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Sunday Service 11 a.m.

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## Sunday Services

Child care is available and all are welcome.

The Sunday Service and Adult Programme are going to experiment with Theme Based Ministry. To that end, there is a theme for each month. More details will be provided on the UFF website or by email. Please make an intention to attend as you are able and willing.

### February Theme is Community Service

**February 1** The Unitarian Chamber Readers *A Trip Up Wisdom Mountain* A play with songs sung and childhood morality tales retold.

**February 8** Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes *Theme is Community*

**February 15** Heather Lunergan *Sharing Our Faith Sunday*

**February 22** Rev. Priscilla Geisterfer *Each One A Sacred Path*

### March Theme is Gratitude

**March 1** Rev. David Hutchinson

**March 8** Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes *Theme is Gratitude*



## Women's Pot Luck

The February Unitarian Fellowship women's pot luck will be held Friday, February 27th, 2015. Deby Nash will host the gathering at her home, 845 McLeod Ave. Apt. 319. We gather at 6 PM and eat at 6:30 PM. The topic for discussion will be Life purpose. Do you believe in such a thing? Do you have one? Do you want one? Visitor parking signage clearly indicated at back of building and enforced..(!) Buzz Deby's apt. from front and take elevator to third floor. For further information contact Joan Brewer at [jebrewer@rogers.com](mailto:jebrewer@rogers.com)



## Spaghetti Supper & Games Evening

**Saturday, February 14<sup>th</sup>**

Supper - 5:30 Spaghetti, bread, dessert - Gluten Free and Vegetarian available

Games - 6:30 Multi-generational - bring your own games/cards

There are some games at the Fellowship if you forget!

Bring family and friends for a fun evening.

**Charge:** \$2.00 each

For further information please call:

Sheila Moore 363-2480



## Thursday Night Discussion

**Community and Diversity**

**February 19 at 7-8:30 p.m.**

For many reasons, this is a good time to talk about diversity: February is Black History month, our monthly theme of Community calls us to think about what a community which is inclusive of diverse beliefs and backgrounds looks like, and world events have drawn our attention to the

harsh realities of racial, ethnic, religious and class divisions.

In celebration of Black History Month, the UNB Art Centre will be hosting several events featuring Sylvia D. Hamilton. An award-winning filmmaker and an acclaimed poet, Dr. Hamilton will be giving a poetry reading and talk on Thursday, February 5, at 7 p.m. In addition, a lunchtime film series will run from Monday, February 2 to Friday, February 6, screening Dr. Hamilton's films as well as others related to the Black History of Canada. All films will be screened at Memorial Hall, starting at 12 p.m. The reading will also take place at Memorial Hall.

Much of Dr. Hamilton's work exposes the systemic racism that Black Canadians have experienced across the country. Her collection of poems, *And I Alone Escaped to Tell You*, deals with the settlement of African peoples in Nova Scotia, and discusses the complex layers of the lives of early Black Nova Scotians and the generations that followed.

More information on Sylvia D. Hamilton's visit and the schedule of films can be found through a link in a copy of this article in the Timely News section of the uff.ca web site. That copy will be available until the discussion night.

A discussion on Community and Diversity will open our Thursday Night Discussion series, which starts on February 19 at 7 p.m. Members and friends who are interested in the topic may wish to attend the poetry reading or one of the film screenings. The movie *Selma* and the book or the TV series entitled *The Book of Negroes* also provide excellent insights into slavery, civil rights, and other historical issues. Finally, the situation of our First Nations and Aboriginal peoples can remind us that issues of diversity in Canada are not relegated to past injustices: "Canada has a bigger race problem than America. And it's ugliest in Winnipeg," lamented a *Maclean's* magazine headline. I'll be sharing some information on the Facebook page in the weeks leading up to the Thursday Night Discussion.

Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes



## Popcorn Theology: *Fruitvale Station*

February 15 at 4:00 p.m.

Like our Thursday Night Discussion topic, our Popcorn Theology selection was chosen with the idea of Community and Diversity in mind.

