



Greetings to you all in the month which sees Summer begin! It happens at dawn on June 21st, and although I'm not usually an early morning person, I'm going to try to see the sunrise on the Solstice Let's hope the weather is as lovely for us all as our Maritime Spring has been so far.

No need for me to find material for the newsletter this month – there's plenty from your excellent contributions.

Maureen Killoran writes:

I'll be leaving Vero Beach, Florida, after two years as their interim minister. They have called their new minister and in August I will be moving to Bethesda, Maryland, to take up the role of Interim Senior Minister the 650 member River Road UU Congregation.

Maureen mmk@spiritquest.ws

Kath McIntyre writes:

Hi There,

I have returned from the CUC Annual meeting quite happy with the quality of the program and the efforts of the new CUC Executive Director Jennifer Dickson and the Board. The next AGM will be in Toronto on the May 24 weekend, 2011. You might plan to be there with family . I am hoping they will run an intergenerational conference with child care and program. I went to the service called Bridging where the Youth were welcomed into the Young Adult Community. This is a good thing.

There is a new program which was initiated by the Ministers. It is called Northern Lights. I signed up to donate \$50 twice a year to a fund which will give money to a church in Canada with a growth project. It might be to hire a minister , buy hymn books , whatever. If 20% of a congregation signs up then they become eligible for the fund. One congregation is supported at a time. Individuals can donate the amount they wish. Some of you may remember the Chalice Lighter program run by the UUA Districts. This is inspired by that program.

The keynote lecture was delivered by Paul Bramadat. He is now the Director of *Studies In Religion and Society* at the University of Victoria. He was a member here, a Lay Chaplain and member of a search committee . He and his wife, Karen, were married in the Hamilton Unitarian Church. Their son Max was with his parents and as you might imagine is delightful. Karen is still delicious and has just started her private practice in psychiatry.

Because I was a delegate I spent my time in the business meeting. I missed being in workshops which appeared to be enjoyed. They were varied and offered cerebral as well as experiential activities..... from *World Hunger* to *Dance!* The experience of being with congregants from across the country has been a huge plus.

There used to be a tentative acknowledgment that we practice our faith, that we act out of religious impulse. Our responsibility to do exactly that was highlighted at this meeting . The Theme was "How Shall We Live". It worked well. Talks and workshops were more than distractions. There was depth. My time was well spent.

Kathryn kathmcintyre@sympatico.ca

Stacey Vickery writes:

(first, the note which was accidentally omitted last time, just for the record as I hope you all received it as a separate message)

Hey everyone,

Life here has been upside down! We have a new family member - a one year old dog - named Molly. She has been keeping me hopping. The good part is the amount of exercise I have been getting with her. I lost three pounds in two weeks (I've been attending a weight-loss support group since October).

Next month we will be travelling to Ontario - my first trip back home and my first trip alone with the children also my first air plane ride (I'm a little stressed). I am planning like crazy so that when I am there I can see as many people as possible...

I am singing at an annual choral festival called High C's in Digby in May, so far they have 120 participants signed up. I will be gone for a whole week-end (the first time to leave the children for this long) and staying in an amazing hotel with a friend. I can't wait to participate in the workshops and sing with other people again, I miss having a group to sing with.

I am planning my first garden. We have built a large 20' x 3' raised bed for vegetables. I have an existing six' x five' bed right at the door for herbs and flowers. So I am certainly going to grow "something". Hopefully I can learn and succeed at the same time...

As per usual - I have too much on the go and while I am enjoying everything I need to slooow down.

Stacey Anne

(and this month's update)

I had a wonderful time singing with High C's - the weekend was fabulous. I learned so much, and I sang with the soprano section for the first time. I also had my first weekend away from the children (it was so peaceful!).

David and I are starting to sell our wares at the Annapolis Royal Farmers Market. I have been making soap and David has some beautiful photographic artwork. Sales are slow but we have had a few... I hope to expand our product line, but time is slipping past so quickly.

The garden is also a slow start here - I feel like I am constantly learning something new. I will have some tomatos, broccoli, spinach, beans, peas, pumpkins and lettuce (I hope). Wish me luck I have never tried so many things at once before. I also have some herbs and flowers, but Molly (our dog) has pulled some of these things up on me.

Next month I will be in Ontario at check-in time (I will try to send something from there but...).

