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Religious Exploration Council Newsletter, OCT. 2021

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Welcome to RE 2021 – From DRE Rachel Kohler

A new church year, a new Religious Exploration year, a new set of pandemic restrictions, a new Director of Religious Exploration...there are a lot of changes happening here at the Fellowship. There are likely even more changes to come as the year progresses, before we settle into some kind of "new normal" -- whatever that new normal looks like. Right now, it seems impossible to tell, which is a little overwhelming in some ways. Change is complicated and unpredictable, but it also opens new frontiers for exploration, and lucky for us, that's what religious exploration is all about.

Over the past year, our circumstances have inspired new ways to gather and new ways to present spiritual content. Our forays into the digital world will continue in this new RE year, with a continuation of online podcast stories and activities for people of all ages, as well as the continual integration of storytelling into our services. Stories, after all, are the ultimate exploration of the human condition, ripe with metaphor and themes that are both timeless and ever-evolving. We'll continue to innovate new ways to connect both digitally and in-person as safely as we can as time goes on.

Our previous RE year also saw the resurrection of the RE Council, which spent months brainstorming ways to create more opportunities for intergenerational interaction. The theme of this church year is, after all, "Radical Belonging," and a more thorough integration of all ages into as much RE content as possible is an extension of that. As we move forward with this stated goal, we will also find ways to balance the needs of spaces dedicated to different phases of life, for that, too, is a kind of belonging.

So what's our "new normal"? The long and short of it is: "We don't know." But we're going to explore and figure it out together. I'm proud and grateful to be trusted with helping to guide that exploration as the new UUFC Director of Religious Exploration, and I'm excited to head out on this journey with our community.

RE for Families with Children (and everyone else too)

“Living the Stories” Season Two – The UUFC’s Own Podcast Series

A new church year means a new season of the UUFC’s own Living the Stories podcast. Until we are able to gather in person again – all ages together, including children – “Living the Stories” is our primary RE connection. Throughout 2020 and into the early part of 2021, DRE Rachel Kohler created audio storytelling podcasts to distribute via email to members of the Fellowship. These stories often appeared in services, too! Although the stories and their accompanying hands-on activities were designed to provide spiritual enrichment to families with children, as it turns out, *everyone* of *all* ages loves stories! People of all ages were doing the activities, too, which generally took the form of thematically related craft activities using common household items.

This summer, we started to incorporate live storytelling into our summer services. While most of the 2020-21 podcasts were adapted from material from the Unitarian Universalist Association website, during the summer, Rachel started writing her own material to better align with our service themes. And now, for the new RE year, Rachel will be recording podcast versions of many of the stories she tells in services to make it easier for families to access the material. There will be crafts, too!

And best of all, the podcasts and the crafts will be much easier to find now that they have a dedicated space on the UUFC website. Go to <https://uucorvallis.org/re-podcasts/> to check it out! The latest one will be featured on the front, and you’ll be able to access the archive of earlier ones, too. Happy listening!

“Apocalypse Parenting” and the Wheel of the Year

RE offerings for families with children and youth will include recognition of and support for the unique challenges of parenting in these times, under the title “Apocalypse Parenting.”

Themes include: endings and beginnings, honoring what dies to allow something new to be born, humility and right-sizing, meaning-making in the context of centuries of human life/culture, and scaffolding for change (moon cycles as well as the Wheel of the Year). “Radical Belonging” will be part of this work, by exploring letting go of rigidity about “how things are done” and “the way things are” to allow for welcoming in new ideas. Worship services will follow a liturgical year that is non-appropriative for white folks and includes hospitality to practices rooted in BIPOC cultures, connecting with ancestors and deep time, and belonging to land.

The Wheel of the Year cycle of earth-centered all-ages worship for these themes will include trauma-informed worship elements such as rhythmic grounding in nature, connection with beauty and story, tangible accomplishments of creation/generosity/service, invitation to vision and meaning-making, music, ritual, and art. For each WOY festival day, we’ll offer a packet of possible do-at-home activities (this is invitational – folks should do as many or as few as they want), then a worship service on or near the festival day, and then small group parenting meetings to share what came up for folks.

Here is the tentative schedule for the Wheel of the Year offerings, to support us in Apocalypse Parenting:

Samhain (Oct 31): honoring and relating to the beloved dead, connecting with ancestors (white folks need ancestor practices), honoring the sacrifices of endings (and of what dies so we may eat), entering a new year with sweetness

Yule (Dec 21): nurturing darkness, rebirth, gifts, renewal

Imbolc (Feb 2): initiation into mysteries, midwifery, water, flame, poetry

Ostara (Mar 21): joy, growth, rebirth and renewal again, play

Beltane (May 2): celebrating our beloved life, fertility, abundance, guarding the natural world, art, mothers

Litha (June 21): transience, letting go, fathers, generative masculinity, generosity, dreams

Lughnasad (Aug 2): harvest, hopes and fears, full partnership with Life/the holy, difficult choices

Mabon (Sept 21): harvest, giving and receiving, liberation, rest.

