

March 2009 Newsletter

First Church in Jamaica Plain, Unitarian Universalist

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Rev. Terry Burke, Minister
Rev. Marshall Hawkins, Affiliate Minister
Rev. Peter Connolly, Affiliate Minister
George Wardle, Trustees Chair
Laurie Corkum, Standing Committee Chair
Michael Hirsch, Religious Education Director

Ellen McGuire, Music Director
Janna Frelich, Soloist
Philomena O'Donnell, Head Usher
Monroe Heyman, Building Use
Jean O'Leary, Church Administrator



Thoughts from Terry

Know languages. Know cultures. Own nothing! Own nothing!" Solzhenitsyn warns in his book Gulag Archipelago. Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, your heart will be also." Yesterday, I received similar advice from a friend I met on my trip last year to Jerusalem. While moving, she and her husband had some of their things damaged and records destroyed. She was philosophical about the losses, but asked me for a copy of a prayer I'd given her at St. George's in Jerusalem.

St. Ephrem the Syrian lived in the 4th century and died in Edessa; he is a patron saint of spiritual directors. His prayer is especially used by the Eastern churches, Russians, Greeks, and Ethiopians, for Lent. I read once where a scholar linked the name of Stavrogin, Dostoevsky's anti-hero in the novel Demons, to Ephrem's prayer.

While translations vary somewhat, the version I know goes:

O Lord and Master of my life,
Take away from me a spirit of despair, slothfulness, ambition, and vain thought.

Rather create in me a spirit of prudence, charity, patience, and humility.

Yes my God and King,
Help me to judge my own sins and refrain from judging the sins of others,
For blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen

After each sentence you are to do a prostration, touching your forehead to the floor.
Then you repeat the whole prayer with a prostration.

Prostrations come from court ceremonial of ancient Oriental rulers, but in those churches which practice them, you are to bounce upright again, as humans are created in the image and likeness of God. I like how the prayer suggests that our prayer has to be embodied; it can't simply be abstract spirituality. What we do with our body, our deeds, are also our prayer. Feeding the hungry, visiting the prisoners, working for the rights of illegal immigrants, hugging a depressed friend, can all be prayers.

"Where your treasure is, your heart will be also." Like the old Neil Young song says, try to be a "miner for a heart of gold."

This Lent, take time to prayerfully put your body where it needs to be.

Yours,
Terry

RE News

Following my sermon this past Sunday, I enjoyed a stimulating little conversation with Mort Ahmadifar and Peter Connolly while drinking coffee and munching on the most delightful slice of banana bread.

My sermon was entitled “The (Mis)Education of the Religiously Inclined” – in it, I hoped to call attention to the global importance of local religious education programs. In brief, I wanted to suggest that the local church – a place like First Church in Jamaica Plain Unitarian Universalist – is the site for a new religious education that is committed to the work of social justice. To indicate the potential for a strategy of localization over-against one of globalization, I referred in my sermon to a program implemented by the International Parliament of Writers (IPW). In the aftermath of Algerian author Tahar Djaout’s assassination, the IPW convened in part to designate certain so-called “cities of refuge,” cities which would offer asylum to writers under threat of persecution.

In his comments to Peter and me in the fellowship hall, Mort graciously called our attention to several disagreements he has with the IPW – in particular, one point for consideration is the relationship between the creative impulse of an artist/author and her environment/context. In fact, several authors who have taken advantage of IPW’s hospitality have complained that they were unable to write once settled into their new conditions – conditions, mind you, which are undoubtedly more hospitable and socially liberating (at least, from a Western perspective) than those which they have fled. Paris, a designated city of refuge, is simply not Algiers: one can imagine, perhaps, how a writer who intimately relays the experience of living amidst censorship, fear and lack, experiences an interruption in creativity when she finds herself writing on a veranda overlooking *L’Avenue des Champs Elysees*.

This, in fact, is one place where my vision for the local church diverges from the model provided by the IPW’s cities of refuge: rather than being a place which (potentially) stifles or limits an individual’s creativity and imagination – which, of course, is a sad outcome of many a religious education program – what if the local church was precisely the place where individuals go to dream, to create, and to relish in all those things to which religion – true religion – calls us: imaging the unseen; putting words to the ineffable; experiencing the supra-sensible? The *Spirit Play* curriculum that we use at our church on Sunday mornings emphasizes one word that is at the heart of my vision for a new religious education: wonder. Rather than telling our children ‘the facts’ of any given story (whether scriptural, secular, or ‘mythological’), and rather than imposing any authoritative interpretation on the story, the storyteller invites us to wonder. The local church, as locus for a new religious education, is a sanctuary of and for wonder – a safe place where all of us are not only allowed and encouraged to wonder, but a place unlike any other where wonderment comes naturally, spiritually and in super abundance. I wonder what RE programs elicit the religious imagination in you and your loved ones? Let’s talk!