Peace, Stacey Anne greenwillowwyth@yahoo.com

Elisabeth Michnick writes:

Over the Victoria Day week-end I was able to travel to Victoria to attend the CUC annual conference. I was talked into being a delegate and was reluctant at the thought of missing some of the fun workshops I would miss but found the business meetings quite rewarding. I'm delighted that we managed to pass the resolution asking us to support a bill now proposed in parliament to institute more affordable housing and to studying the feasibility of our denomination concentrating on this issue.

I was happy to run into Janet Vickers on campus. Despite my best attempts to plan wisely it turned out that the residence I was in part of the time was a long way from the buildings where meetings were held and the campus is quite hilly which adds to its charm and beauty but makes it hard on an octogenarian. Between that and the long air travel my legs are not in great shape now but hope they will recover.

Next Sunday I will be giving a reflection at church on a trip I took in 2007 to Transylvania, Hungary and Prague to visit the geographical source of our religion (Toronto 1st's partner church in Budapest) and attend the flower Sunday service at the church of the author of the service, Norbert Capek. This year we are celebrating Partner Church Sunday and the Flower Communion at the same service. Well I think this is enough from me for now.

Greetings to all,

Elisabeth bert.michnick@sympatico.ca

Janet Vickers writes:

I attended the ACM in Victoria this year and was very moved by meeting new and old friends, by the beautiful Sunday Service and the inspiring lecture by Dr. Paul Bramadat.

The fourth poetry chapbook Even This Grey Dawn was launched on the Saturday and we had fifteen people attending. The books now are just about sold out - perhaps a couple of copies will still be available at the Toronto office. The book's title poem is included below, with the author's permission.

I was introduced to people who belong to the Nanaimo Fellowship and hope to get to the service soon. I was delighted to sit next to Elizabeth Michnick, whom I hadn't seen in many years, at one of the dinners.

It is raining a lot here lately and very cool for the end of May - our flowers are wilting under the pressure.

Best,

Janet Vickers janetvickers@shaw.ca

Even This Grey Dawn

Louise McDiarmid

Even this grey winter dawn has its kindnesses:
escape from coiling snakes of worry and regret,
yapping dogs of unaccomplished tasks,
and half-awake dreams of gravel roads
that never lead to home.

Even this grey dawn, no more than a faint promise
that seeps into the horizon, can exorcize the dark.
Fir trees that were black all night
reclaim their green. Starving chickadees
awake and sing—sing—
knowing spring will come.

If the sun never fails to rise, and chickadees
can sing in the ash-grey light,
how could I forget
that night comes to an end?
As does the day.

Noreen Smith writes:

Hello Friends

Finally enjoying some beautiful spring weather! We had a terrible snow storm here in Fort St. John, over the long weekend. My greenhouse and a deck gazebo couldn't take the load and both caved in. I lost my tomatoes, cucumbers etc, which was very disheartening. It makes it hard to keep living up north!

For my Literacy Bus job, I have been asked to complete my Early Childhood Education Certificate, so I am now taking online College courses for this. I am currently in intersession which means instead of the usual 16 weeks for each course I have only 8 - this will be the same for those I registered for in the summer. I hope to complete over the next 2 years.

I have had company from Calgary and Pincher Creek AB visiting for the last 3 weeks which has taken away a bit more of my time, but it is nice for family to make the long drive up here. Hoping to take them to Tumbler Ridge (2 hour drive) to see the falls this weekend. Have a look at the Tumbler Ridge website visitors guide.

<http://www.tumblerridge.ca/> (click discover Tumbler then scroll down to visitors guide PDF)

I think for those of you down East you may be very surprised to know that the Kuneso falls vertical drop is higher than those of Niagra! It is also known for its unique dinosaur fossils, and the Emperors Challenge mountain foot race. Have I convinced anyone to come yet?!

I couldnt find any specifically UU jokes but this one is kind of cute:

The minister was wired for sound with a lapel mike, and as he preached, he moved briskly about the platform, jerking the mike cord as he went.

Then he moved to one side, getting wound up in the cord and nearly tripping before jerking it again. After several circles and jerks, a little girl in the third pew leaned toward her mother and whispered, "If he gets loose, will he hurt us?"

Noreen Smith, Fort St. John, BC

smithfsj@gmail.com

Bunty Albert writes:

I've never "checked in" before as an independent, since I belong to the Unitarian Fellowship of PEI (UFPEI). I was an independent CUC member for one year about 5 years ago when UFPEI took a one year sabbatical.

