



The MidAmerica Messenger

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As we move through the holiday season, I continue to be grateful for the committed Unitarian Universalists working to make the world a better place. We always appreciate your comments and suggestions for the newsletter. Click on the "email the editor" link in the menu on the left to send us a message.

Sincerely,

Nancy Heege, Congregational Life Consultant

March for Marriage Equality in Illinois

by Rev. Scott Aaseng (Unitarian Universalist Church of Quincy, Illinois (<http://uuquincy.org/>))

Rev. Khleber Van Zandt didn't think he or anyone else from First Unitarian Church of Alton would make it to Springfield for the March for Marriage Equality on October 22. Then at church two days before the event, he was talking with a 71 year-old member of the congregation who was apologizing for being a little grumpy. The member commented that it had been an emotional time in their life. Rev. Van Zandt suggested that perhaps he had said something that had made the member upset. "No," the member replied, "it's because I'm this close to being considered equal to you. I've been down in the bottom of the

closet for 71 years, and it's finally time I came all the way out so I can marry the person I love." Both Rev. Van Zandt and the member made it to the March, along with five other members from Alton.

Stories like this were the heart of the day as 300 UU's from 23 congregations - from Carbondale to Stockton, from McHenry to Quincy - gathered in Springfield to march for marriage equality and launch the Unitarian Universalist Advocacy Network of Illinois (UUANI). Buses full of UU's left from Chicago, Evanston, Palatine, Naperville, Rockford, Peoria, and Bloomington starting at 6 am, and met in Springfield, where we birthed UUANI with songs and stories, leadership elections and lunch, and a rally and march at the state Capitol.



About 100 of us gathered first at Abraham Lincoln UU Congregation in Springfield. Peggy Patty from ALUUC led off by saying we should not underestimate the impact of our presence. "We are marching for justice for all citizens of this country, some of whom are unable to...take the chance of being SEEN at this march" for fear of losing their jobs or their housing or even their lives. Cindy Pardo from First Unitarian (Chicago) gave an impassioned response to the question, "Why are we here?" in terms of civil rights and our UU principle of the worth and dignity of every person. Then Karen McMillen from Unity Temple (Oak Park) got up and said simply, "I'm here so I don't have to explain to my 2 year-old son why his mommies are married in one state and not in another." As she sat down, we all applauded with tears in our eyes.

Over a soup and sandwich lunch graciously provided by the Springfield congregation, we got to know UU's from other congregations and share why we were there and what we hoped for. Also with us were 5 young adults from the Ujima homeless shelter in Chicago, one of whom serenaded us on the piano.

UU's were out in force at the Capitol, with at least a dozen Standing on the Side of Love banners and scores of yellow shirts. Four members of the Unitarian Church of Hinsdale met with their state legislator and helped clear up some of her misconceptions about the marriage equality bill. Meanwhile, dozens of UU's continue to make calls from phone banks at their home congregations.

Sharing stories, making connections, building relationships, growing spiritually, deepening our values, creating partnerships, and putting all that into action that makes a difference - that's what UUANI is all about.

If you'd like to get connected, contact your congregational liaison or any UUANI Board member:

Rev. Scott Aaseng (Quincy)
Dale Griffin (Evanston)
David Kraemer (Rockford)
AJ Segneri (First/Chicago)

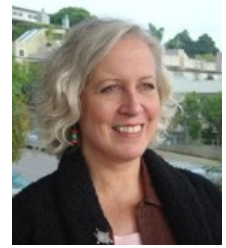
Jamie Boyce (Unity Temple/Oak Park)
Kaiya Iverson (DuPage/Naperville)
Peggy Patty (ALUUC/Springfield)

Editor's note: Marriage equality was passed in Illinois on November 5, and the governor has declared his intention to sign the legislation on November 20.

Spiritual Hospitality in our Congregations

by Dori Thexton, MidAmerica Congregational Life Consultant

The leaders of almost every congregation I visit tell me they want to grow. Many of them are quite sincere and willing to do the work necessary to actually attract and retain new members. However, there is often a disconnect between what the leadership is willing to do and what actually exists in congregational culture.



About 10 years ago, I wrote a newsletter column about hospitality on Sunday mornings and urged folks to stop conducting church business during coffee hour - rather, focus on truly welcoming newcomers or getting to know those you don't know well. That column generated more reaction than any I've written before or after. Irate responses from people saying it was their only chance to wrangle committee members or check off items on their "to do" lists.

I think much has changed since then. Many of our congregations are truly more welcoming than the days when holding the visitor's mug during coffee hour was the "kiss of death," as one Unitarian Universalist minister put it. And...there is still a long way to go to creating a culture where each member feels the responsibility of being welcoming and radically hospitable.

This often involves stepping outside of our comfort zone. Going up to someone new and starting a conversation is not easy, especially if that person appears to be somehow different - older, younger, another race or ethnicity, differently abled. And yet, membership in a faith community carries a responsibility to participate. Participation means more than showing up at services or joining a committee. It means putting ourselves out there to help create the beloved community we desire.

Rev. Victoria Weinstein, a UU minister who blogs under the moniker "Peacebang," wrote about this in her inimitable, direct style recently. She states, "The moral virtue of hospitality asks that we provide food, drink and shelter to the stranger, even at a sacrifice to us and our kin."

