874 York Street, Fredericton, N.B., E3B 3R8

(506) 451-0919

Sunday Service 11 a.m.

Web Site: http://www.uff.ca

Email: office@uff.ca

Newsletter editor: touchstone@uff.ca

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stairs) and art-making (upstairs). We will explore what it means to be welcomed into deep hospitality.

Sept 25: Church of the Larger Fellowship Worship Service. Each week, the Church of the Larger Fellowship (the Unitarian Universalist Association's congregation without walls) presents a worship service online. Jo-Anne will talk about what the CLF is and does, and we will watch a worship service from its archives.



Sunday Services - Calendar

Please note that our Sunday Services will begin at 10:30am starting on September 11.

The two Sundays before September 11 will continue in the more casual "Summer Sunday" format we have been following.

Parents are asked to let us know in advance if their children are planning to attend the children's program. Please contact Jo-Anne at eldergomes@yahoo.com by Thursday evening before the service.

September Theme: Invitation

Aug 28: Happiness... a conversation led by Myron.

Sept 4: Labour Day weekend. Looking ahead. Host: Jo-Anne E-G

Sept 11: Ingathering. this and subsequent services begin at 10:30 am Our 2016-2017 Fellowship year begins with a Water Communion. Please bring a small container of water collected from your travels or your home. You will be invited to merge it with that of others to mark our coming together for the first time of this year. The service will be followed by a corn boil and pot luck. If you are able, please bring a dish to share with others.

Sept 18: Interactive and Multigenerational *Theme Service: Invitation*. Children, youth, and adults are invited to come together to take part in singing (down-

Adult Program

The Adult Program Committee will continue to offer "Third Thursday" evenings as an outreach and community-building exercise. These evenings would begin at 7 pm and offer either a movie or a lecture (some live and some via technology) followed by a short discussion period. The movies or lectures will often, although not always, reflect the monthly theme of the Fellowship. Please watch for more details, which will be posted on our Facebook and Website. Third Thursdays will begin on Sept. 15 when Heather Lunergan will host. The online video that evening will be of the Canadian Unitarian Council's 2015 "Confluence Lecture." The Confluence Lectures are an annual event offered by Ministers within the CUC. The lecture to be shown is from 2015. Entitled "Spirit: The Necessary Foundation of Social Justice," it was presented by Rev. Stephen Atkinson of Vancouver, who began his journey into Unitarianism within the Fellowship here in Fredericton.



Women's Pot Luck

The next Unitarian Fellowship women's pot luck will be held Friday, September 23rd. Judi Day will host the gathering at her home, 280 Dunns Crossing. We gather at 6 PM and eat at 6:30 PM. The topic for discussion will be Change. Tell us how you handle change in your life. Has the way you handled it changed over the years? For further information, contact Joan Brewer at jebrewer@rogers.com



Sunday Services: Something New!

New Start Time!

Starting on September 11, 2016, we will be starting our Sunday Services at 10:30 a.m.

New Approach!

Those of you who have been attending services over the last several years may know that we have have adopted an approach to planning our Sunday Services according to monthly themes. We piloted theme-based ministry from January to June, 2015, with a Congregational Conversation led by Reverend Linda Thomson in January, and continued it throughout 2015-2016. We tried to begin each month with a theme service, often in an interactive and/or multigenerational format, and offer other services and activities related to the theme throughout the month. Last year, our Circle Conversations, Children's program, Youth and Young Adult Small Group Ministry, movie night, and occasional and presentations were organized around the monthly theme. I sometimes wrote reflection pieces in The Touchstone to introduce the theme.

This year we have an opportunity to work with the Universalist Unitarian Church of Halifax on an "electronic circuit ministry" by live streaming some of Rev. Norm Horofker's worship services or broadcasting previously recorded services on our screen. Halifax has theme-based ministry, as well, and most or all of the weekly services are related to the theme.

Those attending felt that it would be best to use the theme in as many services as possible during the month. We will broadcast services on the theme from Halifax and have one interactive / multigenerational service on our theme each month Our theme will generally be the same as the one in Halifax, but we will explore different themes over a few months. We will invite speakers from the Fellowship or outside to speak either on theme-related or other subjects on the other Sunday(s) each month.

At a planning meeting on August 18, several members of the Board, committee chairs, and others who work in roles which would be affected by the new approach had a chance to discuss how the Sunday services would work and to meet with Rev Norm using the Zoom platform on which the services from Halifax will be streamed. Those attending felt that it would be best to use the theme in as many services as possible during the month. We still have a few details to work out, but once we have piloted the Zoom stream (probably in October) we expect that we will be streaming services on the theme from Halifax twice a month and have one interactive / multigenerational service on our theme on another Sunday. Our theme will generally be the same as the one in Halifax, but we will explore different themes over a few months. Because we

also want to ensure a balance of social justice, academic, personal, theological, and spiritual subjects, and want to invite speakers from the Fellowship and the wider community, we will include talks on theme-related or other subjects on the other Sunday(s) each month. It was noted that we should find a way to integrate announcements and joys and sorrows into the services streamed from Halifax; we have also been asked to set up a web camera and mic in addition to the laptop so we can transmit as well as receive videos.

