

# Reflections

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE RIVER OF GRASS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

DAVIE, FLORIDA

DECEMBER 2016



## ONLY THE ABSENCE OF LIGHT

Rev. Amy Carol Webb

**T**hese December days in the sunshine state where I live, the yellows, pinks and blues of dawn creep up a little before 7 a.m., then fade some 10 hours later as the days grow shorter until the longest night of the year, December 21st. Then, beginning with the very next dawn on December 22nd, light and warmth grow as the sun begins its promised return.

The world's peoples have celebrated this mid-winter return of the Sun, by its many names – Helios, Aditya, Sol, Ra, Saulé, Grian, Sekhmet, Unelanuhi, among them – with

holy festivals. From the Roman Saturnalia, to the Hindu Pancha Ganapati and Buddhism's Bodhi Day, from the Celtic Yule and Saxon Mondranect, to Iran's Shab-e Yalda, China's Dong Zhi, from the African American Kwanzaa to the ubiquitous Christian Christmas, and Soyal observed by the Zuni and Hopi tribes of North America – cultures and religions the world round mark nearly thirty different festivals to Light between November and January. For thousands of years in hundreds of languages human communities have gathered to sing and feast and pray and play, and set spark to candle, torch, kindling, and lamp to declare victory over darkness again and again, and again.



Science gives two major reasons for darkness in our universe: the first, to be in shadow, and the second, to be lacking radiance. The first kind of darkness, to be in shadow, is the blocking of light by some other object, and most simply observed in the “day and night” binary of Earthly life – “night” being Earth in her own shadow. The second, to be lacking radiance, is a state where light is not generated or sustained over time. Darkness itself, by our knowledge to date, does not exist independent of other forces of nature, and is, materially speaking, only temporary. It is by this understanding that, in the midst of earthly night, we do not despair the Sun's return. It's different for Spiritual night, though. Or is it?

Poets, philosophers, theologians, and mystics of every age have grieved the “dark night of the soul” – in the words of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish mystic Saint John of the Cross, *La noche oscura del alma*. *La noche oscura del alma* can also be said, “the night of the obscured soul,” as both the Spanish *oscura* and English *obscure* derive from the Latin, *obscurus*, meaning “covered” or “hidden.” Which would bring us round again to the idea that darkness of this nature, of the spirit – St. John's *oscura del alma* – is, like earthly dark, only a state of blocked or hidden light, that does not and cannot exist on its own, only in relationship to radiance, or its absence.

### IN THIS ISSUE

<i>Stay Connected!</i> .....	2
<i>Board President</i> .....	3
<i>Facility Matters</i> .....	4
<i>Worship Services</i> .....	4
<i>Money Matters</i> .....	5
<i>Guest at Your Table</i> .....	5
<i>Board Matters</i> .....	5
<i>Reflections on GA</i> .....	6
<i>Faith Development</i> .....	6
<i>LifeNet for Families</i> .....	7

(Continued on page 4)

## OUR SUNDAY LOCATION

11850 W. State Road 84, Suite 1, Davie, FL 33325

## EVERY SUNDAY

**Worship Service:** 10:30 to 11:30 am. **Hospitality Hour:** 11:30 am to 12:30 pm.

**Faith Development Classes:** 11:00 am to 12:00 noon

## FRIENDLY REMINDERS FOR OUR MEMBERS

There is plenty of parking outside the sanctuary, but please leave the closer parking spaces for our guests and physically challenged worshippers.

All meetings are held at 11850 W State Road 84, Suite 1 in Davie unless otherwise noted.



## River of Grass

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

Phone 954-723-7877

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committee contact info at

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

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& Janet Schwartz  
Stewardship ..... Kristine & Kip Barkley  
Worship ..... Kathy Jens-Rochow

### Other Resources

contact info at [www.riverofgrassuu.org](http://www.riverofgrassuu.org)

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& Pat Katz  
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& Esther Sampol

## OUR PRINCIPLES

**We**, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

## STAY CONNECTED!

**I**n between issues of *Reflections* you can stay connected to the River of Grass Congregation the following ways:

- ♦ Sign up for our **weekly email** with events and news that changes each week: send an email to [office@riverofgrassuu.org](mailto:office@riverofgrassuu.org)
- ♦ Visit our **Facebook page**: [www.facebook.com/riverofgrassuu](http://www.facebook.com/riverofgrassuu)
- ♦ Follow us on **Twitter**: [@RiverOfGrassUU](https://twitter.com/RiverOfGrassUU) or [www.twitter.com/riverofgrassuu](http://www.twitter.com/riverofgrassuu)
- ♦ Visit our **calendar**: [www.riverofgrassuu.org/calendar.html](http://www.riverofgrassuu.org/calendar.html) (or go to: [www.riverofgrassuu.org](http://www.riverofgrassuu.org) – click on Events – Calendar)
- ♦ Join our new MeetUp group: [www.meetup.com/riverofgrassuu](http://www.meetup.com/riverofgrassuu)



