

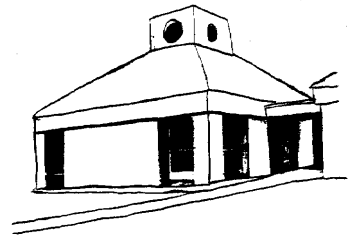
# The Flaming Chalice

## Unitarian Universalist Church of Valdosta

Located at: 1951 East Park Avenue  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 2342  
Valdosta, GA 31604

Minister: Rev. Fred Howard  
<http://uuvaldosta.net>

229-242-3714 e-mail: [uuvaldosta@yahoo.com](mailto:uuvaldosta@yahoo.com)



Please note that although individual personal contact information has been removed from this online newsletter, you can obtain more information on any event or ask questions by sending an e-mail to [uuvaldosta@yahoo.com](mailto:uuvaldosta@yahoo.com).

### What's going on... **September 2013**

Sun	Sept. 1	10:45 AM	Religious Education for children Service – “Spirituality as Practice,” Dr. Michael Stoltzfus Meet & Greet Coffee after the service
Th	Sept. 5	6:00 PM	Board Meeting in the RE wing at the church
Sun	Sept. 8	10:45 AM	Religious Education for children Service – “Sacred Waters,” Rev. Fred Howard <i>Bring a water sample to this Ingathering and Water Communion Service</i> Meet & Greet Coffee after the service
M	Sept. 9	11:00AM	Break Bread delivery
F	Sept. 13	6:30 PM	Pizza and a Movie at the church
Sat	Sept. 14	11 AM	UU Music Retreat! and light lunch at the church
Sun	Sept. 15	10:45 AM	Religious Education for children Service – “The Holy and the Broken,” Rev. Fred Howard Meet & Greet Coffee after the service <i>Share the Plate Sunday</i> Adult Religious Education after Meet and Greet <b><i>Deadline for the October Newsletter</i></b>
F	Sept 20	6:30 PM	Potluck and Book Discussion at the church
Sat	Sept. 21	12-7 PM	South Georgia Pride Festival at John Saunders Park
Sun	Sept. 22	10:45 AM  2 PM	Religious Education for children Service - “Karma, Justice From God Or The Law of Cause And Effect,” Doug Tanner Meet & Greet light potluck lunch after the service <i>After service conversations about Immigration as a Moral Issue.</i> Interfaith Pride Service at the church
F	Sept. 27	6:30 PM	Games Night at the church
Sun	Sept. 29	10:45 AM	Religious Education for children Service – <i>No information available</i> Meet & Greet Coffee after the service
M	Sept. 30	11:00AM	Break Bread delivery

**September** ... Lots going on! Welcome back Rev. Fred Howard! Come when you can; we miss you when you are away!

## Sunday Services

### Sunday, September 1 – Dr. Michael Stoltzfus, “Spirituality as Practice”

There is hardly any form of spiritual practice, contemporary or ancient, this tradition or that tradition, that does not emphasize the importance of discipline expressed in the repetitive performance of meditation, prayer, physical postures, activities of service, chanting, study, and the like. Spirituality without practice is like someone blowing you a kiss which, however endearing, is not overly satisfying. How might spiritual practice be distinct from other forms of practice and why is there so much interest in a host of diverse spiritual practices today? Dr. Stoltzfus is a professor in the VSU Department of Philosophy and Religion. He is a regular speaker at our services.

### Sunday, September 8 – Rev. Fred Howard “Sacred Waters” Ingathering and Water Communion Service

Today we will celebrate our annual ritual of water communion. For those who wish to participate, please bring a small jar or vial of water from some significant place on your summer journey, such as a lake, river, or ocean. If you forgot to collect one, fake it with some tap water. Just come prepared to briefly share the significance of place the source of the water had for you or perhaps a brief story connected to your experiences of the summer. There will also be a short homily based on the theme of “Sacred Waters.” Come welcome our minister Fred Howard back at this service after his being away for the summer months.

### Sunday, September 15 – Rev. Fred Howard, “The Holy and the Broken”

Feelings of regret and remorse are part and parcel of the human condition. Yom Kippur is a communal recognition of this existential truth by our Jewish brothers and sisters. For Jewish communities it is their holiest day of the year. Yom Kippur literally means the Day of Atonement. For 24 hours, through fasting, confession, liturgies of forgiveness, and intensive prayers of repentance, the community deals with feelings of guilt and remorse and gives its members a route to wholeness, atonement, or “at-one-ment.” Getting past regret and remorse to a place of joy was also one of the great messages of the song, “Hallelujah,” composed, interestingly enough, by Leonard Cohen, a practicing Jew. This morning we will look at the role of contrition and confession in the process of spiritual atonement using the lens of this song.