Last Sunday I ended ~ 16 years service as an officer of UFPEI, as vice-president, president and most recently secretary for the past ten (?) years. Dropping out of our fellowship completely has also crossed my mind; it no longer gives me the spiritual satisfaction or sense of community which I originally found there. In May I (also) completed a 3.5 year term on the Board of a Historic Homestead on PEI that was very hands-on and extremely time consuming. Dropping both these activities has lifted a great weight from my shoulders. I know that I have a gift for organization, thoroughness and dedication that I could be contributing to my community but before I commit to being a volunteer again, I need to find a cause or activity about which I am passionate. In the meantime, I hope that concentrating on creative activities for a while will bring me more spiritual fulfilment and some sense of my priorities.

My favourite creative activities are:

- 1) photography: the attached photo taken in Peru was entered in the PEI Photo Club Show this year, and I love trying to capture Charlotte for posterity (other photo)
- 2) gardening: an expanding vegetable garden but mostly perennials and shrubs;
- 3) motorcycling (I drive a BMW F650 GS) and travel, but not necessarily on the bike;
- 4) reading, sketching and painting, choral singing, and cooking

I have been retired from the Federal Government (Veterans Affairs) for two years, and live with my partner, Frank, in Vernon Bridge PEI. My daughter Danielle, who is a dentist, lives in Fredericton and she has a 2 year old daughter Charlotte, and a son due in July. My son Michael is temporarily living in Pennsylvania near his in-laws and his daughter is also due in July. My son is between foreign jobs in the field of international community health; he just spent 18 months with The Mentor Initiative <http://www.thementorinitiative.org/> and two months establishing Mentor's presence in Haiti. I am very proud of both my kids and enjoy my granddaughter Charlotte more than I ever dreamed possible. And now two more to love!

Bunty Albert

bunty1948@gmail.com



Lloyd Ryan writes:

A number of people who have joined this group have said, in one way or another, that they don't know much about who Unitarians are or what they believe. I thought that this little item might help shed a little light on "the manner" in which we might believe.

Best wishes! Lloyd Ryan execontrol@gmail.com

The Five Smooth Stones of Liberal Religion By R. Lloyd Ryan, DA., PhD.

(Scriptural reference: 1 Samuel 17)

Many of us know the story of David and Goliath from the Hebrew scriptures. It encapsulates, at core, the theme of most action movies: we have a lad, David, ridiculed by his family, dismissed by the person in control (in this case, King Saul), who manages to convince the king to let him have a try. Everybody else is afraid of the giant, Goliath; nobody can possibly stand up to this arrogant beast whose sword a lesser man can hardly lift.

But David didn't plan to use the normal methodologies. He thought, to use today's cliché term, "outside the box." David well knew that, man-to-man with swords, he couldn't possibly defeat Goliath; David wouldn't even be able to get within reach of the towering behemoth. He was only a lad; Goliath was not only huge, he was a seasoned warrior. Before he could get close to Goliath, David would have already been chopped into vulture feed.

David had no intention of getting within reach of the colossus. David was unconventional; he decided to use his sling. We can imagine that David had spent countless days and thousands of stones practicing with his sling when he was supposed to be looking after his father Jesse's sheep. David had become a crack-shot, and the boy knew it. As he related to King Saul, David had already singly handedly killed a lion and a bear that had come after his sheep.

David used a boy's toy to do a man's job, when the men were quaking with fear and quailing when faced with the enormity of the task of trying to defeat the Philistines. He went and selected "*five smooth stones*", the old story tells us. He used the only resource that he had at his disposal - simple stones from the river bed - to do a job that King Saul and his whole army could not do. The story says that David selected one of his stones, ran towards the Philistine army, wound up his sling and let fly. The stone sank into Goliath's forehead, exactly where David aimed it. The Philistine army was so afraid of what one boy could do that they ran away, as bullies so often do when faced with someone like David.

We all have our Goliaths - personal problems or situations or circumstances that we are at a loss to know what to do about or to solve - or so we think. Frequently, however, our problems are unsolvable because we don't trust our own wisdom to seek solutions, we don't have the confidence in our personal intellectual and other resources to address the problem creatively and, maybe, "head on".

