

The Ebenezer Star

The quarterly newsletter of the Auburn Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

January-March 2018

A Few Words from our Minister

I've been thinking lately about transitions, and metaphors for transitions. As I write, we cross the celestial boundary between fall and winter, from a period of lengthening night to one of lengthening daylight. On the surface of things, we move through a season of festivities together, celebrating the light that endures and shines through darkness. I've always found it difficult to focus on anything on the far side of the winter holiday season, as though the landscape of the new year lies beyond the horizon. The experience of solstice compels me to find meaning in the moment right in front of me, to suspend the anxiety, expectation, and planning for the time ahead and surrender to *presence*. We would do well to notice and practice this.



Life is a journey: passing through time is a *journey*. As on a literal journey—on foot, on wheels, or on some other form of transit—we sometimes move forward with our eyes on the destination, and other times we pay attention to our present surroundings. Whether the day is uphill, downhill, or level, may we find presence of mind to appreciate the beauty of a sunset, the wonder of a natural process, or the warmth of connection with a friendly stranger. May these moments of presence nourish and sustain our spirits in the year ahead.



In faith,

Pam

Rev. Pam Gehrke, PhD
Interim Minister minister@auuf.org

AUUF
NEWS

The name of our newsletter, The Ebenezer Star, was inspired by the original purpose and an architectural feature of the building in which the Auburn Unitarian Universalist Fellowship convenes. Newly freed black women and men constructed this building as a place of worship for their Ebenezer Baptist congregation. Inside, a hand-carved, four-pointed star is the unique focal point of the beautiful ceiling. It is our hope that The Ebenezer Star will serve – as storied stars often do – as a guide for navigating your journey while finding connection, meaning, and community.

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AUUF MISSION



The Auburn Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is a community dedicated to affirming a reverence for life and enriching the spiritual lives of its members. Here we honor the one and the many; here we welcome a diversity of thoughts, beliefs and passions; here we speak without fear and listen with open hearts. We gather to care for one another, share our burdens and joys, and celebrate life's passages.

Strengthened by this fellowship, we bring a liberal religious presence to our larger community and work for a safe and just world.

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The President, Thinking...

At home on my refrigerator, there magnetically adheres a quote from Teddy Roosevelt. "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." When I put it up on the fridge, a long time ago, I liked the sentiment. It seemed a prescription for self-sufficiency, an antidote to the "if only" excuse. I could solve this problem *if only* I had some training, *if only* I had a better tool, *if only* I lived somewhere else. *If only*.

Over the years, my response to the quotation has drifted around. Sometimes it sounds like the advice of mayors and emergency officials to the populace to "shelter in place" during and after a hellacious storm: "You're on your own, folks, because we don't have the resources to improve your chances of surviving. Do what you can, with what you have, where you are. Good luck!"

Sometimes it strikes me as permission to set your sights lower: "do what you can," not "do a great job." In one respect that's a good thing if you tend to be a pathological perfectionist. In another respect, permission to lower your sights could be permission to produce needlessly shabby results, permission to not try harder.

As a person who grew up in The Bronx (the glamorous part), I must admit the thought of returning there to live has crossed my mind once or twice in the last forty years living in the jungles of Alabama. Corny but true, Teddy's refrigerator advice to act "where you are" helped keep me here in the loveliest village. (That, and the prospect of five months of snow, ice, and worse – slush! – every winter, and occasional temperatures that begin with a minus sign....But I digress.)

Through an unfortunate and non-reproducible chain of events, I find myself the Prez of the AUUF. (I could adopt more modern usage and call the steps leading to my Presidentification a "thread." That might, however, suggest that your president

hangs by a thread. Bad optics, that). Anyway here I am. And TR's quote is still on the fridge. And on my mind.