*Share the Plate Sunday Offering: Donations to the plate this Sunday, not otherwise designated as pledges, will go to the Valdosta Area Rotary Club Imagination Library Project. The project provides Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library books each month to children under the age of five in Lowndes County. Starting with “The Little Engine That Could,” an age-appropriate book is mailed directly to each registered child each month, until the child’s fifth birthday. There is no cost to the child’s family. Early reading is important to all parts of the community because it leads to a lifetime of opportunity.*

*Children who learn to read early in life become avid learners in school, skillful workers on the job, and informed citizens in life. Since starting in 2009, the Lowndes Imagination Library Team has raised over \$40,000 and served over 400 children in Lowndes County. A contribution of \$24 provides a child a book a month for a year; \$120 provides a child a book a month for five years. The program is administered in Lowndes County by the Valdosta Rotary Foundation.*

Adult Religious Education Session today following Meet and Greet. (See Fred Howard’s column for more information and watch for announcements.)

### Sunday, September 22 – Doug Tanner, “Karma, Justice From God Or The Law Of Cause And Effect”

In traditional eastern religious belief, Karma controls the cycle of death and rebirth. While Hindus, Buddhist and Jains share the belief that Karma is the result of actions or deeds and that these have consequences in the present and in future lives, they differ in their views of the underlying mechanism and effects. Join us for a discussion of the eastern Karmic traditions and how some appear similar and others differ from traditional western judgment beliefs. Doug Tanner, VSU Director of Financial Aid, is a member of our congregation and Vice President of our Board.

Today’s Meet & Greet will be a light lunch (*watch for details*) followed by a continuation of the conversation begun last month on **Immigration as a Moral Issue**.

**2:00 PM - Interfaith Pride Service at the church**

**Sunday, September 29 – No information about this service was available when the newsletter went to press.**

## Religious Education

**For Children:** The RE program for children under 15 years of age meets at 10:45 AM concurrent with the Sunday morning service. Older young people will remain with the adult service. Two adults are needed each Sunday to help with RE. Sign up on the weekly e-mail volunteer list or let Sue Bailey know if you can help on a given Sunday.

### Adult Religious Education and Immigration as a Moral Issue Discussions:

- This fall Fred Howard, on the Sundays, he speaks will lead Adult RE sessions after the Sunday service. See his column for more information.
- On the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday this month and next, after a light lunch at Meet and Greet, we will discuss issues related to immigration. See Carol Stiles column for more information.



## MINISTERIAL MUUSINGS

Rev. Fred Howard

September 2013

As I reenter the church community this month, I want to thank you all again for the opportunity this summer has given me to spend some quality time with my family. It has indeed been a blessing for us on many levels.

This time away has also given me the opportunity to reflect on the direction of my ministry. Much of my thinking and soul searching is not, as yet, completely formulated to the point that I can articulate it well. I expect to gain more clarity as I go through the next year and I expect to speak about that as opportunities arise. But the one question that keeps popping up and that I keep returning to is "Who are we and what makes us unique as a people of faith?" It's a fundamental question of identity. I don't have too many firm answers yet, as you might imagine. But one thing that I am clear on and convicted of is the need for more focus in my sermons and in our programming on the origins and the development of our faith traditions, Unitarianism and Universalism.

With that in mind I want to offer an adult religious class on Transcendentalism. To understand who we are as a community of faith, I think you have to understand transcendentalism in its historical and cultural roots. To accomplish this, I have chosen "The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings" by Lawrence Buell as the text for the class. Of all the many books that have been compiled about this group of visionary thinkers that very much shaped the way enlightened Americans have come to think about religion, literature, the natural world, class distinctions, gender issues, and human rights, this anthology seemed to be the most succinct and readable. It will be a good introduction for those new to the writings of these great minds that championed the inherent worth and dignity of the individual. For those more familiar with the thoughts of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and the many other transcendentalists, this book will give you some valuable new angles on what they were ultimately after in the writings they composed.