Another issue that sometimes crops up is a lack of respect shown when discussing other faith traditions - Weinstein calls that a form of spiritual violence.

She raises many important points in this article - concepts about inclusivity that are crucial to the future of Unitarian Universalism if we are to grow and have relevant, meaningful faith communities in the coming years. The article can be found here: <http://www.peacebang.com/2012/02/18/on-hospitality/>
If your congregation is interested in learning more about welcoming processes and integrating newcomers, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Membership Professionals has lots of resources on their website - www.uuamp.org.

And if your congregation has a truly welcoming, spiritually inclusive culture...share your story with us!

Regional Assembly Workshop Deadline Looming!



Do you have something that you've learned that you wish someone had taught you sooner? Do you have information that you want to share? Have you something terrific that others should know about?

Then please, submit an application to do a workshop at one of our Regional Assembly locations. The deadline for the Topeka location has passed, but not the deadline for Ann Arbor, Michigan; Bloomington, Indiana; or Wisconsin locations!

We need your help to ensure our leaders learn more, our social activists change the world more, and that we all find ways to connect more deeply with being Unitarian Universalist.

Submit your idea for a workshop - remember, the deadline is the end of this month!

Regional Assembly 2014 - "Hunger for Justice" Workshops on Saturday, April 12

Excellent New Resource for Congregations

Here's an excellent new resource your congregation might benefit from using. The group Equal Access, who promote equality and access for Unitarian Universalists with disabilities,

has written a 30-page "Reflection Paper on Mental Health Issues and Recommendations (http://www.uua.org/documents/idbm/131015_equal_access.pdf%20)."



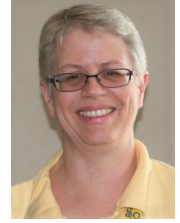
From the report:

- "About one in four American adults (57.7 million people or 26.6% of the adult population) live with a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. We are them and they are us.
- "Ministers throughout the Association are beginning to address mental illness in their sermons and are seeing its incidence first hand. The Rev. Barbara F. Meyers, a community minister in California, frequently speaks to Unitarian Universalist congregations about mental health. After her sermon, she asks those assembled to rise in body or spirit if they or a loved one is living with a mental health problem. Eighty to 100% of the people rise. They are universally surprised that so many people are standing. It becomes obvious that there are many people suffering silently, either for themselves or for a loved one, and unwilling or unable to be open about it."

Given that so many of us are affected by this issue, this is a resource that will be quite valuable.

Virtual Office Hours

Rev. Lisa Presley, MidAmerica Congregational Life Consultant



Do you have a question about congregational life? Do you want to be able to ask a MidAmerica Regional Staff Person something? Just want to chat and hang-out?

Come join Lisa Presley, one of MidAmerica's Congregational Life Staff, during her "virtual office hours!" Phone in any time between 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm Central; 7:30 - 9:00 pm Eastern, on Monday, November 18, and she will be there to chat with whomever shows up, and to answer any questions you might have, or find resources for you, or whatever.

Awards Suspended for This Year



By Nancy Heege, MidAmerica Congregational Life Consultant

In the past, the three districts from which MidAmerica Region originated each gave out awards to UUs at their annual District Assemblies or Conference. Each district had some awards which were unique to that district, and there were some awards that two or more districts gave.

In order to move forward into a combined award system, we will take some time to consider which honors we might want to give in the future and how it will work. In the meantime, we will suspend awards for 2014.

Winter WomanSpirit Conference

Women and Region (W&R), like Camp UniStar, is taking the formation of our MidAmerica Region as an occasion to consider their own best future. After reflection our Central Midwest Women & Religion Committee had discerned unanimously that the advantages of agility, focus, and ability to maintain their unique organizational culture outweigh what they would gain as part of a larger structure. They therefore have taken the bold step creating a new and independent structure serving their continuing mission of building UU women's community in the MidWest.



Women and Region is unique nationally in the role it has played organizing UU women to gather. They

have brought such people as Starhawk, Margot Adler, and Vicki Noble. In many years these gatherings are the MidWest's largest gathering of UUs - larger than our District Assemblies.

Continuing this tradition W&R this year brings us Sue Monk Kidd.

Winter WomanSpirit 2014 -- Wisdom for the Journey: A Weekend with Sue Monk Kidd will take place Friday, February 7, 2014 - Sunday, February 9, 2014 in Naperville, Illinois.

Writer Sue Monk Kidd is one of the foremost explorers of the feminine divine and spiritual creativity for women. Her fiction works dance on the edges of magical realism as she celebrates the connection between writing, creativity, and soul, and her non-fiction writings have provided a map for women seeking to expand and reclaim their own spiritual power. We encourage all women to come and spend a weekend laughing, learning, and growing at Winter WomanSpirit 2014, with Sue Monk Kidd and the UU women of the Midwest.

CLF at Amazon

The CLF (Church of the Larger Fellowship, our UU congregation without walls) offers UU-themed pendants, lapel pins, and note cards at Amazon.com. Type CLF UU in the search field. If a congregation wants to order in bulk, call Beth Murray: 617-948-6150.

Central Midwest, Heartland, and Prairie Star Districts of the Unitarian Universalist Association joining together to create a new era in Unitarian Universalism as MidAmerica Region.
