



# THE SOUTH COUNTY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF SOUTH COUNTY

VOLUME 19 ISSUE 11

DECEMBER 2010



## December Services



### December 5

The Third Unitarian Universalist Principle

– *Rev. Betty Kornitzer*

“Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations” is our Third Principle. We will explore the world of difference between radical acceptance and tolerance.

*The service will include a New Member Welcoming Ceremony*

### December 12

Mature Spirituality: Engaging the Self *and* the World – *John Glasheen*  
Unitarian Universalism theology has a long and proud history. What compels us to action?

### December 19

The Gift of Giving: Presence, not Presents – *Rev. Betty Kornitzer & Debby Hedison*  
*Our Annual Intergenerational Holiday Service*

On this day all households are asked to return their Guest at Your Table Boxes for our grand finale and the building of the Tower of Boxes.

### December 23

#### The Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at 7p.m.

We will join together for a traditional service of carols and stories, and rejoice in the special enchantment of the holiday season. Bring your children, bring visiting relatives, and bring friends to this wonderful time of shared community spirit.

*Please bring baked goods to share at a time of fellowship after the service.*

### December 26

Love Poems from God – *Rev. Betty Kornitzer*

Sacred voices from the East and West hold us in a place of wonder as we move toward a new year.

These poems and their beauty are Rev. Betty’s gift to our Beloved Community as she leads the last Sunday service before her one-month sabbatical.

*There will be No Religious Education this morning. Children are welcome to accompany parents, and the nursery will be open for children with their parents.*



OUR HOME IS AT LILY PADS PROFESSIONAL CENTER, 27 NORTH ROAD, PEACE DALE, R.I.



# THE SOUTH COUNTY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

PUBLISHED ELEVEN TIMES A YEAR

KAREN R. ELLSWORTH, EDITOR ♦ VAL FOLLETT & GERRE ALDERWICK, PUBLISHERS

DEADLINE: THE 20TH DAY OF EACH MONTH

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## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF SOUTH COUNTY

[www.uusouthcountyri.org](http://www.uusouthcountyri.org)

27 North Rd., Peace Dale, R.I. 02879 • (401) 783 -4170

### Rev. Betty Kornitzer, Minister

Bkornitzer@aol.com • Minister's Study 284-3321 • Urgent calls: 932-1515

Office hours Wednesdays 3 to 6 and Thursdays & Fridays 9 to noon, by appointment

**Debby Hedison, Religious Education Director**

**Michael Galib, Music Director**

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**OUR HOME IS AT LILY PADS PROFESSIONAL CENTER, 27 NORTH RD., PEACE DALE, R. I. 02879**

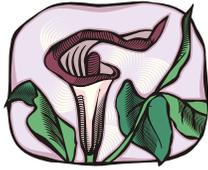
(401) 783-4170 • e-mail address: [uucscri@yahoo.com](mailto:uucscri@yahoo.com)

WEBSITE: <http://www.uusouthcountyri.org/> • Webmaster: David Crockett

Services and Children's Religious Education on Sundays at 10 a.m.



*We welcome all individuals without regard to race, color, physical challenge,  
sexual orientation, age, or national origin.*



# *The Minister's Message*

By Rev. Betty Kornitzer

## Look and See

*Look and See*  
by Mary Oliver

*This morning, at waterside, a sparrow flew  
to a water rock and landed, by error, on the back  
of an eider duck; lightly it fluttered off, amused.  
The duck, too, was not provoked, but, you might say, was  
laughing.*

*This afternoon a gull sailing over  
our house was casually scratching  
its stomach of white feathers with one  
pink foot as it flew.*

*Oh Lord, how shining and festive is your gift to us, if we  
only look, and see.*

At this time, as I prepare for a month of sabbatical, my heart is filled with a special kind of wonder. My appreciation is palpable; it lives within me as a welcome guest. I am so pleased to be noticing this feeling. It didn't have to be that way. I might have simply gone about my daily busy busy-ness, and just not observed this unaccustomed glow of appreciation taking up residence in my heart. That would have been a great pity. I would have missed a wondrous opportunity for delight. I am glad I took the time to look and see.

My thoughts are so much with this beloved community. You know that my one rule in ministry is People First. The runner-up rule is Look and See. I want to invite everyone to slow down a bit in this busy season. Take the time to look and see the texture and the fabric of the life that is happening all around you and inside of you as well. This can be part of our spiritual lives, our connection to the universe . . . that interconnected web of all existence. May we look and see and be touched by the wonder.