*Fruitvale Station* is a 2013 American drama film written and directed by Ryan Coogler. It is Coogler's first feature-length film and is based on the events leading to the death of Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old young man who was killed by BART police officer Johannes Mehserle at the Fruitvale Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Station in Oakland, California. The film shows Oscar's last 24 hours before

he was fatally shot by BART Police in the early morning hours of New Year's Day 2009.

The film stars Michael B. Jordan as Oscar Grant. It debuted at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival, where it won the Grand Jury Prize and the Audience Award for U.S. dramatic film. It was screened in the 'Un Certain Regard' section at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival where it won the award for Best First Film. The film was released in theatres July 12, 2013. It received critical acclaim upon its release and earned other awards.

Please note that while Popcorn Theology films are generally appropriate for all ages, this movie is rated R (for some violence, language throughout and some drug use). We would ask that youth under 17 be accompanied by or bring permission from a parent if they attend.

The Popcorn Theology program is led by Gabe Elder-Gomes, a film student at UNB. Join us every month (on the third Sunday) for pizza at 4 p.m., the screening of a movie, and a discussion on the craft and content of the film.



## Beginnings

Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes

On January 25, we intended to begin our Theme-Based Ministry program at the Fellowship. Each month, we will have a Sunday Service on the theme, and a Theme Night on the last Thursday of the month.

Since we missed the opportunity to begin the TBM program at the beginning, I am including some of the readings and the questions I had prepared for worship that morning. The first two readings are adapted from articles by UU ministers on the theme of Beginnings.

### 1. "In the Beginning"

*adapted from an article by Reverend Nancy Shaffer*

You have perhaps heard the humorous story of cosmological beginnings in which the earth is understood to be a flat, circular disc resting on pillars. The inquiring mind naturally pursues deeper:

"But, pray tell, what are the pillars resting on?" "Why, the pillars rest on large stones." "I see. And upon what do the large stones rest?" "Well, the large stones rest upon the broad backs of elephants." "Ah, and may I then ask, upon what do the elephants stand?" "On the back of a giant turtle." "And what does the turtle rest on?" "Oh, from there it's turtles all the way down."

Whatever your cosmology, whatever understanding you have of the nature of our cosmos and its origin, there is a point at which the curtain falls and we stand before an abyss of unknowing—the point at which it's turtles all the

way down.

In such a search for beginnings, the rational mind is shown its limits, unable to investigate the ground of its own being. But though we must always stand humbly before this ultimate cosmological question, perhaps we can say something about the creative process itself, and in this way acquaint ourselves with the ultimate power of being out of which we all come and back into which we all return.

How does creation begin? How can we talk about the beginning of creation since we join it mid-stream? It is already well along the way before we become aware of it—we can only look back upon it.

Reading Genesis, Christians and Jews face their first question: Is this creation out of nothing—*creatio ex nihilo*—or did the Creator God in this story have pre-existing materials with which he was working? Whatever conclusion one might come to on that question, in the beginning—at the beginning of creative activity, before any creation takes place—there is no form or differentiation of any kind. There is only formless void, waste, chaos. The original waters of creation are not contained in any boundaries or forms. In the beginning, says the story, water covers everything. There is only water, but water without anything to contain it or shape it or give it form.

This is how it is in the beginning, says this story of beginnings. Potential only. Chaos. This, looking back, is a beginning element of a creation. And then, with the light, the first differentiation is seen in the chaos and the darkness. A signal that creation has begun. This is the beginning: the division into light and dark. You now feel yourself making your first headway in the dark, watery void.

Something that before was completely unconscious now becomes crudely conscious. That which is unconscious, which is potentiality only, now begins to become actual, emerging from water.

Dry land. A place to stand. And now creation can take place in earnest, with all different forms and shapes and plans, gradual and simple at first, but becoming increasingly complex. The dome of heaven can be hung with lights, and the disc of earth can become green with vegetation and with creatures of all kinds. And the seas, similarly, can be filled with living things of all kinds.

