

November 2008



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Decatur

3773 N. MacArthur Rd.
Decatur, IL 62526
Phone: (217) 875-5442
www.uufd.org
www.myspace.com/uufd_il



Minister:

Rev. John Biedler
Office: (217) 875-5442
Other: (217) 423-7349
Cell: (217) 972-2184
jbiedler@uufd.org

Office Hours:

Tuesday, Wednesday and
Thursday evenings 4:30 to
6:30 p.m. at the Fellowship

President:

Julie Pajer

Past President:

Linda Shroyer

President Elect:

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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.

Sunday, November 2—"Adlai E. Stevenson for President" by Dr. Mark Wyman

Dr. Mark Wyman, retired Professor of History at ISU, will discuss the life and career of Bloomington Unitarian Adlai Stevenson. Only a few days before our latest Presidential election, Prof. Wyman will review a man of peace who was known for wisdom and honesty while still serving a governor of Illinois and presidential candidate in 1952 and 1956.

November 9—"Democracy in Religion" by Rev. John Biedler

So how did you like the election results? I'm writing this in mid October assuming we will know the results within five days of the national elections. It's taken longer if you remember...but we won't go there in this sermon. What I'd like to address is a comparison of democracy and religion. Can you have a religion that is itself democratic in nature? I argue you can...and here it is: Unitarian Universalism.

November 16—"The Unseen Guest" by Rev. John Biedler

We celebrate and respect the interdependent web of all existence, of which we human are a part. Today we welcome unseen guests--those introduced to us through the work of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. Come here Stories of Hope from courageous individuals worldwide to protect and promote human rights.

November 23—"The Philosophy of Religion" by Professor Tom Morrow

One of the things that strikes me about teaching philosophy of religion is how little thought many students give to the issues of God's existence, nature, the problem of evil, religious experience, the nature of miracles, the afterlife, and the other issues we all encounter. What I would like to do is discuss today the problem of evil in terms of the simplistic answers some of my students provide, and how I try to expose the weaknesses of their answers and move them along to more philosophically sophisticated answers.

Sunday, November 30 -- "The Roots of the Protestant Revolution and Its Meaning for Today."

Our friend Rev. Miley Palmer returns to speak with us today. He will discuss the Reformation and how it has influenced Western economics, politics, and government.

Next Newsletter deadline: November 15, 2008

Mark Sorensen and "The Madness of Mary Lincoln" - October 31 - Friday 6:30pm

Macon County Historian Mark Sorensen will review *The Madness of Mary Lincoln* by Jason Emerson at noon on Wednesday, Nov. 5 at the Decatur Public Library. Abraham Lincoln's widow was declared insane on May 19, 1875 after a three-hour trial. Come find out if this ruling was justified and "the rest of the story."

Democracy In America

The government of democracy brings the notion of political rights to the level of the humblest citizens, just as the dissemination of wealth brings the notion of property within the reach of all the members of the community; and I confess that, to my mind, this is one of its greatest advantages. I do not assert that it is easy to teach men to exercise political rights; but I maintain that, when it is possible, the effects which result from it are highly important; and I add that, if there ever was a time at which such an attempt ought to be made, that time is our own. It is clear that the influence of religious belief is shaken, and that the notion of divine rights is declining; it is evident that public morality is vitiated, and the notion of moral rights is also disappearing: these are general symptoms of the substitution of argument for faith, and of calculation for the impulses of sentiment. If, in the midst of this general disruption, you do not succeed in connecting the notion of rights with that of personal interest, which is the only immutable point in the human heart, what means will you have of governing the world except by fear? When I am told that, since the laws are weak and the populace is wild, since passions are excited and the authority of virtue is paralyzed, no measures must be taken to increase the rights of the democracy, I reply, that it is for these very reasons that some measures of the kind must be taken; and I am persuaded that governments are still more interested in taking them than society at large, because governments are liable to be destroyed and society cannot perish.

—Alexis de Tocqueville 1831

Rev. Biedler's Hours

Office hours for Rev. Biedler in November are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the Fellowship, except the week of Thanksgiving when John will be visiting family in Tulsa and Kansas. You may reach John by calling (217) 972-2184. John is available at other times by appointment and welcomes your calls.

