

February 2008



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Decatur

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Office Hours:
Tuesday evenings
5 – 7 p.m.
Wednesday & Thursday
mornings
10 a.m. – noon

President:
Linda Shroyer

Past President:
Eric Devore

President Elect:
Julie Pajer

Vice President:
Heather Stoa

Treasurer:
Mark Sorensen

Secretary:
Mary Lovell

Board Members at Large:
Ron Shafer
Dave Snoeyenbos
Denise Renfro

UUFD Trust Board:
Ken Robertson
Vern Thistlethwaite
Dave Snoeyenbos

Upcoming Services

All Sunday services begin at 10:15 AM.

There is religious education for children and child care for babies.

February 3 — “Do You Pray, Pray Tell?” by Rev. John Biedler

The more loosely you define prayer, the more likely you are to find people who practice it. Obviously, those who don't believe in God or supernatural miracles do not pray to God for supernatural miracles. But this hardly exhausts the meaning of prayer. Many have some practice in which they try to commune or identify with forces and currents beyond their kin, thus many would define what they do as meditation. Others seek out experiences of awe and wonder, and cultivate those emotions in private moments. Some use a traditional prayer practice to express their deepest needs and wants, whether they believe a God is listening or not. And some have a personal relationship with a higher power, just as a Baptist or Catholic might. Today I'll explore Why Pray!

February 10 — “We and Our Country are Children of the Enlightenment, but where is the Enlightenment today?” By Dr. Roy Wehrle, Professor of economics emeritus, UIS and adjunct professor at Millikin.

Our country was founded in the excitement and vision of the Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century in Europe, in the belief that man is not victim but creator of her future through reason and tolerance. This bold flowering of ideas gave birth to our country and to the continuing faith in progress through reason. But compare the richness of reason in the "Federalist Papers" to the one liners which pass for news and analysis today. Compare the texture of the Lincoln/Douglas debates to what pass as candidate debates today. Why the decline today in the admiration for intellect, reason? Why the unwillingness to enter into the fray of tough mental thought? I will bring questions and hopefully you all will provide answers.

February 17— “New Member Welcome“ by Rev. John Biedler

The simple act of signing your name in the membership book of UUFD can be a deeply significant decision for you. Being a member enables you to participate in congregational decisions, such as nominating and voting on the officers and trustees of the board each year. This voting covers the officers of the board, the selection and retention of the minister, as well as the budget of the congregation. As a member of the Fellowship you may also express your personal commitment to this community by sharing your talents, time, resources, and energy towards individuals within it as well as for institutional needs such as joining a committee. Wherever you see yourself fitting in the many opportunities that abound, we joyfully welcome you on this day.

February 24 — Journeying with our Elders by Mary Jo Comerford, Parish Nurse

Mary Jo will share her personal and professional insights about responding to and supporting the needs of those preceding us through life.

Next Newsletter deadline: February 15, 2008

Monthly Themes

Each month we explore a new theme at UUFD. The purpose of these topics in sermons, children's R.E., newsletters and discussion is to inspire deeper meaning and purpose as we ourselves explore these themes. The goal is to contribute to the shaping of our country's culture and future by becoming the change we want to see in the world. With these ten themes we will investigate the language and knowledge needed to dialogue with people of different views on issues such as faith, values, ethics and religion. Please join us in this journey by attending these services.

The themes for 2007-2008:

September -- Building Community

October -- Knowing your Calling in Life

November-- Gratitude's Gifts

December -- Peace on Earth

January -- With Grace & Compassion

February -- Spiritual Practices & Prayer

March -- Letting Go

April -- Salvation Defined

May -- Truth , Is it Relative?

June -- The Power of Transformation

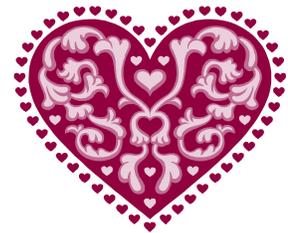
Religious Education Classes

February 3 Why do people pray and meditate?