## BLACK LIVES MATTER OPEN FORUM AT RIVER OF GRASS UU CONGREGATION



### NOTES FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Zena Tucker

**Location:** River of Grass UU Congregation, Davie, FL

**Date/Time:** November 4, 2016 at 11am

**Attendees:** Rev Amy, Zena Tucker, Board President, several board members and congregants for a total of about 20 people

These Open Forums were called by Rev Amy and Zena to offer a time of listening and feedback regarding a recent board approval to place a Black Lives Matter feather flag near the driveway entrance to our complex during Sunday Service. These forums came at the request of the covenant group which proposed the feather flag.

We began with a reading and meditative song. Rev Amy reviewed the timeline of River Of Grass involvement with Black Lives Matter and the UUA's Action of Immediate Witness, "Support the Black Lives Matter Movement"

Rev Amy stated these forums are a chance for the Board and all to hear feedback and gather ideas for a way forward. Zena opened with the feedback she had already received.

- ◆ The flag might prompt radical people to react in harmful ways, such as damaging our facility or even worse, bringing disruption and harm to the congregation
- ◆ The flag doesn't address the needs of the BLM movement and there are more effective ways to show support
- ◆ The BLM movement is the only cause River of Grass is supporting and we ought to be behind others.
- ◆ Many expressed support for the feather flag via social media postings and in person
- ◆ The feather flags are in line with the other support the congregation has been involved with, to include marching in the MLK Day parade and in the BLM protest march.
- ◆ The flag would announce to all our support to the movement and be an encouragement to those who are struggling with racism
- ◆ Many people are not able to attend marches or meetings, and this was a way they could participate in promoting the cause.



Rev. Amy polled other Congregations in the South regarding what issues they may have had as a result of putting out a BLM flag/banner, other than defacing or stealing flag/banner itself. The results of her query were:

- ◆ in-person yelling, angry phone calls - nothing during services
- ◆ damage to building that appeared to be incidental to intended
- ◆ damage to flag/banner
- ◆ no violence/damage inside building
- ◆ no violence against persons

Rev Amy also emphasized these meetings were meant to bring us together in covenant so that we may together find a way forward, emphasizing that process and relationships are more important than the final outcome.

Members at the forum provided similar feedback and expounded on them in further detail. A sampling of the points are:

- ◆ fears for kids safety
- ◆ a lot of hatred boiling out there
- ◆ some members got in our face

(Continued on page 4)



## ONLY THE ABSENCE OF LIGHT

(Continued from page 1)

The physical darkness our ancestors interpreted as a message of the gods, science has taught us is actually the emanations of starlight shifting through planetary orbits and rotations, as Earth tilts farther from its source this time of year. And that darkness of the spirit, that shadow that sometimes falls longer and holds stronger over the heart's winter? That darkness, too, cannot exist save for radiance – yours and mine – momentarily obscured. Let us never despair, my beloveds. Let us not tilt away from the source, but hold high the beacon of Love over longest night. Let us sing and feast and pray and play, to set spark to Hope, to remember that the night will pass and the shadows cannot last in its light. And know again there is no darkness, only the absence of Light.

## FACILITIES MATTERS

Jon Kitner, Facilities Co-Chair



Congregational workdays are still planned on the first Saturday of each month, from 9AM until noon. Members are encouraged to come and help us do some light housekeeping and small church home improvement projects. There is no need to call or sign-up. Just show up and help us out. In a long range sense, It would be great if we could have enough people to work in teams. Teams of volunteer members would be called on for specialized needs. We could have a painting team, a repairs team and a maintenance team. Each would set up its own schedule and procedures. An example of this working well right now is Riley Cothran's Hurricane Shutter Team who worked together putting up and taking down our church shutters. Thank you all for that. So, if you are thinking that you may be interested in lending a hand by helping us take care of our church home, come to the Congregational Workdays. If you would like to work closely with several others as part of a team to do repairs, clean or paint just email me at [facilities@riverofgrassuu.org](mailto:facilities@riverofgrassuu.org).

## FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

(Continued from page 3)

- ◆ maybe a way to increase security
- ◆ Do we want an armed guard to protecting us? Some will not be ok with a gun
- ◆ There are hundreds of hate groups, 58 in FL
- ◆ Are there other ways to engage?
- ◆ The BLM flag is serving the same purpose as the Rainbow Flag we proudly displayed not so long ago.

