

Circle of Fellowship
Monthly Newsletter of the First
Universalist Society of Central
Square, NY
February, 2020



Our Mission Statement

The mission of the First Universalist Society of Central Square is to be a welcoming, diverse congregation which values spiritual growth and service to the local and world community

The First Universalist Society of Central Square, New York

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Maple Sapping: The Earliest Sign of Spring

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Ministerial Musings

It's February and, looking at the grey skies that alternate between sending rain or snow, it's hard to feel enthusiastic about the month. We are very fortunate. For the sixth year, we will be escaping to Mexico (not Mexico, New York) where we join another UU congregation, larger than ours and mostly composed of expats, and get a different take on the world and on being UU. Oh, yes, and then there's the sun, but it seems mean to even mention that. Even here, in the gloom and slush, February is an interesting month. It's as if people purposefully stuffed it full of thought provoking events or holidays. First, it's Black History month, time to reflect on the way in which history is often hidden and on the way in which understanding hidden history can change all of us. The first event is Groundhog Day, not the endless loop of the famous film, but a day of hope for spring and the realization that even six weeks can be very long. Then, there's Darwin Sunday. We'll be missing Winfield's talk, but it will be thought provoking and I hope everyone else has a chance to be in church for it. Winfield always has interesting things to say, Darwin Sunday celebrates the unfolding of truth. Valentine's Day follows, a day that should give us some reflection on the meaning of love and how people have been denied the ability to freely love each other. Coming right behind that is President's Day, a day that used to be two days, where we can think a bit about how that institution has changed and the uses of power today. Last, the very last, there is Leap Day, an extra day, something we don't often get in our busy lives. Let's leap into March and leap forward to spring.

-Reverend Andrea Abbott

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Green Minute
Radioactive Wastewater

I recently read an extensive article from *The Rolling Stone* that I found very concerning regarding how radioactive the wastewater brine from oil and gas extraction is, especially when it comes from the Marcellus shale that lies under Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and under our feet here in New York. I encourage you to read the article by going to <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/oil-gas-fracking-radioactive-investigation-937389>. The article discusses safety and health problems experienced by workers and the general public as well as the lack of oversight and regulations to address the problems. It points out many instances where federal and state agencies do not oversee the removal, transportation and disposal of oil and gas extraction wastewater as strictly as they do with other hazardous waste, often because the industry enjoys protections that other entities do not.

There is a lot of information in the article but if you think it doesn't affect you here in central New York, think again. This wastewater brine is legally spread on New York State roads for de-icing. The brine is somewhat natural since it comes out of the earth during any sort of oil and gas extraction, but it can also contain naturally occurring radioactive elements that would otherwise have remained buried. The article states, "The (oil and gas) industry pawns off brine — offering it for free — on rural townships that use the salty solution as a winter de-icer and, in the summertime, as a dust tamper on unpaved roads." The article quotes environmental engineer Dr. Bill Burgos of Penn State University as saying "Not much research has been done on this." Dr. Burgos co-authored a paper in *Environmental Science & Technology* that examined the health effects of applying oil field brine to roads. A link in the article takes you to a summary abstract of the paper which says that analyses of oil and gas wastewaters spread on roads in the northeast show that these wastewaters have salt, radioactivity, and organic contaminant concentrations often many times above drinking water standards and that they also contain organic micropollutants. Dr. Burgos' paper reports that the wastewaters contained not just radium, but cadmium, benzene, and arsenic, all known human carcinogens, along with lead, which can cause kidney and brain damage. Further, it claims that release of a known carcinogen such as radium from roads treated with oil and gas wastewaters has been largely ignored and that state-by-state regulations do not require radium analyses prior to treating roads.

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Green Minute (Continued from Page 3)

Even though New York previously banned oil and gas extraction by the method known as “fracking” in an attempt to protect the state’s waters from pollution, some of the contaminants from spraying wastewater brine on roads can still easily make it into our waters. As *The Rolling Stone* article and Dr. Burgos’ paper point out, lab experiments showed that nearly all of the metals from the sprayed brine leach from roads after rain events, likely reaching ground and surface water.

Many people associated with the oil and gas industry as well as politicians and state agencies frequently point to a 2015 report by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Conservation (PDEC) that concluded there is “limited potential for radiation exposure to workers and the public”. However, nuclear physicist Dr. Marvin Resnikoff wrote a “scathing critique” of the report saying it “downplayed the radioactive gas radon, misinterpreted information on radium and ignored the well-documented risks posed by the inhalation or ingestion of radioactive dust.” He said, “The consensus of the international scientific community is that there is no safe threshold for radiation. Each additional exposure, no matter how small, increases a person’s risk of cancer.” There are links to both the PDEC report and Dr. Resnikoff’s critique in the article.

Ellen LaPine

Social Justice Committee

SJC meeting was held 1/12. We did some brainstorming on initiating and sponsoring a climate change contest in Central Square High School.

Once we get confirmation from the school administration we will followup some ideas.

Adopt-a-highway pickups are scheduled for 2020: 4/19, 6/28. 10/18 @ 8am.

Our March potluck will be a vegan/vegetarian meal. Potluck lunches are on the 3rd Sunday each month.

Join us 2/9 @ our next meeting.