Unitarians, as a group, also have their Goliaths. From the very beginning of the religious movement that came to be called Unitarian, the fore-runner of today's Unitarianism, people who have associated with the Unitarians or have been sympathetic to the cause, have been ridiculed, discriminated against, had their property confiscated, banished, and even put to death. Even today, there is no shortage of diatribe directed against Unitarians, though today the weaponry tends to be verbal. For example, Unitarians are sometimes called a Cult. Now, can you imagine any organization less cultish than Unitarians? Here, nobody suggests what you should believe, only that you should believe responsibly. It's a faith tradition where you can come and go with no questions asked; and where proselytizing is discouraged.

Because of the controversy surrounding Unitarianism and liberal religion in general, one of the best known Unitarian theologians, James Luther Adams, was inspired by the Bible story of David and his five smooth stones to try to articulate the basic principles of liberal religion, of which the Unitarian way is a fine example. Adams felt that it was necessary to have a succinct articulation of the basic principles of the Unitarian tradition because we, as Unitarians, have no creed or dogma that we can point to as other denominations have, and because he wanted us to have a ready understanding of our own Unitarian ideas.

Inspired by James Luther Adams, I am going to outline my own understanding of five basic principles – or, to use his term – the five smooth stones of liberal religion.

The First Smooth Stone: **Revelation is continuous.**

Unitarians have rejected the theological and dogmatic notion that God's revelation to humankind was closed when the last of the so-called Christian apostles died – that would be, I guess, old Skipper Paul himself, the founder of the Christian church.

Unitarians generally believe that revelation can be found just about anywhere and that we are all capable of receiving illumination or revelation -- that it is only a matter of listening and looking. We might find revelation on a pop can: "*I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony*". I'm sure Coca-Cola didn't have Unitarians in mind when they came up with their song, but what sentiment could be more Unitarian?! Revelation can be found in something we read, hear or see, or in gene sequences or chemical formulae. Sometimes, it can come as a shock; sometimes the revelation dawns on us slowly. But the important point is that once awakened to the new revelation, there is no going back. **Once your consciousness has been raised, it cannot be lowered.** Revelation is continuous and all around us.

Moreover, we all have the gift of prophecy. There are prophets all around us – it is simply a matter of listening to them – they range from the Dalai Lama to David Suzuki to each one of us. Unitarians believe in the prophethood and priesthood of believers – a principle that is being exercised by Unitarians on a daily basis. We believe we are all priests and prophets - or at least have the potential to be so, and we are being called upon to be so.

The Second Smooth Stone: **Relationships ought to rest on mutual and free consent.**

We practice this principle when we invite somebody to worship with us but would never consider arm-twisting. If people come to be part of our community, either as a casual visitor, or as a full-time committed member, it has to be of their absolute free will. We invite participation; we invite consent. We might offer the opportunity to explore the concept of Heaven, for example, but never by threatening someone with Hell. Moreover, in our personal relationships within our community, we treat each other with the utmost respect and honour each person's integrity.

As Unitarians, we not only tolerate multiple religious and even conflicting viewpoints within our fellowship; we promote and welcome them. Quite frankly, since the time that I chose to refer to myself as Unitarian, I have heard or read statements by other people who call themselves Unitarian in which they articulate religious and spiritual sentiments and ideas or concepts that I have never heard before. I haven't got a clue what some of them/you are talking about. Obviously I have lived a very sheltered life. At these times, I have tried to respond in the manner in which we are called upon as Unitarians to respond: that is with acceptance, without rejection, with respect. In other words, to use the sentiment of an early Unitarian thinker, "*We don't have to think alike in order to love alike.*"

We won't ask you what you believe; we won't tell you what to believe; but we will walk by your side and support you in your own search for meaning and personal truth. We will accompany you on your spiritual journey and we honour you and your decisions, asking only that you accept responsibility for the beliefs that you have freely chosen.

The Third Smooth Stone: **We need to work together for a just and loving community.**

We have to acknowledge ownership of our civic community as well as our religious one. Our obligations extend well beyond paying our taxes and voting. Some religions believe that justice comes only from God; we believe that we must be active participants. Shia Moslems, for example, await the return of the just Imam who will bring Justice for the whole world in his wake. Christians are waiting for Jesus to return for their judgment and universal and eternal justice. For the Jews, the Messiah is also yet to come, a preoccupation of the Jews from the time that the Book of Job was formulated. Likewise, in Buddhism, human action leads to rebirth and eventually, also, a universal justice.