Several suggestions for further fact-finding and actions came forth.

- ◆ Education of the congregation could be fruitful. Affinity and Covenant Groups are a way to explore this. It was suggested all the covenant groups of the congregation cover this topic at at least one meeting.
- ◆ Allow congregants to present their views in newsletter articles
- ◆ Obtain input from the landlord about the a feather flag on the swale.
- ◆ Obtain input from our neighbors about the feather flag
- ◆ Obtain input from the police about the feather flag

Our next Black Lives Matter Listening Circle will be December 4, 2016 following service. All are welcome to attend.



## WORSHIP SERVICES

SUNDAY AT 10:30 AM

- December 11: ***Love Beyond Belief***  
Marjorie Loring
- December 18: ***Holiday Pageant***  
Fabulous Faith Development  
and Rev. Amy Carol Webb
- December 24, 6:00 pm: ***Christmas Eve Service***  
River of Grass Musicians, Band,  
and Choir, with Rev. Amy Carol Webb
- December 25: ***Christmas Service***  
Rev. Amy Carol Webb
- January 1: ***New Year's Day Labyrinth***  
Emilie Sayward-Henry
- January 8: ***Fire Communion***  
Rev. Amy Carol Webb
- January 15: ***MLK Sunday***  
Rev. Amy Carol Webb

## MONEY MATTERS

**Kip Barkley, Stewardship Co-Chair**

Perhaps you are more generous than you realize? There is a form in the church office and online in the Members Only section for “Gifts In-Kind.”

When you buy a bunch of goodies for a church function and do not seek reimbursement, staple your receipts to this form and turn it in. It will be recorded as a gift to RoG. It is handy for our leaders to know how much our programs actually cost to produce. At the end of the year, you might be surprised. And if you are able to itemize your taxes, you might be pleasantly surprised.



## GUEST AT YOUR TABLE

**Steve Jens-Rochow**

Guest at Your Table (GAYT) is the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee’s annual intergenerational program to raise support and awareness about our work to advance human rights around the world. For over 40 years, Guest at Your Table has raised millions of dollars for human rights projects that have made a real difference in people’s lives around the world. Guest at Your Table — inviting real people who have been touched by UUSC’s work to symbolically sit down and share a meal with us — is such a simple and powerful way to celebrate our common humanity. Share their stories at <http://www.uusc.org/welcome-to-guest-at-your-table/>. It also helps us put our UU values into action in the farthest corners of the world.



The Guest at Your Table program runs through December. Membership in UUSC is \$40 per year. Contributions of \$125 or more are doubled by the Shelter Rock UU Congregation in Manhasset, NY. Please pick up your box or envelope, fill out your information, make out your check to UUSC, and turn it in to Steve Jens-Rochow or Rick Tucker. Our office will tabulate our contributions, and at the end of the drive send in our contributions to the UUSC. This way we can acknowledge your Guest at Your Table gift to the UUSC. For more information contact [SSJC@riverofgrassuu.org](mailto:SSJC@riverofgrassuu.org)

## BOARD MATTERS

**Zena Tucker, Board President**



I regret to inform you that the suite (A3) next door to our facility was leased to a new business. The Board and Rev Amy were in negotiations with the Temple Adath Or to find a mutually beneficial agreement whereby River of Grass had access to more meeting space for Faith Development, but without taking on the financial challenge of leasing A3 on our own. These negotiations were going well, but time ran out. Your Board will be reviewing our actions to look for ways to improve our processes for the future.

Also, your board has been deliberating on the purchase of new stackable chairs for the Sanctuary. Our Facilities Chairperson has presented the board with two wonderful chair options. We will be voting on this matter soon.

If you have any feedback, please contact Zena Tucker or email [president@riverofgrassuu.org](mailto:president@riverofgrassuu.org)

## REFLECTIONS ON GENERAL ASSEMBLY (GA)

By Sheryl Cattell

**U**UA President Rev Peter Morales shared some of the findings of the 2015 national survey of congregations by Faith Communities Today. This annual survey includes responses from more than 30 thousand congregations in the U.S from all faith traditions.

He spoke about the things that distinguish growing and declining congregations:

- ◆ It's not minister age or gender.
- ◆ Those that describe themselves as a "Small knit family" declined
- ◆ Those that see themselves as "Moral beacon in our community" increase
- ◆ It makes sense, as it's hard to join a close knit family.
- ◆ When we work on things bigger than our congregation, our congregation grows.
- ◆ We are at our best when we reach out. When we engage. When we form partnerships that reach out.

