



The Univoice

Small group ministry - an Invitation

By: Ann Myers

Saving the world ten people at a time

Remember back to when you first came to the Berks UU church. Did you sometimes feel uncomfortable and disconnected from the people around you who already knew each other and were engaged in interesting conversations? And if some people approached you to welcome you during coffee hour, did you still feel as if you were on the outside looking in? If this was or perhaps still is your experience on Sundays, and you wish it could be different, we have an invitation for you.

This spring our church is planning to expand the number of small circle groups that are sponsored by the church and facilitated by lay church members. You are invited to consider signing up for such a group, which many have called "the hope of the Unitarian Universalist movement." Why? Because the Circle Groups are unlike any other spiritual growth and community building opportunities we currently have, and they offer the best way for us to connect with each other on the deepest possible level. They offer the opportunity to talk about our lives and to deepen our spirituality.

What is Small Group Ministry?

Small Group Ministry is a network of small groups, whose main objectives are to strengthen the congregation by drawing us into mutual ministry. The primary emphasis of Small Group Ministry is to care for people—to serve them, encourage them to spiritual growth, and meet their needs for affirmation and acceptance. By creating an open, supportive and nurturing environment, Small Group Ministry promotes and facilitates spiritual growth and mutual interactive care for one another.

Why are we developing and enhancing Small Group Ministry at UU Berks?

Our congregation has grown, and it is often difficult for individuals in larger congregations to experience intimacy and real friendship with the entire church membership. Small Groups can provide that intimacy and can contribute to spiritual growth. They provide a way to meet new people and to meet our spiritual and human needs that cannot be adequately addressed in weekly worship and coffee hour fellowship, important as these two activities are. Small groups allow for sharing and empathizing with a small number of people, usually eight or ten. We learn to listen to each other and to respect each other and to be honest with each other. Small Groups are ministries for the heart. They can also help to develop lay leadership and deepen our understanding of UU principles and values.

How do the small groups work?

There is no one set format. Most groups meet once a month in the evening, either at the church or in members' homes. Light refreshments may be served, but food is not the focus of the evening! Meetings generally run from 7 to 9pm, and we try to begin and end on time. Our minister provides topics for the meeting, often a follow-up on themes dealt with in a church service or sermon. Some groups may select their own topics as the participants decide. Every meeting involves checking in with each person and giving each member of the group a chance to respond to the evening's question on a personal level. General discussion and sharing may follow after each person has had a chance to share without interruption. The atmosphere is worshipful and confidential as we get to know each other on a deeper level.

How can I get involved?

April 11 has been designated "Small Group Ministry Sunday," and Reverend Sandra Fees will address the topic in her sermon. A few members who are currently part of a circle group will share their experiences. If this sounds like something you would be interested in, you will have an opportunity to sign up to join one of the groups which we are anticipating forming. We are all pressed for time, but I think that your time will be well spent in a Circle Group. Please let me know if you have questions or concerns.



Church Office Hours:

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

Please contact 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, to schedule an appointment. Monday is Rev. Fees day off.

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. 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.

My new telephone number is (610) 741-6006 if you need to contact me.

~Meghan Cocuzza, Editor

Ann Myers annmyers@comcast.net

From Sandra's Study

Rev. Sandra Fees

Moving Our Spiritual Community from "Pause" to "Play"



While our building was under construction last year, one member observed that it felt like we were on hold, waiting. It felt that way to me too. It felt a little like someone had pressed the "pause" button on the remote. While the construction was completed by late summer and celebrated in the Fall, we are only now beginning to fully live and grow into our new space.

The "play" button has been pressed. There is renewed enthusiasm, optimism, and warmth afoot at First UU. I note this in the buzz on Sunday mornings after church, in people's participation in church life, and in something not as easy to measure, but palpable nonetheless – the mood or environment that pervades the community.

Here are just a few highlights of what I've seen happening recently or is coming up in our church community that signals that renewed spirit:

- Hosting a Youth Conference focused on art in late May for about 30 children and advisors in our region.
- Serving as a monthly meeting site for Reading's Act 47 Community Committee, which is working on creative ideas for the City as it deals with its distressed status.
- A community wine-tasting event in April.
- An enthusiastic team of stewards excited about generating the resources required to move forward with our goals.
- A strong membership team, which is now able to provide regular Sunday morning greeters and visitor follow up.
- 16 participants in the UU theology class "What Moves Us," which began in February.
- Fun town hall conversations to develop our new vision and mission statement, which we'll vote on at our May congregational meeting.
- Renewed attention to our small group ministry program, with opportunities for people to sign up for a group in April.
- Increased number of Worship Associates who share their spiritual reflections on Sunday mornings.
- Spaghetti and song evening, leading to an All Ages Choir piece in February.