Blessings, Peace and Love,

*Betty*

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Contact Information for Rev. Betty:

Regular Office Hours:

Wednesdays: 3:00 to 6:00 p.m.; Thursdays and Fridays: 9:00-Noon, and other times, all by appointment.

Days Off: Monday and Tuesday.

Office telephone (non-urgent calls): 284-3321

Cell phone (urgent calls): 932-1515

E-mail (very effective): [bkornitzer@aol.com](mailto:bkornitzer@aol.com)

*Please be sure to call before dropping by the church during Betty's office hours. Sometimes she is called away on business away from her office, even during "office hours." Betty will be on sabbatical during the month of January.*

# The President's Letter

Recently I had the good fortune to accompany our Senior Youth Group on their retreat to Duxbury, Mass. I thoroughly enjoyed being with the ten high school students and the two youth group advisors, Sally Barney and Jaime Dice. We arrived there Friday night and did not leave until Sunday morning. The Cedar Hill Retreat Center, located on Duxbury Bay, provided a perfect setting. A youth retreat provides an opportunity for youths to bond with each other and advisors. It also provides a safe environment for youths to express themselves and have fun. I'd like to thank the youth group advisors, Sally Barney, Jaime Dice, and Jeff and Cindy Berry, for all their great work with our terrific senior youth.

The board recently approved a new expenditure policy concerning expenses \$500 and over. The congregation is growing, and as we grow there will be larger and larger sums of money spent, especially when it comes to facilities. In order to be financially responsible, the board feels that some oversight of large expenditures is needed. This policy makes sure that any time \$500 or more is spent, the board is able to review the expense.

The policy is as follows: "Any

expenditure or contract entered into with a value of \$500 or more shall be submitted to the Board of Trustees at least one week prior to the board meeting. The board will reserve the right to have the treasurer not disburse the funds or enter into a contract if it feels that the money is not being spent in the best interest of the congregation or



if it feels the risk is too great. Board meetings are held monthly and committee chairs and individuals are welcome to attend the meeting to discuss the expenditure or contract."

In order to help ensure a smooth operation of our congregation, a Congregational Handbook is in the works. Marcia Boyd, who recently moved here from Rochester, New York, is working on a baseline draft of the handbook. She is hoping to

have the draft ready by December. This handbook will be a "living" document and is meant to answer questions about the workings of the UUCSC. It will contain policies and procedures as well as answering "How do I . . ." questions. I would like to thank Louise McLeod, Amber Kelley Collins and John Glasheen for their contributions to the handbook.

The board recently approved an initiative called Share the Plate. This idea was brought to the board by Reverend Betty. On the first Sunday of each month, beginning in January, all non-pledge plate monies collected will be given to a charity. This means any money collected during the service that is not designated toward a 2010- 2011 pledge will be turned over to a predetermined charity. The church year will be divided into quarters; donations received during the first and second quarters will be distributed to local charities, third quarter donations will distributed to a national charity, and fourth quarter donations will go to an international charity. A suggestion box will be set up so that anyone who would like to suggest a charity may do so. More details to follow.

– Charlie Donnelly

## Can You Host A UUCSC Friend for Christmas Dinner?

Sometimes members and friends of our church family have no plans for Christmas dinner. If your household has an extra place or two at your holiday table, and you'd like to host a UUCSC member or friend, please let Rev. Betty know at [bkornitzer@aol.com](mailto:bkornitzer@aol.com) or 284-3321. "Table hospitality" is a wonderful

way to remember our faith family during the holidays. This is what is truly means to be community. – Rev. Betty Kornitzer



## The Agape Fund

*The Agape Fund, created in 2004 with the Board's approval, is a discretionary fund the minister uses to confidentially assist members and friends of UUCSC who need help in critical areas of sustenance, such as food, housing and heating. A special collection for the Agape Fund will be taken at the Christmas Eve service on December 23.*





# The Music Corner

by Mike Galib, Music Director

December has arrived, and so too has my favorite musical season. Although I grew up going to a Catholic church, I attribute my love of Christmas music to the ubiquity of the stuff—I would wager it's difficult for you to escape it, as it's freely diffused from TV, radio, and internet as early as Thanksgiving. As a musician I certainly have a musical affinity and appreciation for much of it, as many "classic" carols are nicely arranged with elegant harmonies and careful voice leading. I've also had wonderful transformative experiences singing in choruses with the Boston Pops at Christmas time and participating in Handel's inspiring Messiah.