Should we, the AUUF, do what we can, with what we have, where we are? Of course, that depends on your interpretation of TR's advice. As I've said, my interpretation is malleable. Currently, I'm back to my original "self-sufficiency" reading, but with a twist. The twist is: read the **second sentence**. Okay, I know the quotation is one sentence, but I noticed you were yawning and checking your phone a lot, so I thought I'd better get you back on track. Hello?! Yoo hoo!! The (*invisible*) second sentence (that I made up) is: Once you're finished doing what you can with what you have where you are, do more than before, get more than you had, and if where you are is not the right place, move.

TR's dictum is a recipe for equilibrium, stability, stasis. The *second sentence* is a recipe for change, kinesis. At AUUF, we need to do both. The long-distance runner must first position the body, plant the feet, crouch motionless and balanced, before taking off on the run. In the same way, our years of Interim Ministry are a time for us to "do what we can," to look down the running paths (which one is best?) and plant our feet. Once a settled Minister arrives (August, 2019, we hope) we will get about the enterprise of doing more than we now can, with more than we now have, at a place (maybe) where we presently are not. What path will we run on?

Now is the time to figure out where we want to go. Because, as Yogi Berra said, "If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else."



I invite your comments.

Peter Livant
AUUF President
president@auuf.org

Announcements and Events

Automate Your Pledges!

Are you interested in setting up a recurring pledge payment to the AUUF? It's pretty easy and quite convenient. Greg Schmidt or Darrell Crutchley can walk you through it. Talk to them at coffee hour or potluck, or send an email to finance@auuf.org to learn how to set it up.

Art π Exhibit and Sale at the Fellowship

Art π will hold their annual show and sale at the Fellowship in February. The opening reception will be on Friday evening, February 9, from 6:30 until 9:30 p.m. The sale will continue on Saturday, February 10, from 10:00 until 4:00 p.m., and Sunday afternoon, February 11, from 1:00 until 4:00 p.m.

Art π is a collaborative of eight women artists—Susie Criswell, Leigh Hinton, Katie Jackson, Terry Rodriguez, Dee Smith, Deborah Strawn, Gina Touchton and Brenda Wood—who have been sharing ideas and lending one another support in the creative process for more than a decade. They express their art through a wide array of mediums: drawing, painting, mixed media, mosaics, and printmaking; jewelry, fiber, gourd, and glass art; and writing and graphic design.

In 2014, after years of being nameless, they officially named themselves Art π —after the mathematical constant that is the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter, but they feel is so much more, not the least of which is a name that embraces their tight encirclement of creativity and support.

They are grateful to be able to show their work in the wonderful space of our Fellowship Hall. Come and enjoy!

Heads Up! With Springtime Will Come Canvass-time

The annual canvass is approaching! Greg Schmidt will begin his search for canvassers in January. Consider saying yes when he asks you to be part of the canvass team. Even better, surprise him by volunteering before he asks.

Valentine's Express – RE for All Ages, January 28

Participate in the fun of making Valentine's Day cards with the children after service on January 28, from 11:15 - 12:20, in the RE Building. Place an order for as many hand-made cards as you'd like to share with others. Cost is \$2/card. On Sunday, February 11, the children will deliver cards designated for Fellowship members after the service and during potluck.

Half of the proceeds from the sale of these small works of art are given to charities selected by each class of children. In the past, their choices have included Lewy Body Dementia Association, Lee County and Macon County Humane Society, Planned Parenthood, World Wildlife Federation, East Alabama Food Bank and others. The other half of the money is designated to improve the playground.

View additional news, features, and upcoming Sunday Services info at www.auuf.org

On Religious Exploration

Education.... Exploration.... Think about those two words for a moment. What are the images that pop into your mind when you hear each word? I'll return to this question shortly, but first I want to share with you some of the amazing experiences I've had this year out in the larger UU world with people who do the same work I do.

From trips to several churches outside Alabama, attendance at General Assembly, participation in the K-1 "Our Whole Lives" training, RE Week at the Mountain, and active involvement in the Liberal Religious Education Association (LREDA), I have learned just how varied the approaches are for imparting our UU values. For example, I met a woman from New York who takes her eager youth twice a year into the most impoverished areas of the city to share toiletries and kindness. I met a man whose RE program is the test subject for the creator of "Imagine-RE" (*UU and Harry Potter* and *Jedi Academy* are two products of "Imagine-RE" that our middle class has used with great success).