This, then, is the beginning of beginnings: First, chaos in the formless void. Second, early stages of differentiation. And third, movement toward the more finely differentiated.

Enough, then, to begin a new year.

Enough for the beginning of a new creative cycle.

Enough to know that creation does not happen instantaneously.

Enough to know that chaos is a necessary element in creation.

Enough to know that much may be going on beneath the surface and in the darkness.

Enough to know that we become aware of a creative process long after it is already under way.

Enough to know that we may some day be conscious enough to be partners with the creativity that has birthed us.

Enough to know that patience may be useful, that trust may be helpful, and that the new year may be interesting in ways we could never, ever dream.

## 2. “The Beginning is Now”

*adapted from an article by Reverend Sara Husjen*

The beginning is now,

and will always be...

There's another train.

There always is.

Maybe the next one is yours.

Get up and climb aboard

another train.

—Pete Morton

The words in the song expressed a longing I recognized as my own at that time: a kind of hope or faith that I wanted to hang onto, the confidence to believe that somehow, regardless of whatever has come before—whatever heartbreak or loss or disappointment we have known in our lives—we can move on. We can allow our experience to shape us, yes, but not to hold us back or keep us from taking chances again.

This song said to me that despite whatever we've done, forgiveness is possible; that beginning again is possible; that setting out and charting a new direction in our lives is possible; that however difficult or scary or overwhelming it may seem, change is, in fact, always possible. The beginning is now, and will always be. . . .

Kathleen McTigue writes:

The first of January is another day dawning, the sun rising as the sun always does, the earth moving in its rhythms. . . . Yet also we stand at a threshold, the new year something truly new, still unformed, leaving a stunning power in our hands.

As the old year dies and the new one begins, we have the opportunity to be mindful of this threshold and to take time to reflect on the past year, to remember what it held for us, good and bad.

In my work and ministry with hospice, I've learned to listen closely to what people say about their lives and their experience, knowing that it often has a lot to teach me about living my own life. People wrestling with a serious or terminal illness are often very aware of what matters, and what's most meaningful in their lives. For some, this awareness ushers in a sense of gratitude for all they've had—for their children and grandchildren, for the long life

they've been fortunate to live, even in spite of difficulties they've known.

The most common regret people express at the end of life is: "I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me." How many dreams, I wonder, have gone unfulfilled in your life to date? How can you, or might you, honour some of them, starting now? I'm reminded of a poem by May Sarton that begins, "Now I become myself. It's taken / Time, many years and places; / I have been dissolved and shaken, / Worn other people's faces..." What does it mean in your life to be true to who you are in this moment? Another regret is "I wish I'd let myself be happier." Implicit in this thought is that happiness is a choice we can make: that happiness becomes possible when we choose to appreciate what we have, and to act on what we know is right and good. Happiness, in any real sense, becomes possible when we're aware of our attitude, when we're willing to step outside of our usual comfort zones, daring to be more authentic, aware and appreciative of the parts of our lives that truly matter.

The question, on this cusp of the new year, is how will we learn to grow through all the days of our lives—bruised up at times, but also seasoned and made more wise through our experience.

In this new year, may you find the courage to live a life true to yourself. May you find a balance between work and play, between the many demands we all know and having the time for people and relationships that are most important to you. May you dare to express yourself and remember to be in touch with those you love. And may you choose to walk down the new road toward happiness. The beginning is now, and will always be...

The final reading is a reflection I wrote myself.

### **3. Starting Over and Over**

*by Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes*

Reverend Rod Richards writes: "Begin at the beginning, they say... but few of us have that luxury. We must begin things in the messy middle of it all. We are beginning, often, from an ending of something else. We are not just starting; we are starting over and over again."