Democracy arose from men's thinking that if they are equal in any respect, they are equal absolutely. —Aristotle

Religious Education Classes

11/2: Day of the Dead - Day marking the transformation of life to death - Liz and Derek Richards

11/9: World Community Day - Day for celebrating the unity behind diversity and remembering we are all one people – Cassandra and Thomas Meyen

11/16: Kindness Day - Day for practicing random acts of kindness. – Cassandra and Thomas Meyen

11/23: Love Day – Ways people have shown it and how we can too. – Cassandra and Thomas Meyen

11/30: Thanksgiving Day - Day to give thanks for the abundance of our land and for our food, clothes, shelter, and health. - Jennifer Sekosky and Linda Shroyer

November 2008 Calendar of Events

All activities take place at the Fellowship, unless otherwise noted.

Visitors are always welcome!

Sunday, November 2nd

- 12:00 p.m. — Drumming Circle

Tuesday, November 4th

- 5:00 p.m. — Youth Science Group
- 7:00 p.m. — Eckhart Tolle Discussion Group
- 7:00 p.m. — Christian Practices Covenant Group

Wednesday, November 5th

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

Tuesday, November 11th

- 5:00 p.m. — Youth Community Group

Wednesday, November 12th

- 6:00 p.m.—Women's Book Group

Thursday, November 13th

- 7:00 p.m.—UUFD Buddhist Group at Ankrom's house

Tuesday, November 18th

- 5:00 p.m. — Youth Science Group
- 7:00 p.m. — Eckhart Tolle Discussion Group
- 7:00 p.m. — Christian Practices Covenant Group

Wednesday, November 19th

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

Tuesday, November 25th

- 5:00 p.m. — Youth Community Group
- 6:00 p.m.—Drumming Circle

Thursday, November 27th

- 7:00 p.m.—UUFD Buddhist Group at Ankrom's house

Group discussion topics:

Buddhist Group—The UUFD Buddhist Group will be meeting at Terry Ankrom's house, 2480 West Main Street, Decatur, Illinois, 62522. Further information? Call 217-428-1807 E-mail terryankrom@gmail.com.

Youth Group—Youth Group meetings are every Tuesday from 5-6 pm at the UUFD. The 1st and 3rd Tuesdays are Science Group, and the 2nd and 4th are Community Group. All ages are welcome. For more information email Cassandra at meyen@peoplepc.com

Eckhart Tolle Discussion Group— The Eckhart Tolle Discussion Group meets the first and third Tuesdays of each month at 7 pm in the Fellowship sanctuary. This month we will meet November 4th and 18th. 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 Copenhagen, Denmark in 2004 and entitled "The Art of Presence." All are welcome and no prior knowledge of Tolle's teachings is required. Contact Mel Weinstein (763-0509) for additional information.

The Christian Practices Covenant Group—meets the first and third Tuesday of the month. Nov. 4 and 18 from 7:00 and to 8:30 p.m. at the Fellowship Hall. All are welcome to join for discussions on the life and teachings of Jesus as the group reads "The Heart of Christianity" by Rev. Marcus Borg.

The Wednesday Morning Covenant Group—meets the first and third Wednesdays of the month, Nov. 5th and 19th, from 10 a.m. to 12. Please join us as we discuss the book by Eckhart Tolle "A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose" by Eckhart Tolle. Guests welcome—we always leave an empty chair in our circle.

Letters from John...

Why a Democracy ?

As somewhat of a historian, I often think historically about common ideas. Perhaps like you, I've noticed there are certain words everyone uses based on the assumption that we all know what they mean and that we all mean the same thing when using them. Like the word liberal. How in the world did it happen that liberal became such a dirty word in American politics that even some people who are don't feel free to claim so? The dictionary says liberal means "favorable to progress or reform."

Other words that show up in definitions of liberal include "of or pertaining to representational forms of government rather than aristocracies and monarchies," "maximum individual freedom," "governmental protection of civil liberties," "tolerant," "free," and "generous."

And the dictionary is not a bad place to try to get a handle on democracy. I would argue, the two words, liberal and democracy, are not unrelated. Democracy is "a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system."; also: "formal equality of rights and privileges," "the common people of a community as distinguished from any privileged class."