Speaking with my counterparts has widened my perspective on how different RE programs are organized and what their challenges look like. For example, I learned about another congregation with so many children and youth that they have two grades per class. I spoke with many who share challenges similar to ours, in addition to having their own hurdles. I discovered that some of my colleagues run programs that serve not only children, youth, and young adults, but adults too. Another thing I found interesting was how different the titles are among those with responsibilities similar to mine. Here are just a few of them:

- Director of Religious Education.
- Director of Religious Exploration
- Director of Religious Growth and Learning
- Director of Lifespan Religious Education
- Director of Lifespan Religious Exploration
- Director of Lifelong Learning
- Director of Community Life and Learning
- Director of Lifespan Faith Development
- Children's Program Coordinator
- Youth Program Coordinator

Now, let's get back to my original question, one that the leaders of RE Week at the Mountain posed to us. The consensus in my group was that "education" is something that is given to you from on high, while "exploration" is something you experience. This got me thinking. I want our RE program to be an **exploration** of values and sources, experiences and questions, opportunities and collaborations. So, last month I brought this idea to the Board Meeting. The trustees agreed that we want our children and youth to actively participate in their learning, rather than simply to be told what they should know.

So we are replacing the old model of learning, represented by the term "Religious Education," with this new model. Welcome to our "new RE" – the AUUF's Religious Exploration program. On the next page are some photos of the middle RE class and a glimpse into their explorations so far this year.



Julie Meadows

Director of Religious
Exploration

dre@auuf.org

A Glimpse into the Padawan Learners RE Classroom

Our Padawan Learners met this past month with the Fellowship's own Carolyn Levy to complete the next step in their training - making their Jedi robes. The Padawans took felt, traced their outlines, and cut and sewed their robes together. The kids really had a good time working on the sewing machines and look forward to showing off their robes at the RE service.



The UUSC – What is it?

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is a 77-year-old human rights organization grounded in Unitarian Universalist values. It is guided by the principle that local organizations should lead efforts to defend human rights and create sustainable models for change within their own communities.

UUSC supports grassroots organizations in over 25 countries around the world, including the United States, and has over 75 partner organizations. Because of its collaborative structure, UUSC has only 39 staff members and an 82:18 program to overhead ratio.

UUSC was founded in 1940. The story of the founders of UUSC is portrayed in the PBS documentary produced by Kenneth Burns, "Defying the Nazis: The Sharp's War."

UUSC's Mission:

- We advance **Economic Justice** by supporting workers' collaboratives, advocating for safe working conditions and a living wage, and working to protect and formalize the rights of workers in the informal economy.
- Our **Environmental Justice** work focuses on promoting access to clean, affordable water and on mitigating the impact of the global climate crisis on poor rural communities that have contributed little toward the climate change impacting their livelihoods.
- We protect **Rights at Risk**, especially in times of humanitarian crises and natural disasters, during which populations already experiencing rights violations are especially vulnerable.

AUUF's UUSC Market

The UUSC Market, found most Sundays at the back of the Fellowship Hall, is a way for our community to share while raising money for UUSC. Anyone can donate small items which others might like to purchase. There is no pricing, a buyer makes a donation to UUSC (donation jar on the table) and takes the item of interest.

What can you donate? This is not a garage sale. Items should be something that you think someone would want. Items should be of value but in a low dollar range, such as a person might have in their pocket or purse. Yes, we want purchases to be spur of the moment. Here are a few suggestions:

- Small art pieces
- Handmade items
- During the growing season excess produce always sells well. It should be clean and either in amounts easily used, or with bags for dividing up as needed.
- Bakery items also sell well.
- Use your imagination. Do you have something interesting which you are willing to pass on?

All proceeds go to UUSC. In past years the market has raised several hundred dollars for UUSC while sharing our bounty. Contact Cindy Reinke (uusc@auuf.org) for more information about UUSC or with questions about how you can contribute.