I'm planning for the class will begin late September or early October right after "Meet and Greet," that is, in the second hour format we used for the Power of Myth class. Watch the newsletter, website, and listserv for coming details. If you plan to participate, I would suggest that you go ahead and purchase the text and begin reading. It's a wonderful compilation of the basic ideas that ultimately shaped who we are today as a spiritual community. I will try to obtain a few copies and put them in the church office for those of you who have trouble getting a copy. I look forward to exploring this world of ideas with you.

Fred Howard is our part time minister. After being on leave during the summer months he will return regularly to our services in September. You may contact him by email (preferable) at [fredhoward3622@gmail.com](mailto:fredhoward3622@gmail.com) should you need to reach him. He is available for weddings and rites of passage ceremonies by prearrangement.

### INVITATION TO MEMBERSHIP

If you are interested in becoming a member of our fellowship, we encourage you to talk with our minister, Rev. Fred Howard or our President, Carol Stiles, or Membership Director, Kimberly Tanner. We welcome your questions, and we extend an open invitation to all who want to join our liberal community of faith.

### Sangha Tuesdays

5:30-7:00 PM at the church

The KTD Buddhist reading and meditation group meets on Tuesday evenings at the church. Everyone interested in Buddhist practice and meditation is welcome. Tea, 5:30-6: Buddhist shamata meditation, 6-6:30; Discussion of reading, 6:30-7. Participants should supply their own pillow for sitting, although using a chair for those unable to sit on the floor is allowed. The group shares books and the liturgy.



### VALDOSTA SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT GROUP

This support group hosted by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Valdosta is facilitated by Tamara Hardesty. The group meets at the church on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 8 P.M. Contact via e-mail at [sosvaldosta@yahoo.com](mailto:sosvaldosta@yahoo.com) or connect online at **VALDOSTA SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT GROUP** or 'Like' us on **facebook** for online support, daily affirmations, links to resources, and information on upcoming meetings.

Communicating at UU Valdosta  
Newsletter Editor: Betty Derrick  
September 15: Deadline for the October newsletter.

If you prefer reading this newsletter on the website, e-mail the editor to remove your name from the mailing label list.

Website Manager: Carol Stiles  
e-Mail List: Contact Carol Stiles, [uuvaldosta@yahoo.com](mailto:uuvaldosta@yahoo.com)  
Facebook: Kimberly Tanner  
Local Publicity: Dee Tait

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

### CAROL STILES

We have many things happening this month and this fall! September is essentially the start of our new year, as we welcome Rev. Fred Howard back to the pulpit. Games night and other activities return and we also kick off some new activities! We will begin a series of conversations around "Immigration as a Moral Issue," the Statement of Conscience overwhelmingly passed by the 2013 General Assembly. We will meet the fourth Sundays of September and October, after the service and after a light potluck lunch that will serve as the Meet-N-Greet as well. We will use the curriculum study materials provided by the Unitarian Universalist Association as well as some materials provided to us by two members of the UU Church of Orlando, who led similar conversations in that congregation and at a UU Cluster meeting.

There is much to do! Each of you brings talents and skills to our community and we welcome your participation. Let us know what you're interested in – helping with services, working on social justice, buildings and grounds (we have volunteers to clean up the nature trail later this fall – yay-y-y-y!), fundraising - you-name-it, let us know.

In community, Carol

### UU Music Retreat!

**11:00 AM, Saturday, September 14**

We will hold a retreat at the church for the purpose of preparing for the new church year. The UU board and layleaders will meet earlier, then at 11:00 AM, all are welcome to join us for a Music Retreat! Come and learn some of the new songs from the UU hymnal supplement! We will work on some of those more challenging phrases in songs we have sung before! The Music Retreat will be followed by a light lunch and fellowship at 11:45 AM



### Social Action Activities

#### Break Bread Together

We deliver meals with the Break Bread Together program on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday (and 5<sup>th</sup> when there is one) of each month. Let Betty Derrick or Dee Tait know if you are interested in helping with this service.

**UU Valdosta Caring Committee** Contact Dee Tait if you or someone you know needs the services of this committee.

### South Georgia Pride Festival

Saturday, September 21 at John Saunders Park(1151 River St),  
12:00 noon to 7:00 PM

Kimberly Tanner is coordinating our UU table at the South Georgia Pride Festival. See her to volunteer your time. Or just come on out to the Festival! Music, speakers, resources, and lots of fun!

