

# Families

## WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

### STORY FOR ALL AGES

## Building Bridges, Breaking Down Walls

Ten years  
after 9/11,  
UUs and  
interfaith  
work

Columbus, Ohio, presents a microcosm of the United States's religious diversity—historically black Christian churches; primarily white, suburban Christian churches; several Islamic faith communities; multiple Jewish denominations; a significant Hindu population; and more. Here, the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbus (First UU) makes interfaith work a priority.

Last September 11, the congregation sponsored an interfaith “Burn No Sacred Books” service in response to the nationally

“Belong,” followed by a several hundred-strong March for Inclusion through downtown Columbus. And a First UU-led, interfaith Spruce Up day has become an annual springtime event and the foundation for a citywide interfaith youth group.

First UU’s Racial Diversity Task Force has led the congregation into interfaith work, pursuing a congregational mission that includes the charge “to claim our diversity as a source of our strength.”

This resonates for the task force co-chairs: Ray Nandyal was raised Hindu, and his spouse, Lauri, grew up Baptist. Several years ago, with racial justice still its core purpose, the task force turned its focus to interfaith dialogue, worship, and action, identifying

immigration, anti-poverty, and criminal justice as issues for attention.

“Interfaith work brings us together across color lines to have conversations about things people feel are important, conversations we must have to move forward together on social justice issues,” says Ray.

**“... to claim our diversity as a source of our strength.”**

— First UU mission statement

Reaching out to existing interfaith efforts is one of the task force’s strategies. First UU’s senior minister, Mark Belletini, notes that Columbus clergy have long collaborated for social justice. For example, Project BREAD is an interfaith group that

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publicized threat by a Florida man to set a Qur’an on fire. The next month, the congregation again gathered Muslim, Jewish, Christian, and Unitarian Universalist clergy, this time to lead worship at a Congregational church on the theme “We All

The Family pages are adapted from Tapestry of Faith lifespan faith development programs.

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convenes multiple faith communities to engage with city officials to address issues from health care access to school truancy. And recently, the Columbus Council of Churches invited the Unitarian Universalist congregation to join—the first time a non-Christian congregation has been included.

The youth of First UU, however, created a new interfaith group for Columbus. Last year, Lauri Nandyal and her daughter, Samantha, took leadership training offered by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Interfaith Youth Core, a Chicago-based organization founded by Eboo Patel. Then, the Nandyals and another First UU mother/daughter pair, Susan and Allegra Roscigno, sought community partners to plan an interfaith youth clean-up of a neglected, inner-city neighborhood. The Interfaith Center for Peace, Muslim youth, and some from other faiths helped with the first Spruce Up. They continued as an interfaith youth group, taking roles in the fall 2010 interfaith worship services. A youth poetry event and other gatherings have followed.

“What feels like success in this work is to see the young people laughing, chatting, and being together,” Lauri says.

Ray agrees: “We have some food, and we talk, to bring humanity together across the divisions society imposes.”

He adds, “Unitarian Universalism is ideally suited for 21st-century pluralism because of our beliefs in interdependence and the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. Lots of other faiths are able to feel the truth in that, and the current cityscape is a perfect place to practice our beliefs.” ❀

## Interfaith Youth Training

**A** grant from the Shelter Rock Congregation has allowed the UUA to train youth/adult teams from around the country to lead interfaith projects. **Back in their local communities, UU youth...**

**...cleaned up a Boys & Girls Club** in Marietta, Georgia, working with school classmates, a college-age Christian group, and others.

**...hosted overnights to raise awareness and funds to help homeless people.** At First Parish of Sudbury, Massachusetts, UU and Catholic youth each brought \$5, goods for a local food pantry, and a cardboard box to sleep in. A Maryland overnight involved Unitarian Universalist Church of Rockville, River Road UU Congregation, and Jewish youth.