What's happening right now that is inspiring and encouraging you and your family spiritually? What keeps your relationship with our community on "play"? I encourage you to spend a little time reflecting on those questions, and to share your answers with me.

Yours in faith and love,
Sandra

Wine Tasting

Save this date
Saturday, Apr. 17
5 to 7pm

Come for a good time
Wine tasting with cheese,
gourmet pizza and
dessert

Bring a bottle of wine
and your friends join in
the fun, good food and
fellowship.
Prizes for the best white
and red wines.
\$15.00 Admission



Musical Talent Needed for Choir

By: Dan Matz

As musical director of our church, it is my job to make sure that each service has content which enhance your surroundings. Some Sundays there is a lot of music, while others have just hymns. We are hoping to incorporate more music in our services. The Choir will be singing twice a month. There will also be solo and small group performances. Although our congregation is already blessed with much talent, there are many more members out there waiting to shine. Please contact me if you wish to join choir or perform a solo. To participate, please email Dan Matz at Daniel.matz@hotmail.com or call me at 484-467-3379. Please do not be afraid to share your voice with us.



Splinters from the Board

Board considers mural for a wall of our church

By Gene Goodwin

The Berks UU Board of Directors has authorized mural artist Jessica Chadwick to investigate the possibility of having a mural painted on the exterior wall on the Fourth Ave. side of the Chalice House addition, a wall now covered with graffiti. Jessica, a church member and current RE teacher who has worked on murals in Reading, presented the idea for a mural painting project to the Board of Directors at its February meeting on Feb. 16, delayed a week by snow storms. She hopes to involve some of the estimated 30 young UUs attending a Youth Art Conference at our church May 21-23 in painting the mural. She will come up with a more detailed plan with cost estimates by the next Board meeting on March 9.

Fizz chairs Nominating committee

Board member Gene Fizz agreed to chair the Nominating Committee that will have to come up with nominees for three Board members whose three-year terms expire this summer. Replacing Treasurer Jeanne Hey is probably the most difficult vacancy to be filled, although Jeanne insists that our new office administrator, Susan Stewart, has made the treasurer's job much simpler.

Membership totals 175

The Board learned at its February meeting that membership in our church totaled 175 this year, the same number we reported to UUA for last year. Membership Chair Nadine Smet-Weiss also told the Board that the average attendance on Sundays so far this year has been 118, down slightly from last year.

Nadine thanked Board member Karen Nierle and Carol Orts for recruiting and training Sunday service greeters.

DeBenneville Fund 'revealed'

Many members learned at the first of two sessions to hear ideas for paying off Chalice House construction loans that we have a \$55,000 "DeBenneville Fund."

Nelson Simonson and Barry Groebel told about the fund, created about 12 years ago, to the 25-30 members who crammed into the 12-seat meeting room in the first floor rear of Chalice House after church on Sunday, Jan. 31. But, as Board President Joe Plageman explained after the meeting, the DeBenneville was not created as a "rainy day" fund.

Some members present spoke against tapping any rainy day funds to pay off Chalice House bank loans. Heads nodded in agreement when Walter Axsmith said he felt it would be fiscally healthier for the congregation to dig a bit deeper to come up with the estimated \$62,000 shortfall after all pledges are paid. He urged the board to extend the pledge campaign for two more years.

A second meeting to hear additional member ideas for solving our small financial crisis was to be held on Feb. 21, too late to be covered in this issue.

Where to park? Board has some suggestions

By: Joe Plageman

Board President

Now that the parking garage is no longer free on the weekends, the Board looked at different options. Access to the church for members and visitors is of prime importance:

Option 1: Pay 150 bucks per month and the city would keep it the gate open from Friday pm to Monday am. We don't have \$1,800 in the budget for such an expense; things are a bit too tight to take spend this.

Option 2: Pay 20 bucks a week and the city would give us a key to open the gate on Sunday mornings. It would require a person to open and close the gate every Sunday, plus add \$960 non budgeted expense. This option would be logistically very difficult and costly.

Option 3: Purchase tokens at half price and distribute to members at cost. This is the option that was agreed upon. Next step, get tokens and then figure out who and how to sell these tokens to all of us.

Option 4: Do nothing. There is free parking available along streets and in the library lot on Sunday mornings. The bank lot says no parking but many of us have been parking there for many months without any issues. There also is a lot next to the library lot (brick walled lot) that seems to be open as well. No guarantees here but some folks have been parking there. It is full of snow right now.

