

September Theme:
UNITY
~ Homecoming Sunday! ~
Sunday, September 11, 2011, 11:00 a.m.
First Unitarian Church of San José

Ritual of Remembrance, Grief, and Hope
on the 10th Anniversary of September 11, 2001

Rev. Geoff Rimositis & Rev. Nancy Palmer Jones

Rev. Nancy:

We travel this morning through all the emotions of this day. Gathered here, we create a space, a community of love, where we can grieve and remember the events of September 11, 2001 ... where we can mourn the losses of that day and of all the days of war since ... and where we can discover again the sources of our hope and courage.

We must grieve, remember, and mourn.¹ We grieve the lives lost, the friends and family members who did not come home, in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania, in Kabul and Baghdad and villages beyond naming. We mourn the loss of all that beauty and wisdom and companionship. We ache with all those who bear the pain of these days in their bodies, their health, their heart, their spirit. We confess the splintering of communities with our alienation and distrust. We confess the scarring of the earth with our violence. In this moment of silence, we hold these griefs, feeling the strength of each other's presence....

Rev. Geoff:

The Rev. Peter Morales, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, invites us with these words:

“Let us ... remember that the events of September 11, 2001, failed to destroy us. They did not diminish our compassion for others, did not take from us our ability to love, to heal, or to gather together as a loving faith community. And in the aftermath of that tragic day, we have been given the opportunity to demonstrate our deepest religious values.

“True strength lies not in our ability to destroy our enemies, but in the sometimes difficult choice to turn away from violence and hatred. I believe that every day we choose to stand on the side of love is a day of victory. Instead of hatred, let kindness direct our actions. Instead of vengeance, let

¹ Adapted from Interfaith Roundtable of Washtenaw County, “Litany of Grief and Hope,” for September 11th Tenth Anniversary.

compassion be our show of strength. Indeed, they are our only hope for the future.”

Rev. Nancy:

We light four candles, for the four crashes ten years ago, and for the lives lost on that day and on all the days of war since.

Rev. Geoff:

We light these candles in remembrance. We light these candles to spark our hope. And we make our commitments today to a future of peace and wholeness. Please join with me in the *Litany of Hope*² that is in your order of service.

LEADER: We accept the wisdom that comes even in the midst of war.

All: We hope, we commit, we serve.

LEADER: We commit to replant, renew, and respect the earth.

All: We hope, we commit, we serve.

LEADER: We commit to getting to know each other in order to build true community.

All: We hope, we commit, we serve.

LEADER: We commit to creating a future where love and caring hold space for grief to heal.

All: We hope, we commit, we serve.

LEADER: We commit to paths of healing for ourselves and others.

All: We hope, we commit, we serve.

LEADER: We commit to seeking out the gifts and talents of others and building relationships for a strong future.

All: We hope, we commit, we serve.

LEADER: I open my heart to trust and to receive the goodness of this day.

All: I hope, I commit, I serve.

REFLECTIONS

I. Community

Bill Bowman, Worship Associate

Homecoming has always been a very special occasion for me. I came here on September 11th, 1994 for the first time. But I didn't really dive into participating in church until I experienced a major loss/transition in my life in 2004. That's when

²Interfaith Roundtable of Washtenaw County, “Litany of Grief and Hope,” for September 11th Tenth Anniversary.

the congregation took on a new meaning for me. A lot of it was my daughter Emma—at first I was teaching Sunday school to support her, but later I also wanted her to see what this congregation means to me and how important it is to be involved in this community. I often bring her along when we are short on Worship Hosts, and she is, without a doubt, a short Worship Host.

By deepening my involvement in the broader community, I've come to see that the church is not just about the service—it's about greeting people as they enter the sanctuary, it's about helping the children as they grow older, it's about cookouts and junior high First Friday Fun Nights, where the sprinklers go on at the park right when we're playing a board game. Community is more than these walls and this ceiling. It's about sharing experiences together. Community comes from the Latin word *Communitas*, meaning common, general, shared by all. What we share in this congregation is more than worship and common beliefs, but common experiences. As someone who has struggled to find a sense of community and acceptance for most of my life, this is certainly what I have found here.

