



# Good Gnus

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Jonesboro, AR  
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## February 2016

"Everyone who has ever been born has the same birthright—  
the enormous potential of a warm heart and clear mind."

—Pema Chödrön, Buddhist monk

### Worship Service Calendar

The Fellowship meets at Temple Israel, 203 W. Oak Ave.,  
Jonesboro. Services and Children's Program 10 a.m.  
Coffee 10:45 a.m. Adult Forum 11 a.m.

We gather in worship to find meaning and to  
live more deeply. Worship creates connections  
within, among, and beyond us, calling us to our  
better selves, calling us to live with wisdom and  
compassion—UUA.

**February 7 Arlene Dormio** will help us  
develop our understanding of "Missions  
and Visions."

*Please remember the Children's Shelter with  
your donation of personal hygiene products.*


**February 14 Karen Yanowitz** will lead a cele-  
bration of "Love 'n Stuff," our annual  
Valentine observance.


*The second Sunday is also Peanut Butter Sunday.  
Please remember your love for your neighbors  
through donations of peanut butter or other  
nutritious items for the Food Pantry.*



**February 21 Marlee McCampbell** will speak  
on "Learning to Love You More," finding  
the confidence to value yourself.

*The third Sunday is our monthly Pot Luck lunch.  
Bring a dish and conversation to share.*

**February 28 Loren Ivener and Betty Stafford**  
will explore "Court Fees and the Poor."   
The costs of the criminal justice system in  
the U.S. and Craighead County are paid in-  
creasingly by defendants. Fees plus addi-  
tional sanctions subject the poor to harsh-  
er treatment than others committing iden-  
tical crimes but who can afford to pay. EG, a  
driver gets behind on the payment plan →  
the license is suspended → if caught driving  
→ 3 days jail → employment lost → a down-  
ward begun. Some court observers believe  
the trend has gone too far.

The Fellowship's January contribution to  
Helping Neighbors Food Pantry was 34  
pounds of peanut butter, and other  
foods. Your concern made the month  
easier for many needy families. 

You can also participate by filling the  
Love Boat at Cash Savers Super-  
market on Hwy. 49 & Parker Rd.,  
February 13<sup>th</sup>, when HN board members  
will be sacking groceries and accepting  
contributions to the Pantry.

## The Democratic Process



Arkansas is one of 14 **Super Tuesday** states where voters will cast a ballot on March 1<sup>st</sup> in Primary Elections. If you have moved from a different county since the last election, you must submit your up-dated registration information to the Clerk in your new county no later than February 26<sup>th</sup>.

Arkansas has an **open primary**, meaning any registered voter can cast a vote, regardless of political affiliation. At the polling site, voters may choose the party ballot they will vote on. They are held to that affiliation in the case of a runoff election. An unaffiliated voter may decide not to participate in either party's primary and will be given the ballot with non-partisan contests only.

**Judicial candidates** compete in a nonpartisan election. If no judicial candidate wins a majority, the two with the most votes participate in a runoff, which takes place on the same day as the General Election for partisan races (November 8<sup>th</sup>). Candidates include local judges and, in some areas in Arkansas, judges for the Court of Appeals. Voters statewide will also be voting on two Supreme Court Justice positions, including the Chief Justice.

**Early voting** for the primary begins Tuesday, February 16<sup>th</sup>. Exercise our Fifth Principle. **VOTE!**

## Black History Month

Part of the celebration of Black History Month will be a discussion by **Dr. Lillie Fears**, Professor in the Media Department at ASU, of "The Black Press in Arkansas," at the ASU Museum, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 5-7 pm. Refreshments will be served, and everyone is welcome. For more information, see [astate.edu/museum](http://astate.edu/museum) or [facebook.com/asumuseum](http://facebook.com/asumuseum).

## Encouraging Spiritual Growth

Laurence Sterne wrote: "We may imitate the Deity in all his moral attributes, but mercy is the only one in which we can pretend to equal him. We cannot give like God, but surely we may forgive like him." Mercy involves power. To show mercy to you, I must have something to offer you that I can choose to either give or withhold. Mercy is a way of using our power to show love and compassion. Most importantly, mercy is offered whether a person deserves it or not. In this sense mercy runs counter to justice.