I was naturally excited to plan my first Christmas service with the church, though I was taken aback I when I first read through the Christmas hymn lyrics in our hymnal. "Joy to the world, the Word is come," it reads, and no, that's not a typo. "Let earth with praises ring." All right, the subject of the song has been wholly changed to reflect a humanistic view with no reference to any deity. In the original, it continues, telling us that every heart must prepare room in itself for the recently arrived baby Jesus. I continued reading in the UU hymnal: "Let every heart prepare a room."

In the revised edition, every heart is making the bed and vacuuming.

I was mildly distraught, a feeling which was

compounded by the twinges of guilt I received from the sneaky reminder that I had not vacuumed my room in some time. I was relieved to discover after conversations with Reverend Betty that she too had reservations about singing altered lyrics that erased the very basis of the idea of Christmas (in "Silent Night" all direct references to Jesus are deleted).

What resulted from this exchange was the decision to print the original lyrics to non-copyrighted Christmas material in a booklet—one that can be used from year to year and that will be of lasting use no matter which hymns we choose to sing.

The UUCSC Choir tries to sing music every week that embodies the principles of Unitarian Universalism. One of the core ideas—that of equity—calls for us to sing, for example, in Hebrew for Jewish celebrations, or in Arabic out of reverence for our Muslim guests, two things we've already done in the past year. Although many of us likely came from a Christian background, with Unitarian Universalism something of a peaceful antithesis, it is important nonetheless, or even more important, that we do not censor the Christian words of Christmas and instead embrace them as yet another manifestation of our respect for all peoples and religions.

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## Worship cancellation policy

Winter is upon us. The safety of our congregants is our first priority. Here are our plans in case of inclement weather.

Please take good care of yourselves, and stay at home on Sunday mornings if travel is unsafe for you. Rev. Kornitzer and Charlie Donnelly will determine if Sunday services should be cancelled. Cancellations will be publicized in three ways:

- A message will be sent on the church e-mail list.
- A notice will be posted on the UUCSC web site.
- A message will be broadcast on TV channels 12 and 64 and on AM radio station WHJJ (920) and on FM stations WWBB (B101), WHJY (94.1) and WSNE (93.3).

## In Case of Snow Cancellation, enjoy a 'Virtual Worship Service'

Sunday morning worship is an important part of our experience of Beloved Community, even in the



midst of a winter storm. In December, if Sunday morning worship is cancelled due to bad weather, Betty will send a "Virtual Worship Service" out on the UUCSC e-mail list. The idea is that at 10

a.m. on Sunday morning, all who wish may read the service and participate, knowing we all together in spirit.



# MONEY MATTERS

The monthly column from the Finance Committee

### *.. an amazingly generous gift . . .*

Virginia Carter, the winner of our October raffle, has donated the entire \$10,000 back to UUCSC. The money has been put into a special fund marked "Home Improvements." Virginia, Rev. Betty and Alice Buckley are creating a list of possible improvements and will let us all know what they decide upon. "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus!" and it is you. With grateful hearts, we thank you!

### *... more good news ...*

BankNewport will be providing a loan modification for our mortgage. Our current rate is 6.69%. With the modification, we are looking at a rate of around 5.75%. This reduction will save us about \$3,600 annually, or about one month's mortgage payment. The bank will begin the short process as soon as our accountant provides them with our Compilation Statement. We hope this will be completed in this calendar year. The cost to us is \$500.

### *... understanding the budget ...*

Finally, we will continue to break the budget down each month, one category at a time, in an effort to help us all understand what things cost. This month we will look at Staff.

We have three staff members; our Minister (full time), our Director of Religious Education (75%) and our Music Director (13 hrs).

Salaries - \$66,822.76

Health Insurance - \$15,208.36

Pension - \$7,968

Employer Tax - \$5,200.72

Professional Expenses/Development - \$4,450

Nursery Attendant - \$870

We are all aware that they give more to us than we could ever manage to pay them.