### Interfaith Pride Service

Sunday, September 22- 2:00 PM at UU Church

In conjunction with the South Georgia Pride Festival, we will host the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Interfaith Pride Service. Kym Berry, a musician performing at the Pride Festival, will be our guest speaker, on the topic of "What is Love?" based on all aspects of relationships in our diverse times. Kym is a singer-songwriter, creating and performing music since childhood. She has released three full-length studio albums and is working on her fourth album. She has performed countless benefits to raise awareness and or monies for the likes of Sean's Last Wish, The Sonia Plotnick Health Fund, American Red Cross, and other organizations. Join us for a very special Interfaith Pride Service!

We will invite ministers of other local churches to participate in the service. Extend an invitation to your neighbors and friends – all are welcome to join us in celebrating diversity and recognizing efforts to keep our community safe for all people. Stay afterwards for a meet-and-greet that will include desserts, light snacks, and beverages.

### Thank You! Thank You!

**For layleading services:** Doug Tanner, Valerie Webster, Carol Stiles, Bill Webster

**For speaking at Sunday services:** Cliff Adams

**For Sunday service music:** Rhett Watson, Bill Webster, Amy Wells

**For Stories for All Ages:** Sue Bailey, Amy Wells

**For helping with Children's RE:** Dawn Renner, Emma Bailey, Teagan Dunn, , Kimberly Tanner, Mary Ellen Adams

**For serving as Meet and Greet Hosts:** Doug Tanner, Dee Tait, Raynaé Jones, Mary Ellen Adams

**For greeting visitors:** Kimberly Tanner, Carol Stiles

**For delivering Break Bread meals in July:** Dee Tait, Holly Prall, Betty Derrick

**For cleaning the church last month:** The Buddhist Sangha

**For sweeping the sidewalk:** Mary Ellen Adams

### ABOUT OUR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

*Keep in your thoughts*

❖ Members and friends experiencing health concerns.

## Notes from Kids' RE - Sue Bailey

We had a wonderful summer exploring our world and learning how we are part of the interdependent web of life. Our tidal pool project was a great success and the RE kids love to hear that many adults are enjoying their creative efforts. We are finishing out the summer with a whale of a project, literally, so keep an eye out for it. This fall, we will begin exploring more fully our Unitarian Universalist principles using lessons from "We Believe: Learning and Living Our Unitarian Universalist Principles." As always, we welcome visitors to our RE class. If you would like to volunteer to be a helper, please see Sue Bailey or add your name to the signup sheets at the back of the church.



RE working on making that whale!

## Let's Have Some Fun!!

### Book Discussion and Potluck

**Friday, September 20 6:30 PM - At the church**

The book is "The Toss of a Lemon" by Padma Viswanathan. It is an epic spanning 70 years of Indian life, in the Brahmin tradition. One Amazon reviewer states, "I feel that I know more about Indian culture and the politics of the caste system from reading this book of fiction than from any textbook I have ever studied on India and its people. The text is sprinkled with Indian words and phrases, briefly defined and then used repetitively throughout the story. Brahmin worship, beliefs and lifestyle practices are also used throughout and described only briefly or mentioned in passing, although they play a part in so many situations that the reader not only becomes familiar with them, but comes to expect them, even when not mentioned in the text. It is a near total immersion in Brahmin culture." Sue Bailey has checked out several library books in her name. Speak to her if you would like one. Cheap copies are available from Amazon also. The group gathers for a potluck and fellowship for the first hour and then begins the discussion at 7:30 PM ending around 8:30 PM after choosing the next book. The group chooses books related to difference.

All are welcome. It's always more interesting if you've read the book but you're always welcome whether you have done so or not. Plan to join the discussion in September. Contact Betty Derrick if you have books to suggest.

## PIZZA AND A MOVIE

**Friday, September 13 6:30 PM at the church**

The film this month is "The Mission." Please contribute \$5.00 to cover pizza and refreshments. Viewing begins at 6:30 PM.