If justice is about making things fair and giving someone her due, mercy involves offering love and forgiveness even when a person may rightly deserve to be punished or shunned. An impoverished employee who steals from his boss to feed his hungry children could justifiably be fired or put in jail. However, being merciful might entail dropping the charges and even giving the worker a raise in his hourly wage.

If justice must prevail in modern day Israel, for example, with its history of division and violence, there may never be peace. To try to right every wrong and punish all who have acted violently and unjustly would be futile. At some point someone has to say, "Too much has happened and now justice alone is out of reach. The best we can hope for now is to seek and offer mercy."

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa is a great example of the power of mercy. When apartheid ended there, those in power decided not to seek justice alone. They believed rather that the country would benefit more by knowing the truth than from exacting punishment for the crimes of the past. So they gave amnesty to the perpetrators who committed violence and crime during apartheid if those people shared the truth about what they had done. In other words, at that point in their history, South Africans regarded mercy and truth as higher values than justice. Such a rare achievement of mercy takes faith in humankind and the power of love and forgiveness.

As human beings we all fumble and fail at times. In the process we are truly fortunate when those we have wronged give us an opportunity to try again. In the words of the Psalmist: "May goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life."

—Rev. Marlin Levanhar, All Souls Church, Tulsa, OK



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## In the Good Old Summertime

Summer assemblies, the annual intergenerational UU retreats for fun, fellowship, and personal growth, are being publicized—

- ❖ **Midwest UU Summer Assembly**, July 3-9, will be held at Trout Lodge, at the YMCA of the Ozarks, near Potosi, MO. Information is available at [muusa.org](http://muusa.org).
- ❖ **The Point** (formerly the Southwest UU Summer Institute), July 24-29, will be held at Fort Gibson Lake in Sequoyah State Park, OK. Visit [thepointuu.org](http://thepointuu.org) for more information.

Both are Welcoming assemblies.

## Universalist Historical Society

UU history scholars have come to depend on digital books available from Google Books and the HathiTrust Library (a partnership of major research institutions and libraries). Many of these books were originally collected and saved by the **Universalist Historical Society**. The UHS was formed in 1834 and is probably the oldest denominational history group in North America. The UHS collection was eventually moved to the Crane Theological School at Tufts University (founded in 1852 by Universalists in Medford, MA) and then to the Tufts library.

The Universalist Historical Society was inactive for a few years at the end of World War II, but was rejuvenated in the 1950s by several young ministers, many of whom were Tufts graduates. By carefully improving the Society's stock market holdings, the budget was enlarged, and new programs were initiated, including hiring a professional librarian, establishing a yearly historical journal, and publishing several important Universalist and Unitarian histories. In 1974, the Universalist Historical Society moved to the Andover Harvard Theological Library until it merged with the Unitarian Historical Society in 1978, creating the UU Historical & Heritage Society. For more information, visit [uuhhs.org](http://uuhhs.org), Facebook, or Twitter.

At the same time that the UUHHS works on a national level, UU societies in Arkansas have an opportunity to preserve their historical records. The **Arkansas History Commission** is offering the Fellow-

ship and other UU churches, at no cost, several possibilities for preserving its records, from permanent storage of the original records to placing the records on microfilm. The Commission's interest is to preserve the history of all Arkansans for the future. The Commission collects manuscript materials, census records, military records, family histories, and organizational records, preserving them for viewing or research by anyone interested in the state's history. More information is available at [arkives.com](http://arkives.com).

## In the Denomination



*UUA World* reports that the Presidential Search Committee has announced two nominees for the **2017 UUA presidential election**—the Rev. Alison Miller, Senior Minister at Morgantown Unitarian Fellowship, in Morgantown, NJ; and the Rev. Sue Phillips, UUA Northeast Region Leader. Other candidates may enter the race by petition between February 1, 2016, and February 1, 2017. Delegates to the 2017 General Assembly in New Orleans will elect a successor to President Peter Morales.



