the calendar for the second half of the year. Dinner will be provided and your families are welcome to join us.

**January RE Committee Meeting Sunday, Jan. 24, 2010, 12 noon**

We will meet in the Seekers (Middle School) classroom at the top of the steps on the 2nd floor of Chalice House.



One of the children dressed up as a ladybug at the Day of the Dead Service held Nov. 1.

## Adult Program Offerings

### Getting to know UU with rev. Sandra Fees

**Sunday, Dec. 13, 11:45-12:45 PM**

Join our minister after the worship service for a chance to get to know newcomers, members and friends, to discuss the sermon topic, or share questions about Unitarian Universalism.

### Potluck lunch bunch with rev. Sandra Fees

**Dec. 15, 12-1:30 PM (3rd Tues.)**

Let's celebrate the winter holiday season with a festive potluck luncheon. Bring a soup, salad, or dessert. Beverages will be provided.

### Considering the future of the prayer shawl ministry

Rev. Fees is looking for feedback about this ministry to determine whether to continue it. In order to continue this ministry, we need both a member to coordinate it and more participants. Contact Rev. Fees with your input.



Children in the Chalice House at the rededication ceremony on Oct. 25.

## Awakening Body Spirit III Skin!

Sunday, Dec. 6th from 6:30 to 8:30, join Joanna Groebel for an experiential workshop exploring the largest organ of the body: our skin. Protection and connection, boundaries between inner and outer, touching and being touched are all literal and metaphoric issues we will explore through movement, meditation, vibration/sound, and expressive art experiences. Please wear loose comfortable clothing, and bring a blanket. Reserve a space by contacting Joanna by email at [jvgroebel@gmail.com](mailto:jvgroebel@gmail.com).

## UUBooks

On Dec. 13 we will be discussing Steven Johnson's *The Invention of Air*. This telling of Joseph Priestly's story is so compelling even persons who have not read the book might find it interesting to sit in.

Johnson makes numerous references to how the rise of coffeehouses in London contributed to the free exchange of ideas which marked the 18th century. So at 9:00 AM "coffee's on" and at 9:15 AM we will move into the Gerber Conference Room (Sandra's former study) for book discussion.

The Jan. 10 selection is *The Spiritual Life of Children*. Robert Coles, child psychiatrist and Pulitzer-winning author, interviewed over 300 Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and agnostic children ages 8-12 in different parts of the world.

Using their own words and art works, he examines the religious and spiritual lives of children struggling to understand the concepts of God and spirituality, the ultimate meaning of their lives, and contradictions of religious teachings they've learned.

The Feb. 14 book will be Jennifer Thompson-Cannino and Ronald Cotton's *Picking Cotton*.

For further info, contact Nadine Smet-Weiss or Kelly Hartman.

## Murray Grove news update:

**U**U New Years at Murray Grove with Rev Craig Hirshberg – Dec. 31, 2009-Jan. 1, 2010

A festive, fun & spiritual New Years overnight retreat for UUs', families and friends. Individuals, couples and groups are welcome! Includes: dinner, 1920s-theme dance lessons and dance party (any level of inexperience OK!).

Cost: \$75 per person; children under 12: \$50.

Space limited – RSVP ASAP! 609-693-5558 or [murraygrove@murraygrove.org](mailto:murraygrove@murraygrove.org)

New: we are now hosting a monthly welcoming GLBTQQI (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning and intersex) service and potluck – coming up next on Nov. 15 and Dec. 6. All

GLBTQQI folks and their allies and supporters are welcome! The future dates will vary, but it'll be on a Sunday each month, from 5:00 to 7:30 PM. R.S.V.P. 609-693-5558 or [murraygrove@murraygrove.org](mailto:murraygrove@murraygrove.org)



Save the Dates:

Drum and Dance Retreat Aug.13-15, 2010

Homecoming 2010 Sept.. 24-26, 2010

Please ask us about bartering opportunities in exchange for retreat costs.

## This Month's Volunteers

### December Ushers

- 12/6 Axsmith/Thibault
- 12/13 Debroux/McLeish
- 12/20 Showalter/Tyson
- 12/27 Orts/Brownstein



### Coffee Corps

- 12/6, IV Walter & Wilfriede Axsmith
- 12/13 V Rick Salafia & Leigh Kane
- 12/20 VI Randall Newnham
- 12/24 (Christmas Eve – Special)
- 12/27 VII Judd & Mindy Bortz

## Food Pantry

By Kelly Hartman

The Thursday, Nov. 5 Food Pantry served 124 recipients, 19 of whom were first timers to our Pantry. These persons represented households containing 217 adults, 223 children, and 37 seniors.

Future Pantry Thursdays will be Dec. 3, Jan. 7, and Feb. 4.

Volunteers from the congregation are an essential part of the Pantry's successful operation, and are always welcome. We serve a marginalized group of the Reading community, and our efforts are greatly appreciated.

Come join us, and help make it happen!

For further info contact Walter Axsmith, w2axsmith@comcast.net.



## Becoming a high expectation Church

By: Jeff Woodward, Stewardship Chair

What would be the most important thing that a church such as ours could do to strengthen our congregation and allow us to play a more prominent role as a liberal church in Berks County? What would help us to be better stewards of our mission? Michael Durall, a prominent consultant for Unitarian Universalist churches and the author of *Creating Congregations of Generous People* and *The Almost Church revitalized* believes that the most important thing UU churches can do is to raise the expectation level for membership in their congregations.