Respectfully submitted,  
Aline Couture,  
Finance Committee Chair

## The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Rhode Island

My husband Carl and I became members of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Rhode Island many years ago when it was known as the Memorial Society. We wished to preplan all arrangements for our cremation in order to relieve our survivors of an additional burden at an upsetting time. At his mother's death, Carl found through the Memorial Society a funeral home near her home on Long Island to take care of things about which we had no clue. We found that membership (at a very nominal fee) also brought us a tempting discount at the Cremation Society.

The following is a blatant commercial: The Funeral Consumers Alliance's mission is "to protect the right to choose meaningful and affordable funerals." We aim "to educate consumers on available options, provide statewide price information, and give consumers information, tools and encouragement for preplanning."

The Funeral Consumers Alliance maintains office space at Westminster Unitarian Church in East Greenwich. The address is 119 Kenyon Ave., East Greenwich, RI 02818, the telephone number is 884-1131, the e-mail address is fca-ri@cox.net, and the website address is <http://www.funerals.org/affiliates/-rhodeisland>.

Carl and I have been very pleased with our association with FCA-RI and give it our highest recommendations. The Board members are all volunteers, and frugality would be on their banner if they had one. Contact them for details or feel free to ask me any questions.

– Helene Gersuny



*Our Meditation Group meets in the Sanctuary every Wednesday from 10 to 11 a.m. We practice sitting and walking meditation and share a reading and time of discussion. All are welcome, no meditation experience is necessary.*



## Religious Education News and Events

By Debby Hedison, Director of Religious Education

*"....go with Wisdom, go with Wonder...."*



Charlie Brown: *"This little green tree here seems to need a home."*

Linus: *"I don't know, Charlie Brown. Remember what Lucy said? This doesn't seem to fit the modern spirit."*

Charlie Brown: *"I don't care. We'll decorate it and it'll be just right for our play. Besides, I think it needs me. (Picks up tree; a lot of needles fall off)"*

– Charles Schultz, "A Charlie Brown Christmas"

Thanks to all who have helped over the course of our first Religious Education session.

By the time you read this our holiday programming will be well under way. It will include all ages activities for the kindergarten through fifth grade students. We will have fun activities such as gift making, music, games and community service activities.

The January session will soon begin and will include studies from our selected curricula that have been utilized since September. If you are able to assist at any level, please let me know. We can always use an extra pair of helping hands!

May I take this time to thank you all, beloved community, for all your love, dedication and support to our programming and to me. I am truly blessed and wish you love and light this New Year and always!

*Debby Hedison*

## Caring for members and friends of UUCSC

The Lay Pastoral Associates Team (PAT) assists Rev. Betty in caring for members and friends of UUCSC who are experiencing times of challenge and transition. Rev. Betty will continue offering pastoral care; the lay team will supplement her work, thus affording a wider and deeper resource of attention to our growing community.

Pastoral Associates provide a caring presence. They listen and help nurture the spirit. Members of the Pastoral Care Team are Cindy Berry, Val Follett, Penny Hall, Pat O'Reilly and Lynda Wells.

The PAT is distinct from the Caring Connection, chaired by Judi Marcy. The Caring Connection will continue to be a caring resource, offering support and providing meals, rides to church, and helping those without transportation to get to the supermarket, bank, or medical appointment. Their caring outreach and is a mainstay of congregational life at UUCSC.

Call Rev. Betty (284-3321) with your pastoral concerns. She will speak with you and make referrals to the PAT when appropriate. During the January sabbatical, and when Rev. Betty is away, Cindy Berry will coordinate the services of the PAT. A PAT brochure and further explanation is available at UUCSC. – Rev. Betty Kornitzer



# The Advent Garden Labyrinth Walk

a magical journey into the winter season

Sunday, December 5th at 4:30 p.m.

For more than a decade, our congregation has shared this contemplative, meditative experience at the beginning of the Advent season. A spiral of evergreens is laid out in the sanctuary. While everyone sits in silence, each individual walks to the center, lights a candle, and places the candle somewhere on the spiral while walking out. In this way we support each others' gentle entrance into the darkest days of the year. All ages are welcome to participate, though children must be accompanied by an adult at all times.