February 10 Valentine Party

February 17 Spiritual Practices - Cassandra Majen

February 24 "Keepers of the Earth", Native American Spiritual practices Denise Renfro & June Allison



Batteries & Recycling

If you need to throw out your old RE-chargeable batteries, then look no further. Just bring them along with you to the Fellowship and drop them into the little marked silver box in the entryway. And if you don't have recycling in your area, you may also bring in your aluminum cans and plastic bottles, too. We'll take care of them for you!



Pantry Donations

Reminder: The second Sunday of each month is Food Bank Sunday. This month that will be on Feb.10th. Please bring canned goods or other non perishable food item with you on that day.

Social Action Covenant Group

Rev. Biedler's Hours

Office hours for Rev. Biedler in February are Tuesday evenings from 5 – 7 p.m.; Wednesday mornings and Thursday morning from 10 a.m. – noon.

You may reach John at the church office by calling (217) 875-5442; or by calling his cell phone at (217) 972-2184 to set an appointment. He is also available at other times, so please call.

February 2008 Calendar of Events

(All activities take place at the Fellowship, unless otherwise noted. Visitors are always welcome!)

Friday, February 1st

- 1:00 p.m.—UU Men's Group - Tuscany restaurant

Monday, February 4th

- 7:15 p.m. to 9:15 p.m.—Social Action Covenant Group

Tuesday, February 5th

- 7:00 p.m. — Eckhart Tolle Discussion Group

Wednesday, February 6th

- 10:00 a.m. to noon—Wednesday Morning Covenant Group

Thursday, February 7th

- 6:15 p.m. to 8:15 p.m.—Christian Practices Covenant Group

Friday, February 8th

- 1:00 p.m.—UU Men's Group - Tuscany restaurant

Sunday, February 10th

- Food Pantry Donations Accepted

Wednesday, February 13th

- 6:00 p.m.—UUFD Women's Book Group at Lorelei Zaker's home.

Thursday, February 14th

- 7:00 p.m.—UUFD Buddhists Group

Friday, February 15th

- 1:00 p.m.—UU Men's Group - Tuscany restaurant

Saturday, February 16th

- 6:00 p.m. — “Dinners for Eight” - see p. 6 for details

Monday, February 18th

- 7:15 p.m. to 9:15 p.m.—Social Action Covenant Group

Tuesday, February 19th

- 7:00 p.m. — Eckhart Tolle Discussion Group

Wednesday, February 20th

- 10:00 a.m. to noon—Wednesday Morning Covenant Group

Thursday, February 21st

- 6:15 p.m. to 8:15 p.m.—Christian Practices Covenant Group

Friday, February 22nd

- 1:00 p.m.—UU Men's Group - Tuscany restaurant

Thursday, February 28th

- 7:00 p.m.—UUFD Buddhists Group

Friday, February 29th

- 1:00 p.m.—UU Men's Group - Tuscany restaurant

Group discussion topics:

Social Action Covenant Group— We lead the congregation in social and political issues important to and in coalition with the citizens of Decatur, the state and the nation. Please join us and make a difference.

Wednesday Morning Covenant Group—We are launching into a new book *Constructing a Life Philosophy* by David L. Bender. Visitors are always welcome.

Women's Book Group— Bring a dish to share. The book is *The Elegant Gathering of White Snows* by Kris Radish.

Eckhart Tolle Discussion Group—The discussion group seeks to explore the teachings and spiritual philosophy of Eckhart Tolle, a contemporary mystic, through discussions, audio-visual presentations, and silent meditations. Presently we are viewing and discussing a spiritual retreat with Eckhart Tolle filmed in Costa Rica a few years ago. This event was attended by Marcelo Lepeley. Contact Mel Weinstein (763-0509) for additional information.

Christian Practices Covenant Group—Come explore the possibilities of the Christian faith. Guests are always welcome.

Letters from John...

Last month I wrote that I would share with you the experience of being with my father at the moment of his death. It's been just over a month now since his death and I find it difficult just what to write. So many emotions sweep through me; so many fond memories of a man who taught me so much and whose ways I see in myself ever so subtly. From him I learned tolerance. I never heard my dad denigrate another race, another culture, another country, or another person.

Dad worked for many years for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) taking my family of six first to the Philippine Islands for two years and later to Tanzania, E. Africa. My father was a teacher educator and would work with schools in developing countries to advance their teacher training. Always a humanitarian, always creating projects to promote teacher education in the United States and abroad, he was well loved and respected.