To reach a broader audience and to share UU's good news, the UUA Bookstore is being renamed—*inSpirit: the UU Book and Gift Shop*. The word *inSpirit* is rich in meaning—to fill with spirit, to encourage, to exhilarate, or to bestow with strength or purpose. As *inSpirit*, the shop will continue to offer a wide range of books and gifts that reflect UU values, including titles from Skinner House Books and Beacon Press, selected titles from other publishers, and fair trade items. New items include—

- a chalice logo soft cover journal in various colors
- an elegant chalice logo bound journal
- a Let Your Light Shine pen with integrated flashlight and stylus
- a chalice logo post-it cube
- a chalice logo luggage tag in red, green, or orange.

For more information, visit the inSpirit website, [uuabookstore.org](http://uuabookstore.org).

## Our Interdependent Web



When we get closer to nature—an untouched wilderness or a backyard tree—we do our over-stressed brains a favor. In 1865 the great landscape architect of New York's Central Park, Frederick Law Olmsted, looked out over the Yosemite Valley and saw a place worth saving. He urged the California legislature to protect it from rampant development, believing that beautiful green spaces should exist for all people to enjoy. "The occasional contemplation of natural scenes," he wrote, "is favorable to our health and vigor, especially of the intellect." American writers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Muir, inherited that outlook. Together they built the spiritual and emotional case for creating the world's first national parks by claiming that **nature had healing powers.**

Olmsted's observations echo in the findings of a growing body of research. Several years ago Stephen Kaplan at the University of Michigan found that a 50-minute walk in an arboretum improved executive attention skills, e.g., short-term memory (while walking along a city street did not), "a therapy with no known side effects, was readily available, and could improve cognitive functioning at zero cost."

David Strayer, a cognitive psychologist, at the University of Utah, knows our brains are prone to mistakes, especially when we're multitasking and dodging distractions. Our brains aren't tireless 3-pound machines; they're easily fatigued. When we slow down, stop the busywork, and take in beautiful natural surroundings, not only do we feel restored, but our mental performance improves too. In fact, his participants performed 50% better on creative problem-solving tasks after **3 days of wilderness backpacking.** The 3-day effect "cleans the mental windshield" that occurs when we've been immersed in nature long enough. Our senses recalibrate, smelling and hearing things we didn't before.

Motivated by large-scale public health problems such as obesity, depression, and pervasive nearsightedness, all clearly associated with time spent indoors, Strayer and other scientists are looking with renewed interest at how nature affects our brains and bodies. Building on advances in neuroscience and psychology, they've begun to quantify what once seemed divine and mysterious. These measurements—of everything from stress hormones to heart rate to brain waves to protein markers—indicate that when we spend time in green space, something profound happens.

But you don't have to visit a national park for 3 days to experience the effects of green. People living **within half a mile of green space** reported less mental distress, even after adjusting for income, education, and employment and a lower incidence of 15 diseases—including depression, anxiety, heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and migraine. And those living on blocks with more trees showed

a boost in heart and metabolic health equivalent to what one would experience from a \$20,000 gain in income.

It's difficult to tell why people feel better. Is it the fresh air? Do certain colors or fractal shapes trigger neurochemicals in our visual cortex? Or is it just that people in greener neighborhoods use the parks to exercise more? Less death and disease occurs in **people who lived near parks or other green space**—even if they didn't use them. Moreover, the lowest income people gained the most—in the city, being close to nature is a social leveler.

Even when subjects completed a stressful math task, their heart rate variability returned to normal more quickly when they sat through 15 minutes of nature scenes and birdsong in a **3-D virtual reality room** than when they sat in a plain room. A real-life experiment is under way at the Snake River Correctional Institution in eastern Oregon. Officers there report calmer behavior in solitary confinement prisoners who exercise for 40 minutes several days a week in a **"blue room" where nature videos played,** compared with those who exercise in a gym without videos.

Benioff Children's Hospital in Oakland, CA, has initiated a pilot project training pediatricians to write **prescriptions for young patients and their families to visit nearby parks.** So far, says Strayer, the results are consistent with his hypothesis although they don't offer a full explanation of the brain-on-nature experience. Something mysterious will always remain, and maybe that's as it should be. "At the end of the day," he says, "we come to nature not because the science says it does something to us, but because of how it makes us feel."

—from Florence Williams, *National Geographic*, January 2016



*"Did you ever feel like you're part of something greater than yourself?"*