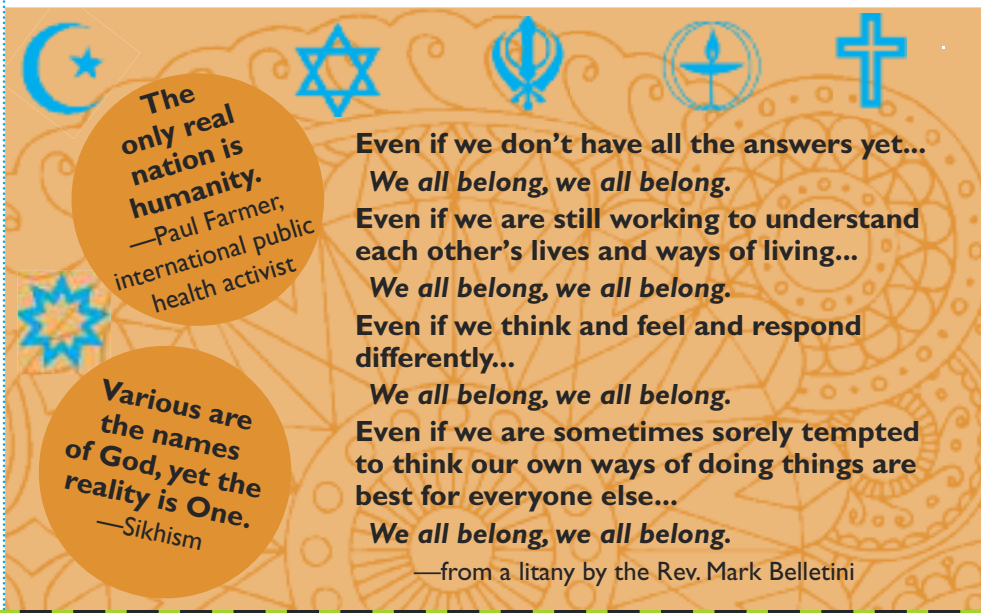
**...with a Methodist youth group, mobilized peers from Catholic, Orthodox Jewish, Reform Jewish, and United Church of Christ faith communities for a Westport, Connecticut, walk against hunger.**

**...organized a candlelight vigil for Haiti** in Greenville, South Carolina.

**...planned peer trainings** in Iowa, Kansas, and Minnesota to prepare for a Prairie Star district-wide commemoration of 9/11.



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## A Ritual of Remembrance

A Unitarian Universalist ritual to mark a death can take many forms, but it will certainly emphasize our belief that the person who has died lives on inside us through the love they shared and in the world through their good actions. Include children in a ritual. A ceremony can be appropriate at any time to remember someone who died long ago, even before the child was born, or people who died in a tragedy such as 9/11.

✿ Invite a child to contribute a flower as a symbol of life and its cycle. ✿ Use a real flower, or cut out a paper flower for children to draw or write what they remember and loved about someone who has gone.

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## Oranges and Oranges

Pass around a bowl of oranges. Ask everyone to take one and “get to know their orange.”

Then invite each person to tell a story about their orange based on a feature they noticed. The stories can be as silly or as serious as you like. After the stories, mix up the oranges in the bowl. Have everyone find their orange again, as fast as possible. Ask: Are you sure it’s your original orange? Most will know they have found it.

Now, have everyone peel their orange and return it to the bowl. Mix the oranges, and again, ask everyone to find theirs as fast as possible. This will be harder.

*My orange got this dent when it was traveling in a truck from Florida with its brothers. It loves traveling and always tries to get to the top of the pile.*

### Eat your oranges, and discuss:

- How did you feel coming up with your orange story? Did it make you like your orange?
- Why was it hard to find your orange the second time?
- How is this analogous to differences and similarities between people?
- If we think only about ways we are the same, what could we lose in human relationships? How do our “peels”—our unique qualities and stories—matter?



All over the world, everybody always strikes out at the enemy, and the pain escalates forever. Every day we could reflect on this and ask ourselves, “Am I going to practice peace, or am I going to practice war?”