But surely our own Abraham Lincoln stated the essence of democracy best: "...government of the people, by the people, for the people." Yes, Abraham Lincoln said many things best!

As I look back at our history it is a slow, painful, still-incomplete growth of democracy. Many people coming to America were seeking greater freedom, economic, religious, and political.

The Mayflower Compact is sometimes seen as crucial in the development of democracy, with its insistence that the people form a "body politic" to pass laws by which all would abide. When we declared our independence from Great Britain, we became more democratic. But our Founding Fathers, those who drew up our Constitution, were, quite frankly, not very democratic. They were a bunch of wealthy, conservative, white men. That is not said to bad-mouth them; many of them were brilliant--the best generation of minds in American political history, and they created a document that has lasted over 200 years--a remarkable achievement in human history.

But the point is that "We, the People" have had to work over the centuries to make our system a more democratic one. We insisted that the Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments) be added, and over the years we have insisted on amendments abolishing slavery, giving women the right to vote, giving us the right to elect our own U. S. Senators, lowering the voting age to 18.

People's activism has not been limited to Constitutional amendments; many of us participated in the movement for civil rights for all Americans and the movement to end the war in Vietnam, for example. Parenthetically, surely the next amendment to make our Constitution more democratic should be one abolishing the Electoral College and allowing "We, the People" to actually elect our own President, so that the popular vote cannot be offset by the electoral vote--or, even worse, by the Supreme Court!

Three concluding remarks: First, a couple of questions in reference to current events: Is violence likely to be an effective way to introduce democracy to a people? Should we be concerned that our own democratic rights here at home are eroding in the name of security? (Think Patriot Act) Second, voting is not enough. It's crucial, but it's not enough. Get out there and work for the causes you believe in. That is democracy at its best. And finally, democracy--what an appropriate theme for a Unitarian Universalist congregation to focus on for a month. The proud tradition of our liberal religion relates closely to many of the movements for greater democracy in our country's past. And our congregations exercise congregational polity; that is to say, in a UU church, it is "We, the People" who make the decisions.

In Faithful Service, John

Preparing for Winter from the Green Sanctuary Committee

There's perhaps no time of the year as filled with ritual as the weeks we're now in, as we're thinking about the coming winter...there are gardens to put to bed, leaves to rake up and homes to ready for the coming cold. Wood for the stove arrives this week. Doors and windows are checked for cracks. Already I miss the fresh breezes through the house and can already feel the air inside becoming stale.

The transition brings up a point worth remembering: Everything we do to make our homes tighter and more energy-efficient in winter also has the effect of trapping air, along with odors and pollutants, inside. It's a big season for air fresheners and other fragrance products, but research suggests that the chemicals in these products do more harm than good when we add them to our home's atmosphere. Natural strategies are far better. So we've collected our favorites in a new guide to safer air freshening. This way, you can breathe a little easier this winter.

For many of us that means sealing windows, adding weather stripping to doors, and adopting other strategies that tighten our dwellings to better hold their precious warmth. That's a good thing where energy conservation is concerned, but a well-sealed home traps more than heat — it can trap odors, stale air, and other olfactory nuisances, too.

To mask the smelliness, we often turn to air fresheners. From aerosols and plug-in units to potpourris and scented candles, fragrance products are a \$9 billion a year industry. Yet researchers sniffing out the truth about them have found that such products frequently contain more than a pleasant scent.

According to the Children's Health Environmental Coalition, the fragrance products industry relies on over 3,000 different chemical compounds to create its olfactory wonders. These include flammable propellants like butane and propane; terpenes, xylene, benzene, and other volatile organic compounds; petroleum distillates like naphthalene; and chemicals like phenol, cresol, and paradichlorobenzene. Recently, a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation investigation of air fresheners found that nearly a third of the samples tested contained phthalates.

These and other ingredients are combined in air freshener formulas to create products intentionally designed to fill our homes with invisible airborne fumes that linger in the air where they can be repeatedly inhaled. And manufacturers aren't required to tell us exactly what's in the air fresheners we buy. Instead, most hide their ingredients behind generic label terms like "fragrance" and "scent agent." When we use these products, we have no way of knowing what we're really breathing, and in winter's sealed-up homes, our exposure to them can be nearly constant.