How did you start this new year? How are you finishing the first month of 2015? What came to an end in 2014, and what beginning did it bring? And what messiness do you have to forgive yourself for? In the hymn "Come, Come, Whoever You Are," Reverend Linda Thomson told us, there is a line that is sometimes sung: "Though I've broken my vows a thousand times." Come, you are welcome here, even if you are broken, even if you have broken your promises to yourself and to others. That is all part of the adventure, part of the chaos that will give rise to creativity and give birth to new parts of yourself.

I don't know if you saw the Facebook app that presented photos people had posted during 2014. People could mod-

ify the photos, and change the statement that framed the photo on the front of the others, but the "default" presentation was: "It's been a great year. Thanks for being part of it." Now, having Facebook change something doesn't surprise me, but I have to admit that the way this popped up without warning was kind of scary. For me, and for many others who are on a Facebook group I belong to, it was also very sad. Of course, the picture on the front of my year's summary was one I had posted and shared and one that many people had commented on, so it was, according to the Facebook matrix, a popular photo. It was a beautiful portrait of my sister. My sister's death was easily the most painful and experience I have had in this decade so far, let alone in the past year, and is perhaps the one that in this millennium that will mark my life the most. And as I went through Christmas, sending supportive messages to my sister's children and sending a birthday card to her eldest grandchild, I kept thinking: I don't want to start a year that she won't be in. How can I keep on keeping on?

And yet, the end of my sister's life, this dark, chaotic, lightning-sharp pain and lightning-fast ending did have the seed of a beginning. The mourning period marked a leap forward in my own spiritual journey. The words became beautiful, deep-rooted signposts along the way. I was able to say I was sorry for the messy and cruel parts of our past together. She had already forgiven me. We had already started again. When I said goodbye to her, I wished her "blessings for the journey." I have been repeating the phrase "this blessed life" as an exercise in gratitude for a while. Now the word "journey" also seems powerful and inviting, like the invitation we hear in the first hymn we sang this morning: "come, yet again, come." When my sister was diagnosed with cancer, it was already terminal. She wrote on her Facebook page the day she found out there was no treatment and little time: "the next step is slipping into the mystery." That is how one of my dearest friends describes what happens after death, too: "It's a mystery." We never know what comes next. That's true of death and it's also true of life. We don't know what will happen next, and whether it will be murky or radiant.

"There is a place within us where uncertainty comes to rest.

"Joy and sorrow speak together there, in murmurs that stretch far into the dawn."

When someone leaves us, there is sometimes a movement of energy and love so overwhelming that it is hard to distinguish joy from sadness. This is an ending in the journey of love, and a beginning, too. We think we are just going on, alone, but we are actually standing in the middle, taking a deep breath, and then starting over and over again with hope, forgiveness, gratitude, and some measure of peace. Questions for Reflection:

At the Theme Nights I will be leading (on the last Thursday of every month from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.), we will be



using a format similar to small group ministry (chalice lighting, check-in, words for reflection, questions, check-out and closing words). In some Theme-Based worship services, we will also have a chance to read quotations or short passages and respond to questions in small groups.

Here are some questions about Beginnings:

- What ending has been a new beginning for you?
- How is starting over different from doing something for the first time? What do you require to be able to start over again when your trust or your courage has been broken?
- Talk about a time when you felt hope after a period of worry or sadness. Where did your sense of hope come from? Did it feel like you had found hope deep inside, or that it had just happened to you?



## Theme-Based Ministry

### Monthly Theme: Community

**Sunday Service: Sunday, February 8, at 11:00 a.m.**  
**Theme Night: Thursday, February 27, at 7:00 p.m.**

On February 8, I will be leading the Theme-Based Ministry Service. February's theme is Community: what it means to be together, whether as a whole we are greater than the sum of our parts, and what kind of communities we belong to.

The Sunday Service will feel a little bit different that morning. After the Chalice Lighting, we will be doing different activities in small groups. Some of you may remember the Multi-generational Circles we have done a few times in the past, for instance on one Mother's Day several years ago. This format consists of multi-age groups (parents and very young children, children, youth and young adults, and "more experienced" adults moving together to three different locations to do a different activity in each one. We are planning to have an art activity upstairs in the children's RE room (young children may stay there throughout the entire time, if they prefer), music near the piano, and conversation in the library. Every group will have the chance to take part in these three activities on the theme of Community.