*Option 3 is being pursued and more information will be forthcoming.

Religious Education

Dear Friends,

Last October, some of our children participated in the Children's Sabbath with families from Temple Oheb Shalom, The Islamic Center of Reading, and Washington Presbyterian. It was very moving to hear Jewish, Christian, and Islamic prayers recited alongside UU words such as Spirit of Life. This multi-faith effort is being organized by a persistent and determined woman named Nancy Knoblauch, who attends the Temple and is in charge of Faith Initiatives for the Berks Intercultural Alliance. What motivates Nancy to work so hard to bring these congregations together?

"I'm interested in seeing religious communities come together in diversity to celebrate oneness," she says. "Our faiths can bring us together for our common good. That's what's motivating me to do this kind of work--helping us to understand and appreciate each other."

In order to get to know each other in a less formal setting, the organizers of the Children's Sabbath are planning a Multi-Faith Children's Program and Potluck Dinner on Thursday, Mar. 4, 2010 from 5:30-7pm at the Islamic Center of Reading (raindate is 3/11/10). Children from each congregation will answer several questions about their religion and then a quiz game will be played spelling-bee style to review the information presented (prize for top three is \$10 gift certificate for Wal-Mart).

The questions to be answered are:

- What are your most important beliefs? (7 principles)

RE Calendar of Events

Friday Morning Out for Parents, Babies, and Toddlers Fridays at church, 9:30 – 11am

If you have a new baby, small children, or both, please join us (with kids in tow!) in the Gerber Room each Friday morning from 9:30 to 11am for an unstructured, spirit-nurturing gathering. Let's take time out to let the kids play, read a story or two, and share our personal experience, wisdom, and hope about parenting with one another. Make as many Fridays as you can. We'll be there. Group organizer: Julia Smith.

Multi-Faith Youth Event & Potluck Dinner Islamic Center of Reading Thursday, Mar. 4, 2010 5:30-7pm

See details above.

Middle School Cluster Event—Exploring the Labyrinth Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York Sunday, Mar. 21, 2010

All 6th, 7th and 8th graders are invited to attend this special event at the UU church in York. We'll attend the worship service with the other Middle Schoolers from York, Lancaster, Harrisburg and Boiling Springs at 10am, followed by a pizza party and then activities related to labyrinths (including walking the York church's newly-

- What do you call the creator? (very open question for UUs!)
- What is your place of worship called? (easy one)
- What are your special holy days and do you observe them?
- Which holy day is your favorite, and why?
- Who are some of your prophets, leaders, or heroes?

A potluck meal will be shared around 6:30pm. Our congregation is responsible for bringing dessert, a one-quart beverage, and cups for drinks. Parking is limited at the Islamic Center, so car-pooling should be considered. Women and girls are asked to where head scarves and all will be asked to remove shoes upon entering the Mosque.

I hope that many of us will take time to represent our congregation in this effort to bring peace and understanding to our community. Please contact me if you have any questions or would like to attend.

Peace,

Elizabeth

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

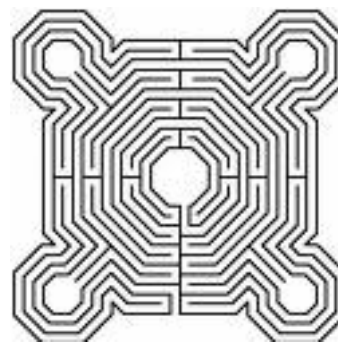


Elizabeth Kaufmann (pictured above with daughter)
Director of Religious Education

installed outdoor stone labyrinth). Unlike a maze, a labyrinth has no dead-ends or wrong turns, the way in is the way out. Walking a labyrinth is a spiritual practice, which many people find calming and comforting. For more information on the labyrinth, please refer to the following website: <http://www.lessons4living.com/labyrinth.htm>. Please RSVP to Elizabeth by Mar. 7 so that transportation can be arranged. We will need to leave our church at 8:15am.

Youth Service—Finding Home Sunday, Mar. 28, 2010

With help from Sandra and I, the youth will explore the meaning of home and the issue of homelessness. They recently completed a quilt for the homeless and we'll learn more about that project and about the state of homelessness in Berks County.



Adult Program Offerings

Join the Lunch Bunch on Tuesday, Mar. 16, at noon. We'll share in a conversation about Religious Extremism: Cults, Fundamentalisms, and Terrorists. Bring a brown bag lunch. Contact Rev. Fees.



Murray Grove News Update:

The Rainbow Circle at Murray Grove: Gatherings, Celebrations, Workshops/Trainings and Support for the GLBT Community happen monthly!

All Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning and Intersex folks and their allies and supporters are encouraged to come! The next is Mar. 28. Future dates will vary, but it's on a Sunday once each month, from 5-6pm (free will donation), followed by dinner (\$5 per person suggested minimum donation). RSVP at 609-693-5558 or murraygrove@murraygrove.org

Grove Gatherings at Murray Grove: Musical/Artistic Coffee Houses. Every second Wed. of the month, 6-7pm potluck (BYOB); 7-9pm entertainment; \$10 per person

A variety of artists will perform and visual arts will be incorporated, in English Folk Music Club form, where performers can share their craft and engage the audience. On Wed., Mar. 10, Valerie Vaughn, songwriter and performer, will share songs about New Jersey history and folklore. This program is made possible in part by a grant administered by the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, in conjunction with the New Jersey State Council of the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Save the Dates:

Heritage Week at Murray Grove, Aug. 1-6, 2010

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.

For information and registration:
Murray Grove Retreat and Conference Center
PO Box 246, Lanoka Harbor, NJ 08734
609-693-5558
murraygrove@murraygrove.org
www.murraygrove.org



Photographer Needed

Do you love taking pictures? Would you like to contribute to the Univoice, but do not have a knack for writing? Currently, the Univoice needs a photographer to include more photos in the Univoice. Candid photos and head shots of church members and staff are greatly needed. If you have taken photos that you would like added to the Univoice, please send them to Univoice@uuborks.org or Mklumpp@duranco.org.



UU Books

By: Kelly Hartman

On Mar. 14 at 9am we will meet to talk about Jill Bolte Taylor's, "My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey." The author recounts her massive stroke at age 37, and the eight years of healing that followed, eventually recovering the abilities and functions she had lost. She tells of her emotional journey into the mechanics of the human mind.

The selection for discussion Apr. 11 is, "The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World," by Jacqueline Novogratz. She tells an inspiring story of her leaving a career in international banking to spend her life on a quest to understand and deal with global poverty.

It begins with the gift of a blue sweater that quickly became her prized possession until she outgrew it and gave it to Goodwill. Eleven years later in Africa, she spotted a young boy wearing that very sweater, with her name still on the tag inside. The sweater's eleven year journey from her Virginia home to Rwanda was ample evidence to her that we are all interconnected and our actions-or inaction-touch people we may never know across the globe.

From her stumbling efforts as an idealist to becoming founder and CEO of a trailblazing nonprofit venture capital firm for the poor, she tells gripping stories with unforgettable characters as she shows how traditional charity often fails, and a new form of philanthropic investing called "patient capital" helps make people self-sufficient and can change millions of lives.

"The Blue Sweater", challenges us to grant dignity to the poor, and to rethink our engagement with the world.

For further info contact Nadine Smet-Weiss, njw1258@hotmail.com, or Kelly Hartman at 610-478-1497.



This Month's Volunteers

March

Ushers

- 3/7 Debroux/Lucas
- 3/14 Oxenrider/Orts
- 3/21 Szajna/Axsmith
- 3/28 Simonson/Tyson



Coffee Corps

- 3/7 Group VII
Judd & Mindy Bortz
- 3/14 Group VIII
Keith & Carol Orts
- 3/21 Group IX
Fay Oxenreider
- 3/28 Group X
Nelson & Caroline Simonson

Food Pantry

By Kelly Hartman



On Feb. 4 the Food Pantry distributed food to 112 recipients, 17 of whom were new. They represented members of households or families, which included 202 children, 179 adults, and 25 seniors, for a total of 406 persons.

During the colder months, our food pantry also offers a selection of coats, scarves, sweaters, gloves, and hats, which are donated by congregation members. The food and cold weather garments were offered the first Thursday of the month, before the snowstorms that hit our area in the week that followed. So whatever these folks took with them from our Pantry was put to good use. The next Food Pantry Thursdays will be Mar. 4, Apr. 1, and May 6. As a volunteer, or with donations of food, you are helping to keep the Pantry an effective part of our local mission.