In this film, Director Roland Joffé explores the daunting challenge the Catholic Church assigns Father Gabriel (Jeremy Irons) during the age of the Spanish conquistadors to build a mission on his own in the wilds of Amazonia. In the process, by learning the language of indigenous people he seeks to convert and observing them as humans perfectly adapted as forest stewards, he gains insight into a culture flourishing in a rainforest capable of meeting all its material and spiritual needs. In profound contrast, Rodrigo Mendoza (Robert DeNiro) a former Spanish conquistador initially views the same people as commodities for capture and conversion into slaves to own or sell. When Mendoza discovers his younger brother falls in love with a woman who refuses his advances, he commits fratricide. Shattered by remorse, he seeks redemption with the help of Father Gabriel by joining his mission. When Spain sells a section of the rainforest containing the mission and its converts to the Portuguese, the two men join in a new mission: to save the mission's congregation from exploitation. Ironically, they become converts who advocate natural rights of indigenous people, but their very different skills and backgrounds clash when they debate how best to protect the Guarani whose descendents Director Joffé enlists to portray their ancestors. The Guarani experienced the Spanish and Portuguese equivalent of manifest destiny perpetrated by their Northern European contemporaries on North American native peoples and their lands.

According to S. D. Greydanus in (<http://decentfilms.com/reviews/mission>, for some critics, this representation of Spanish and Portuguese exploitation of native people, converted by Jesuits, but treated as slaves makes the film anti-religious. Yet in 1995, in its wisdom, the papal committee compiling the Vatican Film List cites "The Mission" among fifteen films noteworthy for special religious significance. Contact: Fred Howard and David Rogers. Let them know if you have suggested films for the future.

## Fire Pit and Games Night

**Friday, September 27 6:30PM - until at the church**

Often we play Mexican Train (dominoes), but we enjoy learning new games. If you have a game that is not limited to small numbers of players, please bring it along! Bring something to cook on the fire and then activities will move inside for more fun. Sue will let you know if it turns out to be too hot to restart the firepit this month. Contact: Susan Bailey

## UU Church of Valdosta Board of Directors Meeting News August 8, 2013

(Note that some matters appear in articles and announcements elsewhere in this newsletter and are not repeated here. The full minutes are posted on the RE wing bulletin board after approval by the board.)

The UU Board discussed plans for the following fall activities:

- board, music and layleader retreat
- Interfaith Pride Service
- series of discussions on immigration this fall.
- work day to clear the nature trail – suggested by some of the youth – will schedule in October when it's cooler.
- Next meeting, Thursday, September 5, 6:00 p.m.

**Update on new AC unit fundraising:** At the last board meeting, our treasurer reported that we have paid off over half of the loan for the new AC unit, with only about \$1800 to go – special donations still welcome! Our gratitude is extended to those who have already contributed to this special fundraiser!

**Holly Jones' honey for sale to benefit the church!!!** Holly has some honey for sale for \$10 with all proceeds going to the UU church. Honey is located where our name tags are with a jar for the money.

## At the Church-in-the-Woods

**New Hope Christian Community Church-** Sunday evenings: Choir practice at 4:00 PM. Service at 5:00 PM.  
<http://www.wix.com/nhccc1/nhccc>

**Taoist Tai Chi** – Monday and Thursday: Summer Schedule (until August 15) 6:00-7:30 PM; New Beginner's Class starts Thursday, August 15 7-8 PM. On August 15 the Continuing Class will begin meeting 5:30-7 PM. Contact Dennis Bogyo or Luana Goodwin. You can e-mail the group at [georgia@taoist.org](mailto:georgia@taoist.org)

**South Georgia Pride** – 3rd Tuesday each month, 7:30PM  
Contact Raynaé Jones [www.southgapride.com](http://www.southgapride.com)

**PFLAG Meeting** – 4th Tuesday each month, 7:00PM  
Contact: Doug Tanner The web page for PFLAG Valdosta:  
<http://community.pflag.org/Valdosta>

## We Are One: A People So Bold DVD Excerpt

by Rev. Peter Morales

[*"We Are One" is excerpted from A People So Bold ([www.uuabookstore.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=1115](http://www.uuabookstore.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=1115)), a collection of essays on the future of Unitarian Universalist justice work published by Skinner House in December 2009.]*

"The hilly countryside of Chiapas is dotted everywhere with milpas, patches of corn. These milpas look nothing like the vast ocean of hybridized, fertilized, industrialized, subsidized corn that stretches from Nebraska to New York State. In Chiapas, the corn plants are farther apart, and the corn is mixed with beans and squash in an ancient, sustainable combination that produces a diet with all the essential amino acids. The corn is tended by hand, in little plots worked by individual families.

"Chiapas is Mexico's southernmost state, bordering Guatemala. In both regions, impressive Mayan ruins dot the landscape and draw tourists. The descendants of that great civilization live today in abject poverty. The children are malnourished. Many cannot afford milk. Mayans are on the margins of society, living today, as they have for the past five hundred years, under an oppressive regime that denies their basic human rights.