2021-22 All-Ages Worship Services Began with the Fall Equinox

Even though we had to make due with a Zoom-only version due to a serious threat of rain, our first intergenerational worship service of the year was an enjoyable success. DRE Rachel Kohler was joined by RE Assistant Skyla Christison, newcomer Dawn Dirks, and UUFC member Hannah Christison to present a nature-based ritual in honor of Fall that shaded into a collective retelling of the myth of Hades and Persephone. The service was designed to be interactive, with attendees invited to use their bodies and voices to summon and honor the elemental forces of the earth.

The schedule for similar earth-centered, all-ages, Wheel of the Year worship is included in the outline above. These worship services will generally be shorter than usual to make it easier for people of all ages and attention levels to participate, and they'll generally be more interactive or experiential. We hope everyone will enjoy a change of pace!

ADULT RE OFFERINGS, FALL 2021

“Multi-Kulti: Removing Unconscious Debris from the Soil of the Soul.” Saturday, Oct. 23, 10 am - 5 PM

A Workshop with Rev. Anthony “Mtuaswa” Johnson: UU minister and faculty member at Starr King School for the Ministry Mtuaswa offers this “brave space” for learning and growing. He writes “In our present Time of Tumult this workshop offers a container and powerful methods for exploring the many knotty issues of race, gender, class, religion and more that challenge our cultures, our communities and our relationships. In the words of Audre Lorde – It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences.”

Saturday Oct. 23, 10 AM – 3 PM, via Zoom. Especially for newcomers to the Fellowship, for those who have had training in multi-culturalism, and of course for all who are interested.

Listen to an invitation from Mtuaswa here: <https://youtu.be/CDGw2lzt-U>

“My Grandmother’s Hands: Reading and Study” Resmaa Menakem’s challenging and acclaimed book about trauma in human life, specifically the generational traumas of racism on all races. This is a book not simply to read, but to read together and work with: group exercises are included for every section. An incredible opportunity for all who are seeking to go deeper in learning how to understand and help dismantle systemic racism, especially as a form of spiritual practice. 8 sessions over 4 months, beginning in late October, to be scheduled with input from the participants. Attend one of two introductory sessions (whichever fits your schedule best) - Sunday, Oct. 17 5 PM or Wednesday Oct. 20, 7 PM. Learn more about Menakem’s work here:

<https://onbeing.org/programs/resmaa-menakem-notice-the-rage-notice-the-silence/>

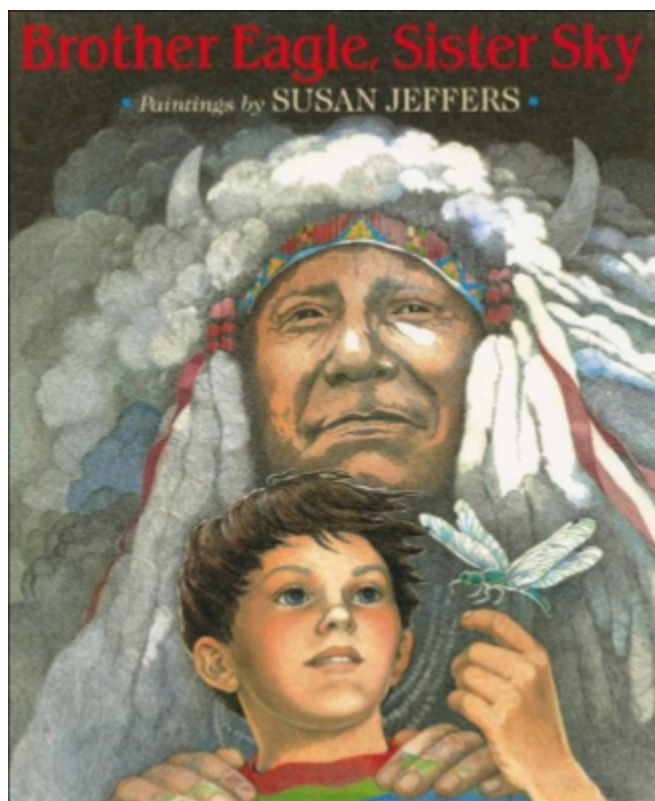
Climate Action as Spiritual Practice What might it mean to approach the incredible task of Climate Justice and a sustainable earth as a form (or forms) of spiritual practice? How might our answers shape both our actions and our connections to each other. Timing and format of this study group are being developed now – look for details in a few weeks. If you’re interested in helping to develop this offering, contact Nick Houtman at houtman58@gmail.com.

UU History A three session exploration of the formative times, events and elements which have shaped the liberal religious traditions which we now claim nurture as Unitarian Universalism. A good overview especially for newcomers to the Fellowship and to UUism, and a good overview for all who are interested to understand more about how our history affects and guides us now. Times and dates TBA, in November, with Rev. Monica Jacobson-Tennessen

Children's Library Revitalization Project

We've spent the past year evaluating our children's library and sorting through it, and we've finally made the hard choices about what to give away and what to keep before embarking on the exciting work of updating our collection. We thought it would be interesting to share some of the materials we've chosen to discard, and as we make new acquisitions, some of the new books, too!

One of the books we chose to give away is a picture book called *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*, by Susan Jeffers.