Mick Hirsch,
RE Director

Come one, come all, to our annual Fellowship Dinner on Saturday evening, March 7, at 7PM. This entertaining evening is the official beginning of our annual pledge drive for the coming fiscal year. All members and friends of First Church are welcome, and can bring their “significant others” too, for this enjoyable evening of fellowship, cooked by church members. Please let us know if you need childcare. It will be provided if enough people want it. (There is no charge, and no one will ask you for a pledge!) Please speak to Abby Krueger or R.S.V.P. to rsvpfirstchurch@yahoo.com or call the church and leave a message on Box 5.

Fellowship Dinner Volunteers Needed!!!

Are you coming to the Fellowship Dinner on Saturday evening, Mar. 7? Experience some extra-special fellowship by volunteering! We are looking for volunteers to help with the following:

- * Setup: Arrive at the Church at 1:00 PM and help to setup tables and chairs - **Four Volunteers Needed**
- * Table Setting: Arrive at 4:00 PM and assist with setting the tables - **Two Volunteers Needed**
- * Greeter: Arrive at 6:15 to welcome all at the door and to assist all with their name tags - **One Volunteer Needed**
- * Break Down: The most important job of all! Stay to put away tables and chairs and to help with any other general straightening up - **Six Volunteers Needed**

If you can help with the above tasks, please email Alice at alice.phoenix@fmr.com

If you can help with the tasks below, please call George Wardle.

- 3:30-5:30 food prep – chopping etc (2 more people needed)
- 5-7 pm cooking (2 more people needed)

Sunday Night aLive - March 29

All are welcome to join us for our monthly alternative worship service, Sunday Night aLive on February 22, 6:00pm until 8:00pm. It features live music and participation in a relaxed but spiritual atmosphere. Childcare is provided and dinner is served following the service.

Adult RE in March: Terry Burke will be leading an adult education class on "Green Community." Drawing on American writers on the environment and guest speakers, the class will explore how we respond to the climate change crisis as a spiritual community. The first sessions will be on Wednesday, March 4th at 7:30PM at church and will run for five sessions. Email the church at firstchjp@aol.com, sign up at church, or speak to Terry if you are interested.

The next **Social Justice Committee Meeting** will be Sunday March 15th at 12:30pm in the Morse Room. Come find out how you can be of service in our community and our world. All are welcome – good works require good people, and we need YOU!

Monthly Potluck at First Church!

Our Second Sunday potluck is on Sunday March 8. Come join us for the next potluck *Patricia Wild, a local Quaker*, will be speaking to us about her recent book in which, decades afterward, she interviews the Black women who integrated her southern high school. -



Musick has Charms to sooth a savage Breast,
To soften Rocks, or bend a knotted Oak.
I've read, that things inanimate have mov'd,
And, as with living Souls, have been inform'd,
By Magick Numbers and persuasive Sound.
What then am I? Am I more senseless grown
Than Trees, or Flint? O force of constant Woe!
'Tis not in Harmony to calm my Griefs.
Anselmo sleeps, and is at Peace; last Night
The silent Tomb receiv'd the good Old King;
He and his Sorrows now are safely lodg'd
Within its cold, but hospitable Bosom.
Why am not I at Peace?

William Congreve, in *The mourning bride*, 1697

*If Musick soothes you, or helps you meditate or pray,
or if you just like to listen,
please join us for our second annual
Lenten Musical Meditation
Sunday, March 15, 2009 at 7 pm
in the Sanctuary*

**Annual First Church Retreat,
Friday, March 27th, 7pm through Sunday, March 29th:**

Carl Scovel and Terry Burke will be leading this year's First Church in Jamaica Plain retreat at ***Glastonbury Abbey in Hingham***. As a "Sabbath Weekend," the retreat will explore the monastic hours, the times of the day and night set aside for monastics for silence, singing, and prayer. We will look at the Hours as sacred "pauses," opportunities to bring the sacred into the hours of our daily life. There will be time for silence and fellowship, walking in the woods and worship, as well as the chance to meet for spiritual direction with the group leaders or with other retreatants.

The retreat will run from Friday evening March 27th, starting at 7:30Pm, through lunch on Sunday the 29th. The cost of the retreat is \$185 per person; some scholarship money is available.