Durall believes that UU congregations must challenge their members to play more active roles in their churches. He believes that UU churches now face a number of serious problems in meeting their mission goals, including attracting new membership, raising sufficient financial support, and realizing the church's commitment to spiritual growth and social outreach. To meet these common goals, Durall calls for UU churches to challenge their members in terms of their regular attendance, their involvement in church programs and ministries, and their financial support.

In his experience, too many UU churches have been reluctant to encourage members to play more active roles in meeting their churches' spiritual and social goals. When UU churches are unclear about the expectations that accompany membership, they unknowingly encourage an environment in which too little is asked of members and too little is committed to the life of the church. This often results in a low expectation congregation in which a significant portion of the members attend services and church events infrequently, and contribute only a small portion of their time, talent and energy to supporting the church's programs. In this low engagement situation many members offer only minimal financial support for the work of their church. As a result, a small percentage of the membership does the lion's share of the work and gives most of the money to sustain the church.

Durall's answer is for today's UU churches to call on their members to commit to five practices that are essential to a committed congregation. They are:

1. Attend Sunday service regularly.
2. Participate in one program each year that deepens your faith.
3. Participate in some activity of the social outreach mission of the church.
4. Strive to reach the 5% level of charitable giving as soon as possible.
5. Tell others about the church



Durall's analysis of the problems facing contemporary UU churches is one that should be of real concern to all of us. His recommendations offer us a good baseline for assessing the underlying health of our congregation and a good point of departure for a congregational discussion.

And, while all five practices are of importance to the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Berks County in maintaining a vital congregational life, it would seem that the most primary practice, the gateway to all the others, is regular attendance at Sunday worship service. All other commitments flow from our weekly worship service together in community. Sunday worship service is our most basic communal act from which we gain insight into our faith, and from which we gain inspiration and the fellowship needed to carry out our ministries and programs. Our regular attendance is an act of stewardship of our shared community. So, let us start by renewing our commitment to our church community and to our faith by coming regularly to church on Sundays.



# December 2009



Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
		1 Women for Health 9-12pm	2 Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	3 Food Pantry 8-12pm	4	5 Potluck 5-7pm
6 Awakening Body Spirit III 6:30-7:30pm	7	8 Board Meeting 7-9pm	9 Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	10	11	12
13 Getting to know UU 12-1pm	14 Heart to Heart 7-8:30pm	15 Lunch Bunch 12-1:30pm	16 Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	17	18	19
20 Building Keepers Meeting 12-1pm	21	22	23 Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	24 Christmas Eve 	25 Christmas Day 	26
27	28	29	30 Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	31 New Years Eve 	1 New Year Day 	

## Special Plate Collection

There will be a Special Plate Collection for Mentors for Berks Youth on Sunday Dec. 6. Mentors for Berks Youth links adult role models with Reading School students who face social challenges in a mentoring relationship, enabling and preparing them to pursue post-secondary education.

So far this Fall, collection totals have been very good. The Sept. collection brought in \$638.00 on Sunday and a late check came in for \$100.00 making a grand total of 738.00 for Easy Does It Inc. The Oct. collection for our own Food Pantry brought in \$1035.40.

## Sunday Service Schedule

10:30am every Sunday

### Dec. 6 Living the Good Life

**Rev. Sandra Fees, Joanna Groebel, Worship Associate, Dan Matz, Music Director, and the First UU Choir**

What does it mean to live the good life? Gandhi said, "Live simply so that others may simply live." What kind of perspectives and ethical considerations can help us learn to live in ways that create a way of being that is satisfying and sustainable? This morning's offering will benefit Mentors for Berks Youth, which links adult role models with Reading students.

### Dec. 13 Epiphanies of Living

**Rev. Sandra Fees, Rachel Gutzler, Worship Associate, and Dan Matz, Music Director**

Each of us is touched at times by the suffering we see in the world. Often we are confused by them, or discouraged from pursuing them, and hold back from doing anything. This morning we will explore these "epiphanies of recruitment," these moments of compassionate living.

### Dec. 20 A Celebration of Las Posadas

**Rev. Sandra Fees, Elizabeth Kaufmann, DRE, Mena Hautau, Worship Associate, Dan Matz, Music Director, and the First UU Choir**

This morning we celebrate the season by exploring this Mexican tradition. "Las Posadas" means "the inns" or "the shelters" and commemorates Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem to find shelter before Jesus' birth. The service will include a Child Dedication ceremony.

### Dec. 24 5 p.m. Seeking Shelter: Christmas Eve Candlelighting Service

**Rev. Sandra Fees, Elizabeth Kaufmann, DRE, Dan Matz, and the First UU Choir**

This is our annual Christmas Eve service in which we light candles, share the stories and music of the season, and celebrate the birth of Jesus.

### Dec. 27 The Human Sides of Christmas

**Tracie Greth and Susan Pena, Pianist**

Christmas is many things. It is fun and spiritual. It is expensive and stressful. For some, it is deeply lonely. Tracie will discuss Christmas in all of its human complexity. One part of this talk will feature Santa as a magical nature spirit and also as a god of commerce.



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## First Unitarian Universalist Church

### of Berks County

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