But not only was he a great educator, he deeply invested himself in his family and I received so very much from him. One of my fondest memories was when dad volunteered to be my "crew" in a sailing race in the harbor of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. I had been sailing for some months and had studied sailing techniques from a book he'd given me. I was sixteen years old and it was my first race as a new member of the British Yacht Club (Tanzania was still a British protectorate at the time).

By applying what I'd learned and dad's ready help as crewmate, we came in *third* in the race. I was ecstatic! When I approached the judge's table after the race with dad at my side, I found out I had been disqualified. My dad was over 21 and this was a young person's race. I had thought it only applied to the captain of the sailing vessel, but we were told it meant all persons on board had to be under 21 -- dad was 43.

We laughed about this for years and years...but I still felt so very proud that my father had been there with me in my first sailing race.

And so I would like to share with you a poem dedicated to my 87 year old father, John Samuel Biedler, Sr., in whose presence I was blessed to be as he passed away on December 15, 2007:

Dearest Dad...

Had I known that you were going
I could have bid you
At least, Godspeed;

But you slipped away so suddenly
That I was left standing on the shore
Watching into space.
Not knowing that you would never come back

Til I felt the waters of the incoming tide
Cold about my heart.

I do not ask for you again,
I know the sea you sail
Does not touch these shores,

I only look for a distant "All Hail"
Like the white crest of a wave against the horizon
Or a signal light flashing once,
Far against the sky.

Sail on, my bright sturdy mariner Dad,
Let out a full sheet to your new winds,
Taste the clear spray of your new waters.

You were made for flight and swiftness,
And eternal freedom.

Nothing shall weigh you down.
Or call you back to the warm earth,
Or the shape we knew,
Or the place that held you so very dear.

I have cut the anchor chain that bound you to me,
And the great strength of my love,
And the heavy ache of my loneliness,
Which might bear upon you and hold you back
I have fashioned into a shining, silken fabric
To be the highest, and strongest of your new sails.

—adapted from: "Bright Mariner" by Katherine
Garrison Chapin

Goodbye Dad.
Your grieving son,
John, Jr.



From the President...

The most recent congregational surveys we have participated in have indicated that a high priority for UUFD members is growth, numerically and spiritually. If that is indeed our desired outcome, we need to think and behave as if we are actively working toward that goal. Otherwise, it is not likely to happen. The Congregational Handbook from the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) is a good source of guidance. Some of the suggestions that follow are from the Handbook, as excerpted by John Biedler and further modified by me.

I think we have already taken some steps to move toward growth. One step is to hire an architect to help us develop a master plan to work within our means to accommodate more people, cars and events/activities. Another is the increased emphasis on Religious Education this year to welcome families with children and infants. Julie Pajer, Lorelei Zaker, Susannah Drum, June Alison, Marge Evans, Denise Renfro, Kate Shields, Charla and John Wylder, Jennifer Sekosky, Kathy Sorensen, parents and others have really created a structure that welcomes children and teaches the values that UU's to promote the spiritual growth of our children in a very fun environment. Of course, there is more we will be doing with the R.E. space to assure safety and cleanliness and to refurbish and, as necessary, replace the toys and education materials. We also need to provide childcare for all important meetings to attract and sustain young families. As we, the congregants, affirm when we have child blessing services, the children are the responsibility of us all along with their parents, guardians, and grandparents.

Recently, the Herald and Review published an article from UUA entitled, "Unitarians put faith in new ads". The article describes the first national advertising campaign ads that appeared in Time magazine. Unitarian Universalist leaders say the newfound embrace of evangelism was brought about by a cultural shift among its membership and the realization that too many outsiders were unaware of what the church has to offer. "We have allowed this wonderful faith community to be the best-kept secret in town for too long," said Rev. William Sinkford, association president. One of the best ways to get the word out is for existing members to share their congregation with their friends. Eighty percent of people attending a church for the first time do so because a friend, coworker, or family member invited them according to the Alban Institute. When an individual or family visits, their first impression is very important. Often newcomers are hesitant and uncomfortable. When we are intentional and genuine in our welcome, people notice and appreciate it.