## Connecting with our Muslim neighbors

On October 1, Common Ground sponsored a discussion about the upsurge of anti-Islamic feeling in the United States. Many different views were expressed, and it became clear that there is a real interest among us in learning more about Islam and the many things being Muslim can mean. So Reverend Betty invited Jennifer Ead and a panel of women from the R.I. Council for Muslim Advancement to visit our church. They spoke about their beliefs and lives as moderate Muslims with a large number of congregants after the service on November 7.

One way we are planning to continue connecting with this group is to visit their school, the Islam School of Rhode Island. We are also planning to host a family potluck supper here at our church in early March, to get together with people from Jennifer Ead's community as well as Muslims from URI and elsewhere in our in our area. Do you know folks you could invite?

To learn more about Islam we have invited Dr. Assem Sayedahmed, Muslim chaplain at

URI, to speak with us on December 1 at 7 p.m. He is a microbiology professor, originally from Egypt, who has a deep knowledge of Islam that he is glad to share. We hope you will join with all of our efforts to learn about Islam and reach out to our Muslim neighbors in Rhode Island. Suggestions and questions welcome!

– Penny Hall, for Common Ground

## Click to be a fan of UUCSC

Our congregation is launching two new pages on Facebook called "UU South County" an "Music at Lily Pads." But the names of the pages won't be ours until 25

Facebook users became fans of each one. That is the minimum number required for Facebook to give us a short and easy-to-remember page name.

Can you help? Go on Facebook, search for "UU South County" and "Music at Lily Pads," and click to become a fan of each page. This is the first step in helping to promote our valuable Facebook pages.

– Myron Waldman



## Spiritual Deepening: A Continuing Series for Unfolding a Soulful Life

A series facilitated by Christine Phoenix-Green and Rev. Betty Kornitzer

Meeting the 3rd Wednesday each month from 7 to 8:45 p.m. in the Sanctuary

This year we will explore the following forms of spiritual practice:

**December 15** – Solstice /Soulstice – revisiting this participatory ritual

**January 19** – The Art of Blessing

**February 16** – Holy Listening

**March 16** – Lectio Divina

**April 20** – Creating Altars

**May 18** – Self Reflection

All are welcome. Pre-registration is very helpful (though not required). To pre-register, e-mail Christine Phoenix-Green at [cphoenix-rising@earthlink.net](mailto:cphoenix-rising@earthlink.net).





# Holiday Potluck Lunch

The Social Events Committee invites you to a holiday-themed potluck lunch in the Sanctuary after coffee hour on Sunday, December 12th. Bring a dish to share, and musical instruments if you care to. After lunch we will sing some seasonal songs.

News flash! We are expecting a special guest at this luncheon—a jolly fellow who has a beard of white and comes around on a special night!

Beard of white? Special night? Must be....???! We'll see!

While many of the great songs we will sing are found in our hymnal, the theme of this event is sociable rather than sacred. We sing for the fun of it. Join us!

– The Social Events Committee (Eileen DeMaio, Harry & Ali Buffum, David Floyd, and Elise Bender)



## Hospitality Helpers

Vikki LePree and Lisa McHenry would like to organize a group of "Hospitality Helpers." We are looking for members who would be willing to host coffee hour more than once a year or fill in should a host have to cancel at the last minute due to an emergency. Contact Vikki .



## The Welcome House Meal

Our congregation supports Welcome House in Peace Dale by providing one meal a month that will feed 20 people. This month, we will provide the meal on Wednesday, Dec. 8. We bring in a salad, an entrée and a dessert to Welcome House by 5 p.m. Instead, you may bring in the fixings for your part of the meal, and the chef de jour will take it from there. Look for the sign-up sheet in the Community Room or speak with Gerre Alderwick.

## Prayer Circle

*December 2nd and the first Thursday of every month from 6:00 to 6:40 p.m. in the nursery, Rev. Betty will facilitate a prayer circle. Many of us hold in our hearts a person, pet or a situation for which we have deep concern. This prayer circle will offer a safe and sacred space in which to join in healing prayer. We will share times of meditation, music, spoken (and unspoken) prayer, silence, and readings. All are welcome.*

## Spiritual Book Reflection Group

On Wednesday, Dec. 1 and Wednesday, Dec. 8, from 5:45 to 6:45 p.m., we will read and reflect on *A Return to Love* by Marianne Williamson. This book is really about a return to Self. If you are interested, please get a copy of the book and begin reading. *Note:* Please suspend judgment about the language, which will be our very first topic of discussion.