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

Special Plate Collection

Our January Plate collection for the UUSC/UUA Joint Haiti Relief Fund gathered \$997.31

- Upcoming Special Plate Collections
- March 21st Family Promise
 - April 25th Wisdom 31
 - May 23rd Planned Parenthood
 - June 20th Opportunity House

History Revealed

By: Ruth N. Epler

1890's: The second church now being completed was used in many ways in addition to services and Sunday school. Many of these activities were instigated by church members. The Literary Club in 1892 received permission to meet in the parlor; they evidently collected many books and magazines and made them available to the public. Miss Fulton, a teacher at the Girls High School on Forth St. recommended its use to her students and use of the space on Sat. afternoons. In 1909, the club donated four hundred books to a branch library in northeast Reading and later became the Women's Club of Reading. Other groups in the early 20th century included the Christian Scientists and The Young Peoples Socialist League (1922), but not the Communist Party since that request was denied on the grounds the building should not be used for political purposes. Also, a children's theater group was in residence, the Reading Choral Society rehearsed here and under the direction of the minister, Rev. Griswald Williams and The Community Club was later to become in the Community Players was established. * In 1927, alterations were made to the worship area including theater lights, the balcony, which would house a new organ and Sunday school space renovations.

*Many of these activities are recorded in a well written church history, As A History of Universalism in The City of Reading, by Cynthia J. Edison and published in the Historical Review of Berks Co., Summer, 1973.

Grocery Cards Get Greener

Did you ever wonder what happens to those old grocery cards? Now you can recycle them! Bring your used cards to the church and place in the recycling box located in the Gerber Room. When the box is full, they will be sent to Earthworks System, a recycling center that specializes in plastic cards.

For those of you new to Grocery "Scrip," order forms are also available in the Gerber Room. It's an easy way to raise funds for the church, at no extra cost to you. Contact Diane Van Bodegraven, dvanbode@ptd.net, with any questions.



March 2010



Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
	1 Heart to Heart 7:30-9pm	2	3 Meditation Group 6:30-7:30pm Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	4 Food Pantry 8am-Noon What Moves Us 7-8:30pm	5 Family Morning Out 9:30-11am	6 Painting and Dancing 6:30pm-9am (all-nighter)
7 Membership Class 12:00-2:30pm Sunday Service 10:30am	8	9 Board Meeting 7-9pm	10 Meditation Group 6:30-7:30pm Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	11 What Moves Us 7-8:30pm Community Meeting 4-6:30pm	12 Family Morning Out 9:30-11am	13
14 UU Books 9-10am Sunday Service 10:30am	15	16 Lunch Bunch Noon	17 Meditation Group 6:30-7:30pm Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	18 What Moves Us 7-8:30pm	19 Family Morning Out 9:30-11am	20
21 Building Keepers Meetin 12-1pm Sunday Service 10:30am	22	23	24 Meditation Group 6:30-7:30pm Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm	25 What Moves Us 7-8:30pm	26 Family Morning Out 9:30-11am	27 Spring Meeting 8am-5pm Auction 5:30-8:30pm
28 Sunday Service 10:30am	29	30	31 Meditation Group 6:30-7:30pm Choir Practice 7:30-8:30pm			

Do We?
 By: Nadine Smet-Weiss

From you I receive,
 To you I give,
 Together we share,
 And from this we live.

I can hardly imagine a more

poetic definition of community than this.

Week after week we mouth the words, as much an offering as an offertory.

And I wonder,
 Do we?

Sunday Service Schedule

10:30am every Sunday

March 7 Extremism: Cults, Fundamentalism, and Terrorists
Rev. Sandra Fees, Nelson Simonson, Worship Associates, Dan Matz, Music Director, and the First UU Choir

Extreme religious views polarize our lives, breed violence, and degrade the world's sacred traditions. How, then, are we to respond to cults, fundamentalisms, and terrorists in the context of a faith tradition that affirms respect and tolerance for religious difference?

March 14 Modern Guilt
Rev. Sandra Fees, Rachel Gutzler, Worship Associate, and Dan Matz, Music Director

Unitarian Universalists can sometimes be heard saying we don't "do guilt" and that we left that behind in other religions or in our childhoods. Yet, we can't escape from feelings of shame and guilt entirely. This morning we will reflect on whether guilt has a helpful or hurtful place and how it impacts the voice of conscience.

March 21 Brokenness
Rev. Sandra Fees, Keith Orts, Worship Associate, Dan Matz, Music Director, and the First UU Choir

Our understanding of brokenness isn't one of sinfulness. Yet we recognize there is suffering and seek to heal the world. What is our theological understanding of brokenness and how do we respond to

the challenges of our time? Today is a Special Plate Collection for Family Promise, a program providing shelter and support for homeless families.

March 28 Youth Sunday
First UU Youth and Susan Pena, Pianist

The youth will explore the meaning of home and the issue of homelessness. They recently completed a quilt for the homeless, and we'll learn more about that project and about the state of homelessness in Berks County.

You are all invited to join us for silent meditation in the Chalice House from 9:30-10:30am before the Sunday Services.



Printed on recycled paper

Address Service Requested

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of Berks County

Church

First Unitarian Universalist



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