The Outreach and Membership Committees will be examining additional ways in which we can convey what we have to offer and when people do express an interest, to assure that we are a welcoming congregation. If you have suggestions or an interest in serving on either committee please contact their chairpersons; Tammy Bledsaw, Outreach and Denise Renfro, Membership.

I hope all of you had wonderful holidays and I wish for each of you peace in the new year.

Sincerely,
Linda Shroyer

A note from Joan Brown

My goodness, "U" UU's have been wonderful! Thank you so very much for all you have been and done during my recovery from knee replacement surgery. Your visits, cards, phone calls, gifts, errands, chauffeuring, and all your support have been awesome. My covenant groups have met at Manor Care, and so I did not have to miss them. How heartwarming.

One of the nicest things about being at Manor Care has been talking with Sue Donovan almost every day. Sue is a longtime and formerly very active member of UUFD, and she contributed the banners that hang in the front of the sanctuary. Sue does not remember things as well as she once did, but she still has the same gentle loving nature and delightful sense of humor and optimism. She might not remember you at first, but mention UU and watch her light up. Manor Care is only about a mile from UUFD, Do *yourself* a favor and drop in to see her. Sue's 90th birthday is coming soon. I think it is February 10.

Thanks again!
Joan Brown

The Integration of Science and Religion

In this series of lectures and discussions, Rev. John Biedler will succinctly explore the schism between science and religion, and the impact of this "philosophical Cold War" on the fate of human beings. He will systematically review previous attempts at integration, explaining why romantic, idealistic, and postmodern theories failed. And will demonstrate how science is compatible with certain deep features common to all of the world's major religious traditions. In pointing the way to a union between truth and meaning, Rev. Biedler's aim is to guide the audience to what he contends is the mutual accord between the spiritual, subjective world of ancient wisdom and the objective, empirical world of modern knowledge. You are invited to sign up on the form on the foyer table at the Fellowship. The lectures have been moved to Sunday afternoons from

2 to 4 p.m., beginning March 9, 2008, with subsequent dates posted on the sign-up sheet.

District Assembly

Our District Assembly is in St. Louis this year, April 25 through April 27. Mark your calendars and save the date because you won't want to miss this Friday through Sunday assembly. The keynote speaker will be Diana Butler Bass, author of multiple books and an expert in religious trends in America. Through a grant by the Lilly Endowment, her research has discovered how diverse congregations can embrace their authenticity by drawing upon their traditions. The highlights of this year's assembly will be conversations, speeches and worship services about taking lessons of the past and using them to shape our religious future. Her presentation will be the catalyst for multiple discussions on shaping the religious future of our Unitarian Universalist congregations and what that future might look like.

Plus there will be all the other great features of past District Assemblies – traditions such as the Banner Parade, the Sermon Contest and of course – the opportunity to join other Unitarian Universalists in fellowship from all across the district.

Good Samaritan Inn

Good Samaritan Inn needs you. Would you consider helping us feed the homeless and disadvantaged here in Decatur? Members and Friends of the UU Fellowship will be preparing, serving meals and cleaning up at the Good Samaritan Inn on Saturday, March 15, 2008, and we would love your help. Please sign the list on the foyer table if you can volunteer that day. You'll be needed from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. If you can only help with a portion of that day, please team up with someone who will fill in during the time you cannot. *Thank you* on behalf of the many we will be serving that day. It fills a very real need – a hungry stomach.



"Dinners for Eight"

Back by popular demand, "Dinners for Eight" will be held on Saturday, Feb. 16th at 6:00 P.M. A Sign up Sheet is available in the vestibule at the Fellowship. These are a great way to become better acquainted with your fellow UU's and to put some fun into the blah winter season. UU's all seem to be great cooks! If you have never participated, consider doing so this year. Questions? Call Rita Schwake @ 424-2305.

GREEN wins again!

All 200 Earthwise bags are now out there spreading their message of conservation, recycling and who needs all that plastic? Thanks for backing this project.