Committee Happenings: Nominations

In the next few months, we, the Nominating Committee (Laura Kloberg, Nanette Chadwick, and Conrad Ross) have our work cut out for us. Currently, we expect to need as many as eight people to refill committee chair positions and three people to refill officer positions for the 2018–2019 calendar year.

Although, at the time of this newsletter submission, we have not contacted all of the committee chairs to verify that they are stepping down, we list below the anticipated open positions. Please give serious thought to donating your skills and talents through volunteering to serve the Fellowship in one of these roles. Terms are for one year, unless otherwise noted.

Our goal is to gather nominees for all of these positions by the March Board Meeting. We will be proactively identifying members to serve, so be on the lookout for some visiting from us during January and February. Contact any of us with questions if you would like more information before deciding.

2018-19 Committee Chairs Needed

Nominations
 Religious Exploration (Children’s RE)
 Buildings & Grounds
 Green Sanctuary
 Music
 Social Action
 Sunday Services

2018-19 Officers Needed

Vice President for Finance
 One-Year Trustee
 Three-Year Trustee [rotates off in 2021]

Laura Kloberg, Chair, Nominations Committee
nominating@auuf.org



Grounds

Far Left: Fleming, Liya & Sylvie building a planter.

Near Left: Completed planter, the first of several additions to the AUUF grounds.

The Board at Work

The Board meets on second Sundays in the Busch Center, at 12:15 pm after potluck. Your presence as an observer is always welcomed. If you want to orally present an issue to the Board, that's OK too, but contact Board President, Peter Livant, one week in advance of the meeting so you can be included on the official agenda. (If you are on the agenda you get to scratch and claw for the Fair Trade chocolate that miraculously appears at Board meetings.)

If you want to know what the Board does at each meeting, but you don't want to sit through several hours of Board deliberations, the minutes of past meetings are becoming available. Email the Secretary, Kristen Starr (secretary@auuf.org), and she'll send you what we've got. The minutes of a Board meeting that took place in a particular month, let's say July for example, are presented to the Board for approval at the next meeting, in August. If there are no problems, the minutes are approved. If there are problems, the corrected minutes are presented in September and, hopefully, approved then (two months after the fact). The point of this explanation is to prepare you, gentle requester of Board minutes, for the heartbreak of non-instantaneous access to the minutes.

Another way to keep an eye on your Board is to pick up *The Ebenezer Star* and turn to this column, "The Board At Work," newly created in an effort to make the work of the Board if not transparent, then at least translucent. Translucent beats opaque, yes?



The Board is presently in the midst of several thorny issues.

- 1) We are working on creating a policy manual for paid staff (excluding the minister). This has taken us into the daunting world of health care benefits, retirement contributions, and other arcane but important items.

- 2) We are reviewing the policies governing use of our buildings by outside groups. A goal is to write policies that enable us to handle "special requests" in a less improvisational way.
- 3) We are undertaking a much-needed major overhaul of the document entitled "How To Do UU." Over the long haul, this has been an invaluable reference resource for Board and committee chairs. Lately, however, it has taken on a distinctly archival cast; it accurately describes how things used to be done, but has become more and more inaccurate at describing how UU at AUUF is actually done today.

An important issue that the Board wrestled with for some time was the question of whether the Minister who succeeds Pam will be an Interim Minister (like Pam) or a Developmental Minister. A Developmental Minister is also temporary, but the length of residence is longer; 5 years is typical. The Board devoted time to understanding the nature of Developmental ministry, and devoted almost an entire Board meeting to discussing the pros and cons of Developmental and Interim ministries. In the final analysis, we decided to seek an Interim Minister to take over for a year after Pam's term ends. By the end of *that* year, the search process will have identified a Minister who will join us as our "settled" Minister.

If you have an item you think the Board should address, please talk to any Board member anytime, but at the latest by the first Sunday of the month. The Board is made up of Peter Livant (President), Amy Phillips (President-Elect), Greg Schmidt (VP for Finance), Kristen Starr (Secretary), Darrell Crutchley (Treasurer), and Kitty Frey, Laura Kloberg, Marcia Rossi, and Shawn Jacobsen (Trustees).