It's a pretty famous book with a perfectly acceptable ecological message, but it's got some problems with the manner in which it both uses the (since understood to be inauthentic) words of Chief Sealth (often Anglicized to *Seattle*), a leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish people, and the way the artist chooses to illustrate the words. There has been quite a bit of criticism leveled against the book in the decades since its original publication, but a lot of it can be summed up by the cover image itself.

Although the book is positioned as one "written" by an Indigenous leader of the Pacific Northwest, the painting on the cover is based on a 1910 photograph by Edward Curtis, and the subject of that photograph wasn't Chief Sealth at all, but a Cheyenne Chief, Two Moons. The regalia worn by the cover image is therefore of a completely different Indigenous culture, an example of the dominant culture's tendency to collapse the rich diversity of all Indigenous cultures into a single monolith. In addition to this, a white child is foregrounded as the focal point of the image, which frames the whole thing as a story for

dominant culture consumption, rather than an authentic representation of Sealth's people.

Because of this, we've chosen to give our two copies of this book away, and we'll seek to replace it with something with a more modern understanding of cultural representation.



COMING SOON! Kiddos and Caregivers Cocoa and Coffee Hour!

We look forward to offering a cocoa and coffee hour for kiddos and their caregivers beginning sometime in October. This will serve as a space for families to reconnect in a more intimate and child-centered setting and find mutual support during these uniquely challenging times. Kiddos ages birth to eighteen and their caregivers of every variety are invited to gather on the back deck of the fellowship for warm drinks and warmer company! Doodle poll and details coming soon!

RE Council is Back to Work!

The RE Council has resumed meeting for the new fellowship year and has many exciting things planned. We will be sending the congregational survey on intergenerationalism to your inbox again soon. Your responses are vital in measuring the progress on our decades-long aim of creating a more intergenerational congregational life. In support of the theme of radical belonging, we will be creating a resource on ways we can each make members of all ages feel truly welcome and comfortable in our activities both in person and on zoom. We will soon begin work on a Black Lives Matter themed mural on the fence. Because this fence will come down during the remodel, we aim to make the mural one that can be relocated to the building so that the artistic interpretation of this moment in our fellowship history can remain beautifully documented. For more information on any of these awesome endeavors, just ask any one of your friendly neighborhood RE Council members!



CALLING ALL ARTISTS! The RE department invites all interested creators to submit proposals for the Black Lives Matter mural project that will soon be underway. The mural is intended to be an intergenerational art project painted by congregants of all ages on durable, movable panels that will initially adorn the fence and ultimately be moved to a wall in or on the Fellowship building. All proposals, while conveying the Black Lives Matter message, should also include representation of our broader UU values and community. Deadline for submission is November 1st. Please contact Skyla King-Christison (mommaskyla@gmail.com) with any questions or offers of expertise.

Ampinefu Oak Project For All Ages

Our great oak tree on the east side of the UUFC is an Oregon white oak. These trees can live up to 500 years. Our oak is likely 300 to 400 years-old, which means it was growing here before up to 90% of the indigenous Kalapuya people were killed by malaria and smallpox following contact with European settlers from 1790 into the 1850s. The Ampinefu (Ahm PEEN a foo) are the band of Kalapuya of this part of the Willamette Valley, and with respect and gratitude, we call this magnificent tree "Ampinefu Oak".

This fall, we've begun a project to plant some baby oaks from the acorns of this tree. A bucket full of acorns is now on the back deck of the Fellowship. All are invited to be part of this project, beginning with saving acorns and helping them sprout in the spring. Here are some instructions from John Bailey:

Oregon white oak ("Garry oak") acorns ripen in late August to early November and fall to the ground. Sound acorns will not have any visible holes/damage and will sink in a cup of water.

Once sound acorns are collected, they need to be kept moist until they germinate; therefore, some type of mulching is required after being put into soil at a shallow depth - imagine being a blue jay and then covering the spot with leaves or mulch. Acorns can be germinated immediately in a greenhouse but would then need to be protected from winter temperatures. Therefore, growers may want to store them in a moist, cool site until springtime ...then allow them to warm up and subsequently germinate.

Acorns are notoriously variable in their germination rates, so collect a bunch in case the rate of germination is low for this year. Once there are a couple open leaves on the small shoot, then you can transplant the seedling to its permanent location before the root gets too long. A deep planting hole will likely be needed.

We have a demonstration video from one of our youth, Haven Christison, of how to make small felt acorns. We still have craft kits for making them! If you'd like one, please email reassociate@uucorvallis.org!



2021 – 22 RE Team: DRE Rachel Kohler, Assistant Skyla King Christison

Unitarian Universalist religious education needs to be re-invented afresh for every era. A changing world affects the lives of all of us, especially our children and youth. Changing theories of human development suggest that there may be new considerations and ways of meeting spiritual, ethical, and educational needs. Philosophizing about religious education is something that needs to be done not just by a few experts, but by everyone who wishes to participate in religious education.

Explore. Love. Act.

We gather as an inclusive religious community to search for meaning, build deep connections, and inspire action toward a better world for all.