Nancy Hallock-Social Justice Chair

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Sermon Calendar

February 2nd: "Liberalism has Limits" -A Sermon by The Reverend David Weissbard

Members of UU Congregations are often unaware and, frankly, uninterested in denominational politics, and why not? Well, since last summer's UUA General Assembly in Spokane, there has been a controversy regarding The Gadfly Papers, a book self-published by Todd Eklof, the minister of our church in Spokane. I've been reading many of the responses, and while I do not think the book itself is all that important, the conflicting responses to it seem to me to point to a continuing tension inherent in our religious philosophy: If you are a UU, can you believe anything you want to? We'll look at that on February 2nd.

February 9th: Winfield Ihlow: Darwin Sunday

February 16th: Rev. Bud Adams

February 23rd: Kurt Hohmann: Neopaganism

Church Events Calendar

REFRESHMENTS

1/26 Thanks to Bonnie and Cary for Refreshment Hour

2/2 Mary Fran

2/9 George & Judy

2/16 Pot Luck

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Volunteers are always needed as greeters and to host the social time on Sunday mornings. Anyone with any questions is invited to speak with Judy Tennant. The Spiritual Committee invites anyone who wishes to place flowers near the pulpit for the morning service on Sundays to do so. There is a sign-up sheet for all volunteers in the dining room.

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UU Universe

Reverend Weissbard's upcoming sermon, according to his summary, will address issues regarding controversies of theology and direction inside our denomination. I have been following this issues as of late and thought it appropriate to share a statement I recently received regarding governance of the UUA in regards to recent denominational events. I have included the statement in its entirety here as I do not have a source with which to link. I hope this can offer a springboard for further open discussion and debate. What the authors entitle "[The Fifth Principle Project](#)" begins below on page seven. The document has only been altered to fit the newsletter format and has not been edited for content. Its expressed opinions and positions are those of the authors listed at the end of the document -ajh

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The Fifth Principle Project

We are writing you to solicit your interest in helping to reclaim our Unitarian Universalist 5th Principle.

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.

Since April 2017 our denominational leadership, specifically, our UUA Board of Trustees, have endeavored to impose what is tantamount to a religious orthodoxy on our historically non-dogmatic faith community. In the wake of the 2017 hiring imbroglio over the Southern Region Executive Position, resulting in the resignation of UUA President Peter Morales, the UUA board voted to declare that Unitarian Universalism is white supremacist both in its structure and values. Consequently, they advocate and have started to work toward dismantling that structure and the values upon which it is based.

And as the events surrounding the recent publication of Rev. Dr. Todd Eklof's book "The Gadfly Papers" clearly show, this new religious orthodoxy will brook no criticism. Rev. Eklof's book examines this new orthodoxy of White Supremacist Culture and criticizes the tactics employed to dismantle it. The response by denominational leadership was instantaneous and overwhelmingly condemnatory, resulting in Rev. Eklof's public censure by the UU Ministers Association (UUMA). Regardless of one's views on the merits of his book, the response by leadership reveals a disturbing effort to quell dissent and to stifle differing views. Some of our ministers who have questioned the UUMA actions have themselves been disciplined. These trends should be enough to give any UU cause for serious concern.

While all UU's agree that there are vast racial disparities and inequities that need to be addressed in our society, it is also true that the UUA board is not a democratically elected body. Whatever nobility there may be in their current efforts, the UUA Board of Trustees are not accountable to the members of our congregations. Our yearly General Assembly (GA) provides little check on the institutional power wielded by UUA Trustees. For example, during the 2017 GA when a new UUA president was elected, only 1.6% of members of our denomination cast a ballot. We seek to remedy this situation.

This lack of democratic representation was recognized over 10 years ago.

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In December of 2009, The Fifth Principle Task Force, chaired by Denny Davidoff and comprised of nine other respected leaders of our UU faith community, issue their report to the UUA board, concluding that the annual General Assemblies at which the UUA board is elected, is

- undemocratic
- expensive
- economically discriminatory
- does not align with the board's embrace of policy governance

The report further found that over the years there has been “Little clarity or consensus existing over what constitutes the business of the Association, what policies carry out its purposes, and how a General Assembly directs and controls its affairs.” It goes on to say that it is “questionable how well the delegate body represents and is accountable to, member congregations.”

In recent years, on average, less than 60% of member congregations had more than one delegate in attendance. In fact, the average number of delegates at GA (2200) since 2001 is actually less than 45% of the number that would be eligible if all congregations were able to send their full complement of delegates. Since the publication of this report, little has been done to address and correct these deficiencies.

As long time UUs, we believe that we need to renew our commitment to our fifth principle. We seek to build a groundswell of support for this renewal in several ways.

First, by fostering congregational conversations to raise awareness of these dangerous trends and to remind us all that we are an association of free and autonomous congregations. These conversations should engage us in critical questions about these trends What it is that we need from our national leadership, and what are the alternatives to the direction in which a handful of people at the UUA seek to take us?

Second, we need to create a truly representative system that changes both the way the candidates for the UUA board are nominated and the way they are elected.

We need to hear from you. We need to know if your congregation is interested in helping ad-

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government. Having 1.6% of all UU's able to vote for at-large candidates is undemocratic. A better and more responsive system must be found We ask that you:

Put this before your membership for discussion and if necessary, a vote.

Let us know of your level of interest with a reply to this letter.

Please try to reply within 30 days after receiving it.

In faith

Frank Casper, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta (UUCA)

Jay Kiskel, Northwest Congregation of Atlanta (NWUU)