Interview with a New Member, Shahla Barrow

What brought you in the doors of AUUF?

The outdoor sign board caught my attention. I participated in the Buddhist meditation and yoga programs. Once I started attending, AUUF seemed to be a place that embodied “all of the above,” which spoke to me of love and acceptance.

What has kept you coming?

I wanted to get to know people. The “old me” used to remain separate and then wonder why I felt isolated. The “new me” has tried out getting to know people, and it’s been really fun!

What do you do with your days?

I’m a transformation artist and coach. I work with creative rebels and spiritual “bad-asses” to open them up to their own creativity and prosperity. Because my clients are bold and bad-ass, I have to be, too. I recently challenged myself to do a Facebook Live video every day for a year.

I used to think that the waters of life just flowed around me as though I was in a canoe. Now I think, “Forget the canoe. I’m the water!” I jumped in, went with life, and am enjoying the scenery. Being immersed in the water keeps me present, aware, and responsive. This is fun, challenging, exciting, and intense.

What gives you joy?

Creating anything: Art. Bonds. Conversations. Creation is a basic human right and ability. When you tap into your creativity, you find joy.

What more do you want us to know about you?

I’ve done a lot in a short amount of time: Traveled the world. Photography. Massage therapy. There’s so much more to do and create. I connect with people and see them for who are without being scared. I love having deep soulful conversations and am open to having one with anyone. I’m very approachable.

Interview with Long-Time Members, Conrad and Janice Koenig Ross

It was a pleasure to interview Conrad and Janice and learn of their lives and active AUUF fellowship contributions since the late 1960’s. Their home on Wrights Mill Road is comfortably full of art and books. “Well fed/well read” is how Conrad has described his family life.

How did this marriage union of two talented artists begin? Janice and Conrad met as students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Janice had already earned her undergraduate degree from Penn State in Sociology, worked for the New School of Social Research at Columbia University, and studied with Karl Knaths in Washington D.C. before joining the MFA program at the University of Illinois. At the same time, Conrad was a flourishing art major (albeit an undergrad). They met in an advanced drawing class, and Conrad was awed by Janice Koenig.

Shortly after spring graduation, a wedding was planned. From different geographic and religious backgrounds, Janice and Conrad found a local Illinois Unitarian Minister, Rev. Arnold F. Westwood, to perform their marriage ceremony. They both recognized the importance of a value system for making choices and appreciated the Unitarians’ sense of community. Janice and Conrad celebrated their 63rd anniversary on April 19, 2017.

As a young married couple, they lived in Rustin, LA, where Conrad’s first teaching position was at the LA Polytechnic Institute. The times were rife with change as Civil Rights Freedom Riders rode integrated busses from the North and crosses burned on lawns. Janice and Conrad’s strong liberal beliefs, sense of community and inclusivity grew.

Both Conrad and Janice were drawn to Auburn for its “small-town” virtues but kept an eye to the larger world. Throughout their life, together and separate, with and without children, they have traveled, taught and created art on many continents. Their art reflects their travel experiences.

Together, Janice and Conrad raised three children in AUUF: Katherine, Rachel and Joe who found their

professions in diverse branches of art. First daughter is a theater designer, second is a green space planner, and their son is an engineer. A Sunday school class photo in "AUUF-A Fifty Year History compiled by Joanna Hoit," shows an RE photo of the 3 children outside AUUF's Cox Street location. Janice served as AUUF's RE director for many years.

In 1989, Conrad founded the Wycross Press, the only press in Alabama solely devoted to publishing original and fine art prints. Located close to home in a separate building at 534 Wrights Mill Road, Wycross Press is a light filled, two-floored structure that provides an art making, display and storage space for Conrad's paintings, drawings, lithographs, woodcuts, and intaglio engravings along with Janice's drawings and paintings.