Jamaica Plain forums

Tuesday, March 3rd, 7pm, Parish Hall

"Urban Sustainability Series: Growing in Containers and Urban Lots"

The first is our Urban Sustainability Series, this hands-on workshop will explore many options for growing your own food in the city. From container gardening to raised-beds, Gabriel Erde-Cohen of Green City Growers will share basic skills and tips to help you grow the most local food possible - directly from your front yard, porch, or windowsill!

Come with your questions about growing food in a container and/or small garden setting, and share your insights with fellow JP green-thumbs.

Sunday, March 8th, 7pm, Sanctuary

"Traces of the Trade" Screening and Discussion with Filmmaker

Join us for a special screening of the acclaimed documentary "Traces of the Trade," with filmmaker and JP-resident Katrina Browne. Featured on PBS and at the Sundance Film Festival, this film recounts Browne's inquiry into the DeWolf family, her forefathers and the largest slave-trading family in U.S. history.

"Traces of the Trade" follows ten DeWolf descendants as they retrace the steps of the Triangle Trade, visiting the DeWolf hometown of Bristol, Rhode Island, slave forts on the coast of Ghana, and the ruins of a family plantation in Cuba. Browne pushes the family forward as they struggle through the minefield of race politics.

Once back home, the family confronts the thorny topic of what to do now.. In the context of growing calls for reparations for slavery, family members struggle with the question of how to think about and contribute to "repair." Meanwhile, Katrina and her family come closer to the core: their love/hate relationship with their own Yankee culture and privileges; the healing and transformation needed not only "out there," but inside themselves.

Friday, March 13th, 7pm, Parish Hall

"Mike Lux: Lessons for the Obama Years"

Long-time activist Mike Lux was the liaison to progressive organizations with the Obama Administration's Transition Team. His new book, *The Progressive Revolution: How the Best in America Came to Be*, looks at the lessons from progressive social movements for this unique moment in history.

Friday, March 20th, 7pm, Parish Hall

"The Buzz About Bees: Urban Apiary for Beginners"

For the second event in our sustainability series, JP resident Jean Claude Bourrut will share tips for beginning your beekeeping hobby, with special considerations for city-dwellers. Jean Claude was the first beekeeper certified as Organic in the state of Massachusetts.

Sunday, March 22nd, 5pm, Parish Hall

"Singer-Songwriters from the Seventies Songfest and Potluck"

Come and sing your favorite songs of the seventies, lead by master songfest leader Ken Ward.. Bring a dish to share and enjoy your dinner with a joyful bout of song..

Church friends, your actions really DO make a difference. Here's a sampling of some of the letters from the Social Justice Committee Mailbox. Keep up the good works!

Excerpts from Sojourner House thank-you notes, in response to food donations, holiday gifts and Thanksgiving baskets:

Dated December 1st:

"On behalf of the guests and staff of Sojourner House, I would like to extend a very warm thank you to...everyone at JP Unitarian. The food that you donated... allowed us to make many Thanksgiving baskets for our guests and other homeless families in Boston."

Dated January 6th:

"... I would like to extend a very warm thank you for your generous donation. The gifts that you sent were so beautiful. The Delacruz and Graham families were so excited to open their presents. The children could hardly wait to play with their new toys!... Thank you again for making the holidays special for our families. The donations that we receive truly make the holidays a wonderful time at Sojourner House."

Dated February 5th:

"Thank you very much for your donation of 40 bags of food for Easter, 13 bags of food, turkeys and all the fixings for Thanksgiving, cosmetics, and 10 more bags of food for the guests at Sojourner House. We are very appreciative of all the support we get from the community for the homeless families that live here and are grateful for your kindness."

Excerpt from thank you note from the Native American Heritage Association, to Priscilla Morris, in response to the clothing drive:

"... we have received 3 box(es) of assorted clothing on 12/4/08. These donations will be taken to the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations [in South Dakota] where they will be distributed to the families in need. On behalf of the families who will benefit from your give, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to you. You have shown the Native American heritage Association your acts of kindness, generosity, humility and most of all, humanity. It is greatly appreciated."

Trust Notice Re: Planned Giving to First Church

Would you like to help your children's children, nieces and nephews attend First Church in the future? The Trust, the church's endowment, contributes to the operating budget and makes needed repairs to the Church building each year. The Trust has funded major capital projects such as the tower and clockwork. The Trust has also provided the required matching money, which enabled the Church to receive grants to build the disability access ramp and bathroom and to reupholster the pews in the sanctuary.

Include First Church in writing your will or preparing your estate plan. You may directly contact Vauntina Franklin, 617-434-4627, the Trust administrator at Bank of America, or you may speak with any Trustee. The Trustees are:

George Wardle, Penny Wells, Theo Colburn, Gerry Culver and Judith Garfunkel.