Unitarians can't wait! We yearn for a just society now. **We want to create the beloved community founded on fairness and justice.**

The Fourth Smooth Stone: **We have a commitment to express our faith in society.**

In other words, we don't hide our light under a basket. Many Unitarians are activists in a variety of ways. For example, take the effort that individual members have devoted to the cause of refugees, or our determination to express ourselves as a loving and welcoming community. We are called on to determine what strengths we have individually and as a group, and to determine who most needs what we have to give – which is a way of saying that we are called to live our faith publicly.

Despite the skepticism that we may find around us, we believe that we have to be in the thick of things, to the limit that our physical and material resources allow, and build and rebuild our larger community. We are called on to make ourselves heard about poverty, about the need for housing and health care, and to have respect for the environment and to be good stewards of the earth. Unitarians would likely say that a purely private religion is purely irrelevant.

The Fifth Smooth Stone: **Live in Hope.**

It is easy to despair. It is easy to lose heart and become dejected and depressed. We are called to live with hope and with courage, despite the potholes and the bumps in the road. I would suggest that most of us have hit some rather major ditches in our lives. But we are still here; we are still on the road. We cannot despair! Adversity happens! And, when adversity does happen, go to the river, **look for the smooth stones of your wisdom and of your faith.**

We all have our Goliaths – fear of public speaking, fear of being seen speaking to gays, fear of looking foolish, fear of being embarrassed and fear leads to impotence. Maybe our Goliath is of total involvement with the self. We are just so absolutely satisfied with the way things are we dare anybody to attempt to burst my bubble! Maybe we just want to be left alone, hidden away in our own little corner, and maybe in a tiny little corner of our minds. Don't challenge me; don't dare me to step out or to speak out. Our Goliath is one of self-absorption.

Maybe our Goliath is that we want to keep our religion private; we don't want people to know that we slip away to our clandestine meetings with other people with a similar philosophy. Maybe our fear is pessimism, belief that we can't face another disappointment in our lives. Maybe our Goliath is the belief that we are unimportant; that we don't matter; that we aren't loved; that we are powerless to effect change.

But we all have wisdom, we all have nuggets – smooth stones of awareness and potentialities – points of light that we may be hiding away. Even more seriously, we may be hiding our light not only from others, but also from ourselves. Let's acknowledge our points of light, our smooth stones of wisdom. We can seize them to help us break through the largely self-defined and self-imposed barriers that are holding us back. In other words, let's get ready to break through the barriers that are holding us back – gird ourselves to run towards the Philistines, the enemy, and develop the necessary tools and weaponry to slay our personal Goliaths, whatever happen to be our personal sling and stones.

I have talked about the stones of wisdom, vision, faith, love, hope. Now let's go to the brook, to the wellspring of our personal wisdom and seize and draw out the smooth stones we need to fight our goliaths. I am not advocating violence. The smooth stones of wisdom which are so often needed are those of peacemaking. Whatever our needs, may we find the effective stones, and by doing so may we find the personal meaning and truth and peace we seek.

(Editor's note: those of you who have asked about resources for home worship may find the closing words of Lloyd's essay particularly helpful.)

I am now suggesting that you select five smooth stones, from your garden or from a store. Put these stones someplace where you will see them occasionally – around your favourite plant, in a dish on your coffee table. I am suggesting that you might name them, that you might take one with you, maybe a different one each day, in your pocket or purse, as a reminder to you that you have your wisdom, as a challenge to you to acknowledge your wisdom, your points of light, and that you can use your own smooth stones to slay your giants.

And may the source and spirit of Light, the fount and spirit of Life, and the wellspring and spirit of Love give us the courage to acknowledge our smooth stones of wisdom and to use them intelligently, faithfully, and confidently to slay our Goliaths.

Anne Treadwell wrote:

It's wonderful to have so much good material for the newsletter. I'll end this issue with a few photos (taken by my spouse) of the wildflowers blooming abundantly in the woodland areas of our place – these, and the more “gardened” areas have given me great joy this month, as they do most months.



blue bead lily



starflower



wild lily of the valley



bunchberry



ferns at play



Canada anemone



serviceberry



chokeberry

Warmly, and with thanks to you all,

treadwell@ns.sympatico.ca