For a safer choice, stick to natural air freshening strategies. Here's a list of our favorite ways to deodorize your domicile:

- First, track down and eliminate the sources of any persistent bad odors in your home. Since many foul smells are the result of molds or microbial action, spraying or scrubbing trouble spots like trash cans and compost collectors with undiluted 3% solution of hydrogen peroxide will often remove the foul smells. Vinegar, such as Apple cider or an herbed vinegar is another useful natural antifungal and antibacterial agent. Nix the use of bleach.
- Use natural mineral borax and/or baking soda to deodorize surfaces and other places in your home. Because baking soda removes acid odors and vinegar takes care of alkaline smells, a combination of the two is often all you'll need to deodorize as you clean. Lemon juice is another great deodorizer.
- Open windows and doors for a few moments now and then during winter to replace stale indoor air with a fresh supply from outside.
- If odors persist, make your own air freshening spray by combining 5-10 drops of an essential oil like lavender, lemon, peppermint, bergamot, balsam, eucalyptus, tea tree, or sweet orange in a spray bottle with two cups of water.
- To scent indoor air, place a drop of your favorite essential oil on a light bulb prior to turning it on or add a dozen drops to a bowl of water placed on a radiator. Fragrant dried herbs, cinnamon sticks, or cloves boiled in a pot of water will also release a fresh smell.
- Place a couple of drops of essential oil on your vacuum cleaner's exhaust filter to freshen exiting air. A few drops of lemon juice on your vacuum cleaner bag will do the same trick.
- If you burn candles to scent air make sure yours are made from beeswax or other natural waxes like soy rather than petroleum-based paraffin wax. Choose candles with lead-free wicks and naturally-derived scents. And use them sparingly — natural candles may be safer but they're still filling your air with small amounts of combustion byproducts.

Themes for the Coming Calendar Year

During the church year from September through June, Rev. Biedler will speak on each of the specific themes listed below. Each theme is supported by a newsletter article, suggested readings and at-home spiritual practices. After his talks, we hope you will stay for a discussion centered on the sermon's theme. It is our hope that these topics will inspire us to continue to live lives of purpose, worth and dignity, as we shape our community's culture. With these ten themes we will explore the language and knowledge needed to dialogue with people of varying perspectives on issues of faith, values, ethics and religion. Please join us in the journey.

September -- Vision

February -- Evil

October -- Creation

March -- Redemption

November-- Democracy

April -- Freedom

December -- God

May -- Mercy

January -- Authority

June -- Transformation

Speedy Recovery Wishes, Lucy!!!

Members wish Lucy Murphy a speedy recovery after her October 20th surgery.

BOOKS, BITES, BOTANICALS SALE

BOOKS, BITES, BOTANICALS happened again this year with the help of many UUFD members and friends who donated items and worked hard in preparation for and during the sale. The outcome is unknown at the time of writing, but predictions are that it will be another successful fall fund raiser. Much is to be gained by such activities. UUFFD folks work together and get to know one another. We invite the Decatur community into our building. People see who we are and become more aware of the values we believe in and work for. Many people appreciate and look forward to our two annual sales.

The decREADgrp Beginning New Book

Beginning Tuesday, October 26, the decREADgrp will begin reading and discussing "Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism". Please consider this an invitation for people who might be interested. Please join the conversation!!



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“Promoting freedom, reason,

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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.



"Information is the currency of democracy."

—Thomas Jefferson

"Democracy is a constant tension between truth and half-truth and, in the arsenal of truth, there is no greater weapon than fact."

Lyndon Baines Johnson

"Anything that keeps a politician humble is healthy for democracy."

—Irish Blessing

For

Contact

At:

Name Tags

Kathy Kline

kkline923@aol.com

Address Changes

Carolynn DeVore

ebdevore@insightbb.com

Newsletter submissions

Tim Rooney

uufdnewsletter@gmail.com

Website suggestions

June Allison

JuneChelso@springnet1.com or (217) 423-1813

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