II. Youth

Kassandra Omvik, senior youth

Budapest, Kóloszvár, and finally a few long bus rides later, Homoródszentmárton. We, as youth, learned more and more about each other everywhere we went; we experienced a whole new culture together, we were uprooted from our daily routines and our casual chats during youth group or on our Sunday lunchtime adventures. Sunday meetings only go so far to help you really get to know a person. Two full weeks with an intimate group of 18 youth is much different. You end up learning all these crazy facts about them; they become your family. I learned that Emma likes to belly dance while brushing her teeth, and Cece can perfectly rap “Baby” by Justin Bieber.

We faced personal challenges together, but mostly we laughed together. We worked in the village for two days, improving the labyrinth and carrying old tiles out of an attic. A small group of our youth spent their two service days working on digging up old and mostly buried gravestones. On the second day Sarina tripped over what looked like a small rock, but after uncovering it, it turned out to be a large gravestone from 1850! 1850 sounds really old when you compare it to American history, but it's still fairly recent for Europe. I think we ended up digging up 8 or 9 gravestones in two half days of work. Our enthusiasm sped up the process, and we were all giddy with excitement.

One night we had the opportunity to see the cows coming home, a daily occurrence for the villagers but not for San José. The cows reminded me of young children coming home from school. They just walked right into house where they

belong and the rest of the crowd kept walking. They stuck together, like best friends do.

We created a game called Hug or Affirmation, an adaptation of Truth or Dare; it was a game that could go on forever because it's so simple! Either you give someone a hug or tell them how wonderful they are.

These are just a few examples of youth bonding in our pilgrimage to Transylvania last month. We all adventured in a different world ... together.

III. Transformation

Rev. Geoff Rimositis

We mourn and remember the loss of life ten years ago today. A decade is a short time for a nation to work through its grief. It will take a long longer for that sorrow to be fully transformed into equanimity and peace.

We take inspiration from the selfless heroism of Rick Rescorla, who escorted 2700 Morgan Stanley employees out of the south tower before dying in the World Trade Center attack.

We take inspiration from the first responders in New York City, firemen, police, public officials—the women and men of the Pentagon who helped the trapped and the injured, and the neighbors in New York who broke through their normal reticence and reached out to each other with caring and support even though it felt like the world was coming to an end.

Who knows what we would do in such a crisis. We hope we would rise to the challenge and do what needed to be done for each other. And though we might not have it within us to confront terrorists, each of us has the capacity to act with compassion.

We can be agents of transformation in bold and loving ways. And it starts with loving ourselves, and then taking that love out into the world, knowing that there is a great hunger for it.

We can make a difference in both small and large ways when we live with compassion and mindfulness. When we think of others, as we think of ourselves, we can indeed change the world.

IV. Transcendence

Rev. Nancy Palmer Jones

“Look for the clusters of snorkelers,” my friend Wendy calls to me, as she splashes into the waters of the Caribbean. “That’s where you’ll find them.” And she’s off.

I wade into the waters, feeling the coolness climb up over the heat of that March day in Mexico. I swim out toward a cluster of air pipes, where other snorkelers float. It’s only the second time I’ve ever been snorkeling. I sometimes forget, turn my head too far, get a mouthful of ocean, and have to come up sputtering. But this time, when I dip my face back into the water, he suddenly

floats below me: a giant sea *turtle*. [prompt for “I hear it, Rev. Nancy!”] Two feet, three feet in diameter. Gray-green, beige and brown. Feeding on the sandy bottom. Aware of me but profoundly peaceful. *At home here*. I am flooded with awe and gratitude, on the receiving end of a radical hospitality. Just by showing up, he offers me our kinship.

In a clearing in the forest of central Africa, *elephants* gather. [prompt for “I hear it, Rev. Nancy!”] Suddenly two come charging across the wide expanse to greet each other with trumpets of joy, twining their trunks together, flapping their ears like flying saucers, ecstatic to see each other “as if they’d been apart for years,” says biologist Katy Payne, even though it was “actually only since 10:00 in the morning.”³ The scene reminds me, a little, of how we come together across the clearing of our labyrinth. It reminds me of Homecoming.

So many portals from the ordinariness of our days into the places of awe and gratitude, of kinship across difference. Into transcendence. Let us discover them and walk through them together.

³ Katy Payne, interview with Krista Tippett, “Whale Songs and Elephant Loves,” *On Being*, podcast available at onbeing.org.