On Thursday, we will be winding up the month with a reflection on what Community means to us as individuals: what it means to belong, what experiences have led us to be willing to open up to difference and what we bring to the different communities we are part of.

Last year, the Annual Conference and Meeting of the Canadian Unitarian Association chose, as its theme, Building Beloved ComUnity: Sacred Spaces Between Walls. We wanted to address some of the things that may be holding us back, as congregations or as a movement, including

low budgets and oversized and deteriorating church buildings linked to well-known demographic trends: the aging population, the unchurched "nones" whose needs may be different from those of the founders of Canada's largely humanist fellowship movement in the 50s, and so on. We wanted to talk about the different ways of "doing church": pub nights, virtual worship, small group ministry, for instance. We wanted to share ways of doing it all better and being better to each other: right relations, compassionate communication, covenanting, shared ministry.

In February, we will be experiencing Community, as well as thinking and talking about it, in different ways. The Unitarian Fellowship of Fredericton is one of the communities each of us belongs to—but what does it mean to be a member of friend of this particular community? Do we simply have to be willing and able to attend Sunday Services or events? Do we have to individually agree with the principles, or only affirm them as a congregation? Are we expected to enter into an unspoken or unwritten covenant to be together in a particular way?

As Reverend Linda Thomson reminded us last month, being "like-minded" might not be such a great thing, after all. Consensus can be forced, just as majority can exclude large numbers. A community which thrives is one that celebrates diversity, and Diversity is part of our theme this month, as well. I like this quotation by Reverend Ray Drennan, who invites us to think of Unitarian Universalist gatherings as "Collective Kitchens of the Spirit... What a picnic it would be if, in our congregations as a weekly and daily diet, we had more dynamic collective-kitchens of the spirit preparing wholesome authentic Unitarian foods of the Pagan, Cosmic, Humanist, Theist, Christian or Buddhist variety. What a picnic it would be if each Sunday morning we dared to reach across the table and try foods that were new to our pallet? Oh what a picnic that would be!"

Come to the picnic! Bring your whole self, whoever you are, whomever you love, whatever you believe. Bring whatever you have to offer to the table, where others bring their potluck dishes to share, or simply bring your appetite. You may savour some foods, pick at others, decline some politely, discover something amazing. But I hope you won't go hungry.

Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes



## Circle Conversation

### Small Group Ministry

February 12 at 7:30

Our Circle Conversation is starting up again in February! The group will be led by Janet Crawford and will be held once a month, on the second Thursday, from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

Circle Conversations are small groups (no more than 10 people) who meet on an ongoing basis to discuss personal, philosophical, and spiritual topics chosen in advance. The members explore their reflections on these topics in a respectful, positive and supportive environment. The conversations can be life affirming and even transformative.

This year the group will be open to new members until the March meeting, run until the end of June, and will open up to new members again in September. Flyers about small group ministry and our Circle Conversations are available in the hallway outside the sanctuary. If you would like to join the Circle Conversation, please contact Janet at janetcra@nbnet.nb.ca.



## Celebration of Faith and Diversity

The religious studies class of Dr. Alexandra Bain is again planning a Celebration of Faith and Diversity at St. Thomas University. This year, it is planned to limit the session to just a Sunday afternoon in the hopes that this will allow fewer conflicts and more people to attend. The details are still being nailed down, however, the following has, to the best of your humble servants recollection been decided.

Primarily, this article is intended to be a “save the date” request.

The celebration will take place on Sunday, March 29<sup>th</sup> from 1pm to 4pm with a shared meal to follow. Each participating group will prepare an item for the meal. The location will probably be the same as the past few celebrations, the Noël A. Kinsella Auditorium, however, they are considering a more intimate venue, so this may change.