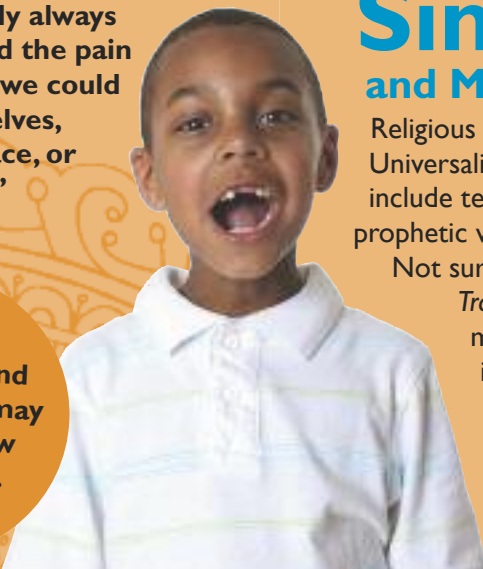
—Pema Chödrön,  
Tibetan Buddhist nun

[We] have made you nations and tribes that ye may come to know one another.  
—Qur’an

## Sing the Living Tradition—and Meet Our Sources

Religious pluralism is a foundation of Unitarian Universalism, mentioned in our Bylaws. Our Sources include teachings from all world religions, as well as prophetic voices from inside and outside our UU faith.

Not surprisingly, the UUA hymnbooks *Singing the Living Tradition* and *Singing the Journey* invite access to multiple faith traditions through music and readings. Browse the hymnbook sections dedicated to specific Sources. Learn to sing something new. Our tradition is “living” because we believe truth is not sealed. We can always learn from others’ faith beliefs and practices.



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## PARENT REFLECTION

### Ten Years Ago, Before I Was a Mother

By Susan Dana Lawrence

**M**y 2001 opened with a crisis. On New Year's Day, my 10-year-old dog couldn't stand up. Within a couple of days, a diagnosis, a decision, and Nellie was gone. As deaths go, it was not a bad one. The grief was sweet, the remembrances warm, and the new, dog-free life had some compelling charms. Not so bad at all.

The year was to unfold, however, with more events that would change my life. In June, my daughter was born to an Ethiopian woman in the town of Awassa—I would not become her mother for another three years. Then, in September, a planned terrorist air attack took down the Twin Towers and killed thousands of people on United States soil. The outcomes from that event began instantly, inside and around me.

First, the search for relatives and friends. For me, this was quick—my brother and sister-in-law were not in their lower Manhattan offices that day. Then, the stories, rippling toward me, each just degrees of separation from a personal impact: Someone's brother had been stuck in traffic and thus, late to work, and safe. The sister of an old high school friend had died on a plane from Boston. Firefighters from my town traveled to New York to volunteer at Ground Zero.

By the time I flew to Ethiopia to meet my small daughter and bring her home, 9/11 had receded from my day-to-day life. Yes, I knew I could not pack liquids or knitting needles in my carry-on bag; I submitted to a barefoot security scan. I worried about the frightening, tightening tone of political life around me, and felt disgust at our government's rush into combat in Iraq. Yet, I never articulated: How will I raise a child in post-9/11 America? Ten years later, it is more timely than ever to ask.



## ASK YOURSELF:

•**Where were you on September 11, 2001?** What is your 9/11 story? How can you tell it to your child? What part of the story do you need your child to know?

•**How are you a post-9/11 parent?** When you feel protective of your child, are you using caution, or fear? How can you know the difference?

•**Ten years later, many still believe 9/11 excuses—even justifies—blanket mistrust of Muslims, words and actions of hate and revenge.** How will you help your child discern? How will you teach them to recognize hateful stereotypes and fight against them?

•**How does your family handle news of death and disaster?** Have your children visited a memorial site? Spent time with people who are grieving? How prepared are you to bring your children into these experiences?

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## Hope heals.

### FAMILIES: WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

Provided by the Resource Development Office of the Ministries and Faith Development staff group of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

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### FIND OUT MORE

#### Parenting

- "Supporting Children in the Face of Disaster" by Tracey L. Hurd, in the Families section of UUA.org
- On the Teaching Tolerance website, "Combating Anti-Muslim Bias" and "Commemorate 9/11 by Confronting Islamophobia"
- On the PBS website, "Talking with Kids about News"

#### Interfaith Work

- Find out about interfaith leadership training for UU youth/adult teams; contact Jessica York, youth programs director: [jjork@uua.org](mailto:jjork@uua.org)
- Join the Interfaith Youth Core's online community of youth leaders: <http://bridge-builders.ning.com>
- The Interfaith Alliance sponsors a youth program: [www.weleadd.org](http://www.weleadd.org)
- Books to read: *Acts of Faith* by Eboo Patel; *Building the Interfaith Youth Movement* edited by Eboo Patel and Patrice Brodeur.

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