"My wife Phyllis and I traveled to Chiapas as part of a delegation sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. We met with people running nonprofit organizations, and we also met with Zapatista rebels struggling, with limited success, against centuries of oppression. They taught us about the intimate connections between the industrial corn of Iowa and the native corn in the milpas. Since the advent of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), U.S. corn has been changing the Mexican economy. The corn tortilla, the staple of the Mexican diet, especially among the poor, is now typically made with U.S. corn. As demand for ethanol for U.S. gas guzzlers inflates the price of U.S. corn, the price of tortillas has skyrocketed. A little-known part of those NAFTA agreements required Mexico to change its laws that permitted ejidos, large areas of land owned communally for generations. The moneyed classes can now buy up land long owned by peasant families.

"The richest man in the world is a Mexican, Carlos Slim. Slim is in fat city, worth more than Bill Gates or Warren Buffett, and getting richer at an amazing rate. He enjoys his wealth in a country where millions of children have insufficient food, a woeful education system, and no health care. It is an old story, little different from that of Europe or the United States. With rural families living on small plots of land being forced to leave, Chiapas is now a leading exporter of people. As thousands of economic refugees flee Chiapas, others from Central America cross Chiapas on their way north. They are heading for jobs at luxurious beach resorts filled with Americans and Europeans, or for the slums of Mexico City. Some of the most adventurous risk takers head for la frontera, the newly militarized border that tries to separate desperate Mexicanos from jobs in the United States. Hundreds die trying to cross the desert, and now there are Anglo vigilantes on the border attempting to "protect" America from the frightful prospect of more illegal immigrants. U.S. citizens are afraid, and their fear is stoked by reactionary ideologues and political opportunists in both major parties.

"The illegal immigrants who are already here are afraid, too. There are about twelve million of them. They don't know when a raid by federal authorities will break up their families. Children don't know when their mother or father will be taken away. It happened not long ago in Greeley, Colorado.

"It is happening all over the country, and it is madness.

We live in a new America. My colleague Stan Perea calls it the America of the moo-shoo burrito and the Korean taco. California now has more people from minority populations than it has whites. Our country is now home to more Hispanics than African Americans. In most cities, the children entering the public schools speak more than seventy languages among them.

"America was once defined by the movement of people who came to the east coast and moved westward. The new American story is of people moving north from countries to the south and moving to the west coast from countries in the Far East—such as Vietnam, Korea, and elsewhere.

In the case of the recent rapid increase in immigration from Mexico and Central America, most U.S. citizens tend to think we are somehow passive victims. These aliens are pouring over our border and must be stopped.

“The truth is very different. Our economic policies, which disproportionately benefit the wealthy, are helping to create wrenching economic dislocations in Mexico, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Many of the people trying to sneak into the United States were pushed out of their homes by U.S. policies.

“I am not suggesting that our country does not need to control its borders, and I do not pretend to have all the policy answers. I do know this: We cannot pretend that we had nothing to do with the creation of this problem. I also know this: We are all connected. We are in this together.

Let us take a moment to get some historical perspective on our situation. Let us look at some major demographic events of the past five hundred years: The arrival of Europeans started a horrific pandemic in the Americas. It was worse than the plague in Europe and many times worse than AIDS. Native Americans had no resistance to the new diseases such as smallpox. Entire populations were wiped out. It was easy for Europeans to move west across North America because the Indian population had largely died off. The Native American population was a tiny fraction of what it had been in 1491.

Another major demographic move, of course, was the importation of African slaves. Slavery became the basis of an economy producing cotton and tobacco for an international market. The legacy of slavery, racism, and oppression still casts its shadow across America.

“A hundred and seventy years ago, the slave-based economy with huge plantations growing commodities for export expanded westward across the South, but then it hit a border. What is now southeast Texas is prime land for growing cotton. The trouble was that it was part of Mexico. The border was porous, though, and undocumented Anglos poured across, bringing their slaves. They encountered another problem: Slavery was illegal in Mexico. The Anglo immigrants soon fomented a rebellion aimed at legalizing slavery. This is not radical left-wing revisionist history; this is the standard account of academic historians, and the version told on the University of Texas website. The fact that the white Texan revolt against Mexico was founded on the desire to extend black slavery has somehow never filtered down to what we teach in elementary schools. After winning their quick little war of independence, Texas joined the union as a slave state. Sadly, James Bowie, Davy Crockett, and Sam Houston were not the freedom-loving heroes we were once led to believe.