The theme this year is “hospitality”. Each participating group is asked to prepare a 15 minute (it may be shorter or slightly longer once details are finalized) presentation on the place that hospitality holds in our tradition.



## The CUC AGM, ACM & Visioning

### Proposed Resolutions for CUC AGM

Four proposals are coming to the Annual General Meeting to be held at Algonquin College in Ottawa on May 15, 2015:

- Abortion Rights
- Fossil Fuel Divestment
- Right to Clean Air, Water and Soil
- Truth and Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians

The CUC is asking congregations to schedule time in February to consider these proposals together. Then provide our feedback directly to the Proposers by February 28 using a provided Feedback Form. Please note that no substantive amendments will be entertained after February 28.

After the Proposers have received feedback and made any necessary changes, the final version of the resolution will be circulated to all congregations by mid-March so that your congregation can engage in further discussion about the resolution and decide how you may wish to instruct your delegates to vote on the resolution at the AGM.

Delegates are encouraged to join the delegate discussion groups. The editor of Touchstone can provide electronic copy of additional information (resolution text, feedback form, proposer contact info) if desired.

### Got Delegates?

Our congregation’s delegates are important folks – they step up to become familiar with the business going to the CUC’s Annual General Meeting, and then share this with your congregations. They are the carriers of your congregation’s wishes when it comes to voting on resolutions. Now that the proposed resolutions are available, if you haven’t yet had the opportunity to do so, we suggest that you take advantage of CUC Month in February to select your delegates. To support you in this process, CUC staff has put together some information about representation, delegate selection, preparation for the AGM, and roles of delegates prior to and in-between AGMs.

Again, the editor of Touchstone can provide an electronic variant of this article with links to additional information.

### Annual Conference and Meeting, May 15-17, Algonquin College, Ottawa

2015’s theme is “Seeking Justice in a Changing Land - À la recherche de la justice sur une terre changeante.” The Host and Program Planning Committees are busy putting together a weekend experience filled with music, sharing, provocative conversation, worship and fun. Registration

and program information will be available in early February. For now, to whet your appetite, here's a look at what's in store:

- Matt Meyer, a gifted musician who says that "rhythm is fundamental to our experience as humans... Through rhythm and music we have the potential to grow our relationships with each other and the divine," will lead us through a multi-generational musical experience on Friday evening. Matt will also facilitate a music and justice stream on Saturday.
- Workshops will feature discussions on a sustainable future, truth and reconciliation with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, how Canadian UUs can live our faith, and other thought-provoking content.
- A multi-gen team of youth, young adults and young-at-heart, is putting ideas together for multi-generational Sunday, with time to play and learn together.
- Children under 14 will be part of a fun weekend, planned by Susan McEwen, Director of Lifespan Learning at First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa.
- CanUUdle XVI, the youth conference that happens concurrently over the weekend, will take place at the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa. Your CanUUdle staff team is busy with planning!

- Rev. Stephen Atkinson, 2015's Confluence Lecturer, will speak about the brain as our spiritual organ, virtue as our spiritual goal, and justice as our spiritual imperative.
- Pre-and-post ACM events and training for lay chaplains, Our Whole Lives (OWL) facilitators, musicians, religious educators and ministers... Look for details when the ACM site is live.

We hope you and many members of your congregations will come together with us in the capital city of Ottawa.

Visioning for the Canadian Unitarian Universalist Movement: What might the future of Canadian Unitarian Universalism look like, transformed by our care and commitment?

The CUC Board of Trustees is leading a conversation on visioning for our national faith community, and inviting all Canadian UUs to be part of the dialogue. The Board invites your congregation or community to take part in conversations happening across the country – the editor of Touchstone will send you on request an electronic variant of this article with links to the Visioning material and Revs. Fiona Heath and Carly Gaylor explaining why it is imperative for Canadian UUs to engage in this conversation now.

This space wants your material!  
Please send articles to [touchstone@uff.ca](mailto:touchstone@uff.ca)