

# Good Gnus

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Jonesboro, AR  
203 W. Oak Ave. P.O. Box 1414, Jonesboro, AR 72403

Karen Yanowitz, President  
Stafford, editor  
[kyanowitz@yahoo.com](mailto:kyanowitz@yahoo.com)  
[nestafford@sbcglobal.net](mailto:nestafford@sbcglobal.net)

[www.jonesborouu.org](http://www.jonesborouu.org)

Betty

[facebook.com/jonesborouu](https://facebook.com/jonesborouu)

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**“It is now May . . . It is the month wherein Nature hath her fill of mirth, and the senses are filled with delights.**

**I conclude, it is from the Heavens a grace, and to Earth a gladness.”**

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**Nicholas Breton, English poet, d. 1626**

## Worship Calendar

The Fellowship has suspended services at Temple Israel during the COVID-19 emergency and is currently **meeting virtually via Zoom**. If you would like to participate at our Sunday Service, 10 a.m., or at our Social Hour, Wednesdays, 5:30-6:30 pm, forward your name and email address to [anidias@me.com](mailto:anidias@me.com).

**May 3 Karen Yanowitz** will be speaking on a timely topic —CHAOS. What is chaos? Is it only a bad thing? Are we in a time of chaos now? And be prepared for an interesting discussion!

**May 10 Betty Stafford** will explain why mothers are exclaiming “I Just Can’t Do This!” She will explore the role of mothering in this difficult and scary time. What is the future for mothers in this country and in those far off where resources are more limited?

**May 17 Sarah Dyson** will review “The History of the Elf.” Where did elves originate? What is the history of this mythological character? Join us and find out.

**May 24 Michael Dougan** will speak on “The Sermon on the Stones,” a historical review tied to the current debate over offensive statues and environmental abuse from plastic flowers.

**May 31 Moe Finley**, one of our new Zoom friends, will discuss “Collecting and Helping Rescue Animals,” those who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned.

## The Origins of May Day

May Day probably emerges from the Roman festival *Floralia*, a celebration of fertility and nature around early May and dedicated to the goddess Flora. However, May Day also has roots in the Celtic festival Beltane, a day marking the start of summer and considered the best time for animals to be put out to pasture. Beltane was ceremonially marked by fire, symbolizing the death of winter and the birth of new life.

Much like *Floralia*, May Day was celebrated with flowers and other vegetation. On May Day, people would traditionally collect flowers, blossoms, and branches to decorate their homes, and literally ‘sing in the May’. Women and girls would rise early and wash their faces in the fresh May morning dew, believed to make them radiant, reduce blemishes, and attract their future spouse.

The most iconic expression of May Day celebrations is the May Pole, the center of merriment and dancing. Originally, this was a large tree in the forest decorated *in situ*, but later it was cut down and brought to the village (or community) and decorated with flowers, wreaths, handkerchiefs, and ribbons. The dance around it was an expression of the joy of new life.

The May Pole dance, discouraged during the 17<sup>th</sup> century after the execution of Charles I of England and the institution of a civilian government, became popular in Victorian society, which revived the tree’s adornment and dancing around the May Pole. Today, schools and villages still celebrate May Day, and it endures as a communal custom, an expression of togetherness, song, and dance.

Some places, in Devon, Cornwall, and Scotland, continue the ancient custom of Beltane. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, fires are still burnt to cleanse the old and to welcome summer and the hope of new life.

---from Helen Carr, Hidden Histories Podcast



## Acceptance and Compassion

An invisible virus without any cure; a death sentence for some and not for others. This is all too familiar to me, as a gay man who came out at the age of 20 in the early 1990s, prior to the advent of any treatment for HIV. It felt like the possibility of the disease dominated every aspect of my existence in those tender days.