“We need to see our present situation in its historical context. The border between the United States and Mexico was created to make space for slavery. We are building fences and guard towers along that border to keep Mexicans from reentering land that was taken from them. Of course, the Mexican elite, mostly of European descent, were not exactly blameless: The land that undocumented Americans stole from them was land they had previously stolen from Native Americans. It is easy to determine who has a legal right to be here, but who has a moral right to be here?”

“As a religious people who affirm human compassion, advocate for human rights, and seek justice, we must never make the mistake of confusing a legal right with a moral right. The forced removal of Native Americans from their land and onto reservations was legal. The importation and sale of African slaves was legal. South African apartheid was legal. The confiscation of the property of Jews at the beginning of the Nazi regime was legal. The Spanish Inquisition was legal. Crucifying Jesus was legal. Burning Michael Servetus at the stake for his unitarian theology was legal. The fact that something is legal does not cut much ethical ice. The powerful have always used the legal system to oppress the powerless.

“It is true that as citizens we should respect the rule of law. More importantly, though, our duty is to create laws founded on our highest sense of justice, equity, and compassion. Loud voices urge us to choose fear, denial, reactionary nationalism, and racism. We must

resist and choose the better way urged by every major religious tradition. We must choose the path of compassion and hope. We must choose a path that is founded on the recognition that we are connected, that we are all in this together.

“These are the teachings of every great tradition. At the core of the teachings of Jesus is the conviction that we are all one. We are all God’s children, and we are all equal. We are supposed to care for one another. Jesus taught his followers that an act of kindness to the most humble human being was the equivalent of performing the same for Jesus.

The prophet Muhammad taught that the tribal divisions among the Arabian people were wrong. The symbols of those tribal divisions were the legion of tribal gods, and Muhammad told the people that these gods were false, that there is only one God. We are united, and we owe our allegiance to the one creator.

“Buddhism teaches that if we stop and really pay attention, we will realize that the things we think separate us are an illusion. Our connections are ultimately real, not our divisions.

“We find the same message in every tradition: We are one. We are connected. We are brothers and sisters. If we truly accept that we are all part of a greater whole, that what unites and transcends us is ultimately more important than our illusion of individuality, how might that guide us? If we accept that compassion (literally “to suffer with”) is the manifestation of realizing that we are one, what are the implications? What would our community and our state and our nation do if they were guided by the finest aspirations of humanity’s religions? What would you and I do if we were guided by these very same ideas, as expressed in our Unitarian Universalist Principles? What future might we build if we created policies guided by our notions of justice, equity, and compassion in human relations?”

“I do not have all the policy answers on immigration or the related issues of public education, health care, and the economy. I do know this: Breaking up poor working families who have lived among us for years does not feel like justice, equity, and compassion in action. Refusing minimal health services to young children does not feel like the way we should treat members of our human family. Having our police forces profile brown people does not feel like breaking down the walls of tribalism. Creating a huge wall, complete with barbed wire, across hundreds of miles of border does not feel neighborly.

“There must be a better way, and you and I must help build it. Barbed wire is not the answer. More border guards and more deportations are not the answer. Paranoia and panic will solve nothing.

“We must remember that we are all immigrant stock, every single one of us living on this continent. Even Native Americans at one time immigrated here from Asia.

“We must also acknowledge that we helped to create the situation in which displaced people look to find a home here. America has already been transformed by the latest waves of immigration. Our children and grandchildren are going to live in a multicultural society—a society of moo-shoo burritos, egg roll tacos, and whole wheat tortillas. We need not be afraid of that multicultural society. Fear leads to violence and repression.

“Instead, let us embrace the possibilities before us. Let us be guided by love and hope. Let our actions emerge from the deep conviction that people from Mexico and Korea and Canada and Vietnam are ultimately part of our extended family. Surely, religious people who have learned to embrace the wisdom of Judaism, Christianity, humanism, Islam, and Eastern religions can lead the way. We are people who have always affirmed human diversity. We have always looked to the future and seen new possibilities. We must do so again. Let us be the people who break down the arbitrary barriers that divide us from them. We are one, and love and hope will guide us. Let us, together with all our brothers and sisters, build a new way.”

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