## Our Wellness Team



Our Wellness Team offers a technique that helps people prepare for surgery, heal faster and use less pain medication. This mind, body spirit technique is also used successfully in lessening the side effects of chemotherapy, radiation, and the challenges of acute and long-term health issues. Many congregants have used this program with success.

Current Members of the Wellness Team are Sarah Bell, Paulette Chamberas, Lindsey Crowninshield, Iris Donnelly, Val Follett, Julie Hopkins-DeSantis, Mary Morrissey, Lynda Wells and Rev. Betty.

If you would like more information or to schedule a one hour personal "workshop," please contact the Wellness Team Coordinator, Lynda Wells.

# Another evening of beautiful music on November 12th

Thanks to everyone who came out for our third Music at Lily Pads concert. The singer-songwriter Anais Mitchell, backed by equally talented musicians Jefferson Hamer and Rachel Ries (from Brooklyn and Chicago), and Portland, Oregon's great indie folk four-piece, Horse Feathers, offered up an evening of



beautiful songs that left everyone smiling. The final encore highlighted the great acoustics of our sanctuary, as Anais, Jefferson and Rachel stepped from the stage and, without amplification, sang an a capella rendition of the old spiritual "Bright Morning Stars are Rising."

We could not have done this without our amazing committee and volunteers, including Harry, Ali and Ari Buffum, Eileen DeMaio, Elise and Will Bender, Lisa McHenry, Gabrielle Torphy, Nancy Dean and Alycia Metz. Special thanks to our own Nick Smith for doing a superb job with the sound that night. Thanks to everyone who helped at the end of the night as well.

Prospective volunteers, anyone thinking they'd love to help with future events, please step up and make yourselves known. These events take a tremendous amount of work to pull off, and we need you!

All of our shows so far have been very special, and we hope this is only the beginning. We have The Low Anthem with Joe Fletcher and the Wrong Reasons on January 8th (tickets on sale now at Sweet Cakes, Looney Tunes II and The Alternative Food Co-op), and Nick Smith's band, The Repercussions, brings rock music for dancing to Lily Pads on January 22nd.



We get frequent questions about our ticket policy. Ticket prices for Music at Lily Pads events are set as low as possible, with the intention of covering all costs and making a reasonable contribution to UUCSC. Most volunteers at our events, including committee members, purchase tickets at full price. We set aside up to ten "Lily Pads EZ Pass" tickets for each event, for folks who could not otherwise afford to attend. We ask for a donation of up to \$5 and a willingness to help out—help with final clean-up is especially welcome. Requests for EZ Pass tickets are considered on a first come, first serve basis, and should be directed to the Social Events Committee (Harry & Ali Buffum, Eileen DeMaio, David Floyd, and Elise Bender).

Children's tickets: for children accompanied by an adult, tickets may be purchased at the door for half the ticket sale price. "Children" are 14 and under and we ask that they be just as attentive to the music as the adults. Very young children (under 5) may attend for free, sitting on a parent or sibling's lap, if parents are completely comfortable with their child at crowded events. Please recognize that some events may be more family-oriented than others.

See you at the next show! – David Floyd



## Appearing on Saturday, January 8th

"The quieter the music gets . . . the more it inhabits its own otherworldly place, where ghosts and angels hover just out of view."

– *The New York Times*

Opening: Joe Fletcher and the Wrong Reasons.



# How to Change the World: Self and Society in American Transcendentalism

*Excerpts from a speech by Philip F. Gura delivered at the 2008 UUA General Assembly*

Who were the Transcendentalists and how did they try to change the world? And, equally important, what did they think was the matter with the United States, a beacon for democracy, only half a century after its founding? There was no central creed that identified a Transcendentalist or any roll that certifiably recorded participants.

The movement's supporters comprised an ever-shifting and open-ended group. The "Transcendental Club" comprised "the occasional meetings of a changing body of liberal thinkers, agreeing in nothing but their liberality," a statement he qualified by quoting his friend, the Reverend James Freeman Clarke, a Unitarian clergyman and one of the group's original members. Clarke had wittily noted that "they call themselves 'the club of the like-minded,' primarily because "no two . . . thought alike."