Janice, retired from teaching at Tuskegee University, is an accomplished artist in portraits, figure drawing and abstract expressionism. "In Pursuit of Likeness" a retrospective exhibition of more than 20 gathered portraits and paintings were put on display at AUUF in March and April 2017. Susan Hood, Professor of Fine Arts at Auburn University noted in the catalogue, "Through the Years," that Janice's gestures of hand in her portraits speak of a kind of language conveying messages about relationships and the power of touch." Janice has helped to raise money for AUUF's annual auction by offering for donation a painting or pastel to the highest bidder. She has also offered her work to the Auburn Arts Associations auctions.

Conrad is Professor Emeritus of Art, Auburn University. From 1963 to 1997 he taught drawing, printmaking and painting. Conrad's China Colle's series was exhibited in June and July of 1999 at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts. This show's catalogue, by Cathy Byrd of Atlanta, describes Conrad's art as a process that embodies a path of enlightenment. The series combines writing – his own and that of the Chinese poets – as an integral part of his printmaking using landscape imagery to examine the human environment and its relationship to nature. In just the last eight years, his work has been featured in more than 10

exhibitions throughout the southeast and can be found in more than 14 public collections.

Currently, Conrad is creating political "BUCKSHEETS" - cartoons and poems satirizing the current state of our national politics. His witty verse is interspaced on masks once designed for Chinese children to protect them from evil spirits.

Conrad and Janice have been active with the Humanist Program, and Conrad continues to facilitate Vipassana Buddhist meditation, every first and third Saturday from 10am-12. He and Janice practice yoga 5-6:30 on Tuesdays at the Fellowship.

Conrad's hopes for AUUF's future: to settle a new minister and continue to grow as that process makes us stronger. He agrees that taking our time is a good tactic; the more people stay involved in the administration, the stronger we will be. He believes that growing volunteerism and inclusivity within AUUF's congregation offers much for the greater Auburn community

We are thankful for Janice's and Conrad's many contributions to AUUF and the Auburn community. They live by experience, wisdom, strength and grace. Throughout their daily routines of life and love, they continue to model ART in its most fluid form.

Submission Guidelines

Articles for *The Ebenezer Star* may be submitted to communications@auuf.org for consideration (max. 500 words, but let's talk if you have ideas for longer articles). Poetry, photos, and art work are also welcome. Deadline for the next issue, April – June 2018, is March 9, 2018.

Announcements and events may also be submitted at any time. Please include a title, dates and times, location, blurb (max. 100 words), cost (if any), and contact information. Longer announcements may be considered with approval. All submissions are subject to editorial discretion and revision.

Poetry & Prose

Remembering Puerto Rico

by Conrad Ross

We were a spring storm
Alien and forbidden, much like
Maria, the hurricane that landed
On that sun-rich patterned vale.

So this wind blown island rose up
Spouting as the fountain it was,
A refuge in the land's blue sea.

The smothered lush green slopes
Ran down to a vast blue ocean
Over lava crumbling pebbles
With all horizons pointing home,
Always, toward the mainland.

On closed doors, grates still guarded
The island's quiet light. Waterfalls
Thundered in the gentle forest.
Always, the rain fell.

We moved about as strange
Fruit-birds bobbling with tails
Awry weaving tales as we walked
Having sprung looks into flowered
Trees. Puerto Rico stands firm
For it is a mountain with a heart.

[Janice and I vacationed in Puerto Rico in 2012 when I began this poem. Over the years I kept working on it, but it took Maria to finally bring it home.]

Peace in the Heart

by Lao-Tse

If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors,
There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart.

Words for Hard Times

By Maureen Killoran (from UUA.org)

No matter how weak or how frightened we may feel, we each have gifts that can make a difference in the world. In this coming week, may you do at least one thing to support the broken; to welcome the stranger; to celebrate what is worthy; to do the work of justice and love.

Be strong.

Be connected.

Each day, act — so you may be a little more whole.

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Volunteers are
the Heart of
AUUF

Please remember to
volunteer to help our
community thrive!!

www.auuf.org/signup