Rosemary Idleman



At Home Practices

Each month I like to include suggestions for expanding on the month's theme. You can read about our monthly themes in another other section of the newsletter. This month we examine Spiritual Practices and Prayer and as you do so I hope you will experiment with one of the following ideas (maybe you already do these...):

- 1) Take time each day to read a quote, a poem, a proverb or a passage from an honored writ that can offer wisdom and ideas for reflection. My favorite is our own hymn book *Singing the Living Tradition*, but any number of books on daily readings offer 365 days worth of reflections (see the Further Reading section for recommendations). These readings can be done first thing in the morning either alone for contemplation or with others for discussion. Some families might prefer to use a daily reading at dinnertime and discuss the reading as part of supper together. Taking time to read and contemplate individually and then discuss one of these passages can be an excellent way for a couple and family build their connection and intimacy.
- 2) Consider beginning a practice of free-writing or journaling first thing in the morning. Maybe you're like me and wake up with a mind full of thoughts and ideas. Writing first thing in the morning can help to focus one's thoughts that can then offer direction rather than distraction during the day.
- 3) There are many books in the further reading section that offer instruction on practices in prayer and meditation. Consider getting some of these books and exploring ways to cultivate a daily practice. It makes the day so much more interesting!

The following books are recommended by our minister for further exploration of this month's theme, Spiritual Practice and Prayer:

Care of the Soul, by Thomas Moore
 Earthbound, by Brian Nelson
 Every Day is a Blessing, by Aaron Zerah
 Life Prayers, by Elizabeth Roberts & Elias Amidon
 The Light Inside the Dark, by John Tarrant
 A Path With Heart, by Jack Kornfield
 Prayer is Good Medicine, by Larry Dossey, M.D.
 Sabbath, by Wayne Muller
 Simply Pray, by Erik Walker Wikstrom
 The Soul's Religion, by Thomas Moore
 Start Where You Are, by Pema Chödrön
 Who is My God? compiled by Skylight Paths
 The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity, by Julia Cameron

Green Film Series

Here's a heads up! The Green Sanctuary Committee is organizing a free film series including documentaries on environmental issues (e.g. *Inconvenient Truth*) and the natural world. The films will be shown on Saturday evenings in the Sanctuary starting March 8th. The series will end on April 26th with the showing of the film *Mad Cowboy*, a documentary based on the life and times of Howard Lyman, a national, social activist who will be our guest speaker for the Sunday service. Watch for the March newsletter for all the details.

NEW YEAR CLEAN OUT

Out with the old; make room for the new. Reduce and Simplify. Box up your clean, useable household items and outgrown but still good clothing for the UUFD Summer Rummage Sale. Books and decorative arts can be sold in the fall Books, Bites, and Botanicals Sale. These are our two major fundraisers. Call Vern Thistlethwaite if you need a pickup -429-5923, vthistle@insightbb.com



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“Promoting freedom, reason,
 And tolerance in religion”

Return Service Requested

Fellowship mission statement:

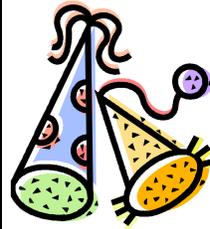
In a nurturing environment of openness, mutual respect, and friendship, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Decatur is a welcoming, diverse congregation. We share values and seek to celebrate life and support one another in our inward and outward searches for spiritual meaning, provide a liberal religious presence, and strive for compassion and justice in our community and our world.

Birthday Calendar

Would you like your or your family members' birthday listed in the newsletter? If so, please forward your dates to Tammy Bledsaw at t.bledsaw@hotmail.com.

Thank you!

February Birthdays



Athena Pajer ~ February 5th

Sue Donovan ~ February 10th

“A History of Lincoln’s Photographs”

On Sunday, February 10, Mark Sorensen will present “A History of Lincoln's Photographs” highlighting ones that became famous - or should have. He will present new information about the only photo of Lincoln taken in Decatur as well as interesting anecdotes about some rarely seen photos and how they have been used in history. This slide show will be at 2pm in the Madden Auditorium of the Decatur Public Library.

At 6pm that night Mark will introduce the film “The Paths of Glory” and then lead discussion for the Just Flicks program at the First Presbyterian Church fellowship hall. This is Stanley Kubrick’s 1957 anti-war film featuring Kirk Douglas. Both programs are free and open to the public. Desserts will be served at the film presentation.

For

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