Congregations that establish a balance between "I," "we," and a "larger vision" are the ones that grow. "I" honors the individual, "we" deals with how we stay connected during challenge and conflict, and the "larger vision" addresses the issues the congregation is dedicated to, things that are larger than the congregation itself.

One thing that he warned against was spending enormous amounts of time and energy polling our congregation but ignoring the surrounding communities.

This had such a profound effect on me that I came home and shared this with our covenant group and in that first meeting after GA we all decided unanimously that we needed to get our message about Black Lives Matter out of our sanctuary and into the community every single Sunday – at least as a starting place.

minister was killed for his participation – giving the ultimate sacrifice to challenge injustice.

I also listened to the white UUs struggling with Black Lives Matter and desperately trying to understand what role they could play, how they could even begin to understand the oppression and fear of our black brothers and sisters. As they spoke they shared their trials and tribulations with the BLM banners that they posted and then repaired, replaced or retrieved time and time again. This is where we learned about the feather banners that could be put out and taken down each service or each event as a way to not break the bank on defaced or destroyed banners. And one congregation shared how their white members really didn't appreciate how it felt to be attacked and targeted for no other reason than being black until their precious banners were destroyed over and over again. This process gave them a small taste of the injustice faced by African Americans on a daily basis. But in the latter case, they can't take down their skin color and safely store it away until the next "safe" Sunday.

This is a process, and not an easy one; but still one we are called to, to walk our talk for justice. I can't express how grateful I am to have the Cypress Springs Covenant Group group along with me for this journey as we venture out in our community with the message that Black Lives Matter. Won't you join us? I'm sure we can make a difference together.

### FAITH DEVELOPMENT NEWS

Deborah Ely, Faith Development Coordinator

**F**aith Development has a very exciting December planned. We have our Annual Holiday Gathering on December 9<sup>th</sup> that will be co-hosted with the Membership Committee and Game Night. Take a break from the holiday rush for this super fun family event! This gathering includes an appetizer and dessert potluck, craft and game tables, decorating fun, a movie, and a special visitor! We also have our Christmas Pageant on Sunday December 18<sup>th</sup>. This will be an impromptu service, full of audience participation from all ages. This service is sure to bring joy to all. Additionally, this Christmas Eve we are welcoming children into the choir. Please let us know if your children are interested. We in Faith Development wish all of you a holiday season filled with peace and joy and love.



Which brings me to reflections on the Black Lives Matter sessions I attended. It was moving for me to hear from our Black UU ministers and members who shared that BLM was a deal breaker for them. It determined if they could continue as a UU and as a member of their congregation. UU is a predominantly white organization yet we were there playing a prominent role in the march in Selma, where a white UU



## LIFENET4FAMILIES NOVEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup> VOLUNTEER DAY

Judi Oltmans, SSJC Co-Chair

**V**olunteering can make your day! Thank you to all the River of Grass volunteers that came to LifeNet4Families on Saturday, November 8th including Josh, Nichole and Jacob, Zena and Rick, Judi, Jon, Ella and Saybel, Andrea, Stan and Cassidy, Gina, Michael and Isabella, Rita and Ann, and Fabrice! What a great turnout! We helped out in the LifeNet pantry filling 171 bags with Thanksgiving fixings for families in need. The younger volunteers were amazing, they are hard workers! There was something for everyone to do and a lot was accomplished. Thank you to Rick and Zena who helped out at the LifeNet distribution center in Lauderhill handing out grocery bags full of food. Thank you all for your hard work and dedication!



Making a difference and healing injustice in our community is part of our River of Grass Mission, and volunteering at LifeNet4Families is one way to put that mission in action. At LifeNet4Families their mission is “to be a seamless system of care for those in need in Broward County by providing necessary food, ancillary services and referrals.” LifeNet4Families serves approximately 5,000 individuals and families, and provides 1.4 million meals annually. They do everything in their power “...to reduce the pain and suffering of those needing food and resources to improve their lives.”

Join us at our next LifeNet4Families Saturday Volunteer day on December 10th. We volunteer there once a month from 9:00-11:00am. What a great way to spend a Saturday morning! Upcoming dates are December 10th, January 14th and February 11th. You can sign up at the Service and Social Justice corner at the back of the River of Grass sanctuary or email us at [ssjc@riverofgrassuu.org](mailto:ssjc@riverofgrassuu.org).

Can't make it to LifeNet? Every Sunday you can bring canned foods for LifeNet4Families to River of Grass and place them in the basket at the SSJC corner. They are always in need of peanut butter and canned meats such as tuna, chicken or beef.