Most were New Englanders, with ties to Harvard College and the Boston area. Second, at some point in their lives almost to a person they had been associated with Unitarianism and thus were considered "liberal Christians" whose reading of Scripture made them reject Calvinism's harsh and, to them, unreasonable tenets. A large number were Unitarian clergymen—Orestes Brownson, William Henry Channing, James Freeman Clarke, Christopher Cranch, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederic Henry Hedge, Theodore Parker, and George Ripley, the most prominent.

The Transcendentalist Theodore Parker humorously provided an index to the fears the group engendered in the general public. He offered a fictional account of a Boston layman who encountered the word 'Transcendentalism' in the daily press and wondered what it meant. "I thought of Transylvanian, and Transubstantiation," the fellow explained, "but found no light." Neither did he find the novel term in any standard dictionary. Then he turned to a pamphlet recently published by some conservative clergy at Princeton, where he learned the truth. "Transcendentalism," he said, is "a very naughty thing." Indeed, what he read so upset him that

he subsequently had an awful dream: "Alas for churches in New England! We be all dead men, for the Transcendentalists have come! They say there is no Christ; no God; no soul; only 'an absolute nothing,' and Hegel is the Holy Ghost. Our churches will be pulled down; there will be no Sabbath; our wives will wear the breeches, and the Transcendentalists will ride over us roughshod."

To many people, the Transcenden-



talists were just this unsettling, and as often ridiculed or reviled as respected. On his famous trip to the United States at the height of the Tran-

scendentalist ferment, for example, the English novelist Charles Dickens observed that when he inquired of some of his American friends what Transcendentalism signified, he was given to understand that "whatever was unintelligible would be certainly transcendental." The Scottish writer and reformer Thomas Carlyle, following a visit from Transcendentalist George Ripley, (founder of the Brook Farm socialist community), was equally acerbic: he termed his recent New England guest a Unitarian minister "who has left the pulpit to reform the world by cultivating onions." Even fellow-travelers could not resist such characterizations. In her old age, Annie Russell Marble, who had lived at Brook Farm, quipped that the Transcendentalists, for all their good will, were "a race who dove into the infinite, soared into the illimitable, and never paid cash." The historian Henry Adams, no stranger to New England's ways, concluded, they were "unutterably funny."

In 1842 Charles Mayo Ellis, a Massachusetts attorney active in the anti-slavery movement, provided a book-length account. He wrote that Transcendentalism maintains that men

have ideas that do not come through the five senses or the powers of reasoning but are "the result of direct revelation from God, his immediate inspiration, or his immanent presence in the spiritual world."

The Transcendentalists' belief in a democracy of the Spirit thus made them call "for immediate application of ideas to life." They were split, however, over how to effect such reform. Was it the individual who had to be redirected or the society that had to be reconstructed? "Do not tell me," Emerson wrote, "as a good man did today, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations," for "are they my poor?" Man will be strong and prevail when he throws off all foreign support and stands alone. "Is not a man better than a town?" he asked rhetorically. "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself."

Elizabeth Peabody had a word for Emerson's philosophy, "egotheism," which she used in characterizing her disappointment in the self-centered tendency of much Transcendentalist thought.

Theodore Parker, another Unitarian clergyman, had spun far from Emerson's orbit. Several sermons Parker preached on social conditions in Boston bear comparison to Brownson's fiery essays. Most searching was his astute analysis of the part played by the wealthy in tearing the city's frayed social fabric. He understood that the problems of the poor—their seemingly inexorable descent into crime, drunkenness, prostitution—were caused as much by the complicity and complacency of the comfortable and well-off as to any personal faults.

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Philip F. Gura is the author of *American Transcendentalism: A History* (2008). Read the complete text of this speech at <http://www.uuhs.org/History.htm>

*Lest anyone conclude that the Editor is attempting to ridicule the Transcendentalists by reproducing these excerpts, please note that Frederic Henry Hedge is her 8th cousin 6 times removed.*

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And man, at war with man, hears not  
The love-song which they bring;  
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,  
And hear the angels sing.

— from *"It Came Upon a Midnight Clear,"* by  
Unitarian minister Edmund Hamilton Sears (1810-1876)



Sometimes referred to as the quintessential Unitarian carol, "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" was written in 1849, during a period of personal melancholy amid news of revolution in Europe and the United States' war with Mexico.

It has been criticized for its unscriptural references and for never mentioning the Christ-child, although Sears was a theological conservative and not in sympathy with "radical" Unitarians.