Summoning the courage to share my truth with loved ones was invariably greeted with the reaction, “Please stay safe. We don’t want you to die.” The reminders were unnecessary. In the gay community—seized by the desire to survive—we were encouraged to assume that anyone we met could be asymptomatic, carrying the disease without knowing that they were HIV-positive.

Every exploratory human connection, every kiss, every expression of love resulted in an insistent anxiety—How safe had I been? Was it safe enough? The only 100% guarantee of safety was complete abstinence, which would require sacrificing intimacy altogether.

Fear can have its own exponential curve, as anxiety and reality collide. My first few months of being a “new gay” were greeted with the death of an older cousin, his family too scared to admit that he died of AIDS, and I too scared to tell him, in our final conversation, that I was also gay.

Echoes of the past fill my present. I scan the grocery store aisle. Is anyone sneezing or coughing, or otherwise looking unwell? Is the aisle too crowded? Maybe it’s safer to wait, or come back another day. Anxiety, both familiar and new, silently fills the air, distrust finely woven through it. A new disease, without any cure, is pushing us apart.

And, yet, we cannot escape one another. We need one another. Whether I acknowledge it or not, the guarantee of safety does not exist. We buy groceries; we touch products and surfaces that others have touched; we breathe the air that has touched the lungs of others.

At the store, an older woman asks my husband for help. She can’t read the small print on the label of a product she needs. He leans in and reads it out loud for her. Inches apart, inches too close, inches and feet embodying love and our shared sense of humanity.

May our abiding commitment to love be the thing we cannot escape.

---Rev. Manish Mishra-Marzetti, Senior Minister,  
First UU Congregation, Ann Arbor, MI



## **Our Interdependent Web**

I was supposed to travel to “Mars” this month. The plan was to stay 2 weeks at the Mars Desert Research Station—actually in the Utah desert—to simulate human operations on the red planet. Eight of us were to live in a 2-story cylinder, 24 feet in diameter. We would conserve water and put on mock space suits every time we ventured outside. But in an ironic twist the coronavirus and social distancing put on hold our simulation of isolation on Mars.

I research groups in space, isolated and confined places, and I’m especially interested in the way gender contributes to individuals’ influence within a group and how men and women manage their emotions in isolation and confinement.

I will not go to “Mars” this spring. I am self-isolating at home and wonder about the lessons for future space travel the current situation can provide. Astronauts have shared tips on how to survive long periods of loneliness and isolation. Maybe in return the experiences of millions living under lockdown can offer insights into previously understudied social effects of isolation and aid future space travel.

Most group behavior research in space and space-analog environments focuses on leadership, cohesion, and conflict, factors that affect team performance and their ability to complete tasks. But, by focusing on the professional level, researchers overlook other potential relationships between crew members—family ties or intimacy. Interpersonal relationships can certainly change dynamics of group behavior.

Researchers suggest that couples are better equipped to handle isolation because of mutual social support. Current isolation also give researchers an opportunity to pay more attention to gender inequalities accentuated by the pandemic. Women in general do more unpaid domestic and care labor, as well as more emotional labor—taking care

of others' feelings and well-being in addition to their own.

Men and women have the same goal—to survive the pandemic, but they experience the quarantine differently. In most middle-class families, the traditional work-home divide is now gone, as both partners work from home. But women are still likely to spend more time running the household, including child and elderly care.

Space-analog research shows similar trends of women taking care of other crew members. The widespread lockdown could allow researchers to get more data on how social norms and expectations about each gender—e.g., who is supposed to offer more emotional support—influence behavior in mixed-gender groups in highly uncertain and stressful situations.

In the past weeks, social lives have moved online. The current situation can help settle the debate whether online communication can replace real-life conversation. What forms of digital communications are closest to meeting a friend for a real cup of coffee? How often should astronauts host a digital happy hour en route to Mars?

Maybe this experience will also provide lessons on how to plan for future cities and social life on another planet.

---Inga Popovaite, Ph.D. Candidate in Sociology,  
University of Iowa, Earth & Sky, 4/23/20