Themes for 2016-2017

Here is the list of themes we have chosen for the coming Fellowship year. In cases where Halifax will be exploring a different theme for the services we are streaming, it is indicated in parentheses.

September, 2016: Invitation

October: Covenant (Halifax theme is Blessing)

November: Quest and Learning (Halifax theme is Letting Go)

December: Expectation January, **2017:** Creation February: Love and Justice March: Simplicity / Abundance

April: Sacred Places (Halifax theme is resistance)

May: Compassion June: Growth



Reflections on our Monthly Theme: Invitation

"Come, come, whoever you are. Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving. It doesn't matter. Ours is not a caravan of despair. Come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times. Come, come again, come."

-Mewlana Jellaludin Rumi

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honourably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.

meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes. because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

-Mewlana Jellaludin Rumi,

translation by Coleman Barks

The Invitation by Oriah Mountain Dreamer

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for, and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.

It doesn't interest me how old you are.

I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love, for your dreams, for the adventure of being alive.

It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon.

I want to know if you have touched the centre of your own sorrow.

if you have been opened by life's betrayals or have become shrivelled and closed from fear of further pain.

I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own, without moving to hide it or fade it or fix it.

(Read the complete poem at:

http://www.oriahmountaindreamer.com/

"Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines." True hospitality can be offered only by those who 'have found the center of their lives in their own hearts'."

-Henri J.M. Nouwen, Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life

"Radical hospitality is both a personal and institutional spiritual practice of being curious about and open to new people and to diverse cultures and life-ways. And it's more. Radical hospitality reflects a willingness and even a hunger to engage across lines of difference. It reflects a willingness and a hunger to offer service, care and love to new and different people, to those who come to us in need, to those "who come hurt and afraid," [4] as we said in our opening words. Radical hospitality is impatient. It reflects a willingness and a hunger to go out into the larger community to offer service, care and love rather than waiting for people to visit on Sunday morning. And more than that, radical hospitality reflects a willingness and a hunger to challenge and transform systems of injustice and oppression in solidarity with others who feel

similarly called, whether or not they ever decide to visit us on Sunday morning."

-Rev. Josh Pawelek

"There is only one invitation it would kill me to refuse, yet I'm tempted to turn it down all the time. I get the invitation every morning when I wake up to actually live a life of complete engagement, a life of whimsy, a life where love does. It doesn't come in an envelope. It's ushered in by a sunrise, the sound of a bird, or the smell of coffee drifting lazily from the kitchen. It's the invitation to actually live, to fully participate in this amazing life for one more day. Nobody turns down an invitation to the White House, but I've seen plenty of people turn down an invitation to fully live.

"Turning down this invitation comes in lots of flavors. It looks like numbing yourself or distracting yourself or seeing something really beautiful as normal. It can also look like refusing to forgive or not being grateful or getting wrapped around the axle with fear or envy. I think every day God sends us an invitation to live and sometimes we forget to show up or get head-faked into thinking we haven't really been invited. But you see, we have been invited —every day, all over again"

Bob Goff,Love Does:Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World

Clearing: an Invitation

Clearing

Do not try to save the whole world or do anything grandiose.

Instead, create a clearing in the dense forest of your life and wait there patiently, until the song that is your life falls into your own cupped hands and you recognize and greet it.

Only then will you know how to give yourself to this world so worthy of rescue.

-Martha Postlewaite

Create a clearing, listen for your song and let it teach you how to give yourself to this world. There is no better description of the religious life than this! And notice that it all begins with invitation, with the deep humility and knowledge that while the song is deeply ours, it also comes from something or somewhere beyond ourselves. It takes time, but eventually we each come to realize that—to be whole and to find home—a space must be made, a clearing must be created, and otherness must be invited in.

 $\overline{}$ From the UU Congregation of Tennessee

Spiritual Exercises: Invitation

1. Invited to Grow

"I'd learned enough from life's experiences to understand that destiny's interventions can sometimes be read as invitation for us to address and even surmount our biggest fears. It doesn't take a great genius to recognize that when you are pushed by circumstance to do the one thing you have always most specifically loathed and feared, this can be, at the very least, an interesting growth opportunity."

> -Elizabeth Gilbert, Committed:

A Skeptic Makes Peace with Marriage

Reflection or Journalling Prompt:

When have you felt invited—or compelled—to make a change in your life because of something that happened to you? What events or experiences in your life have turned out to be opportunities to grow? Did you have to overcome fear, anger, resentment, or reluctance in order to make room for this change?

2. Monk or Pilgrim, Bear or Salmon?

In her essay, Following an Ancient Call (1), Christine Valtners Paintner reflects on two basic spiritual orientations. Each of them is a different response to the call to authenticity. The first, the monk, is associated with the spirit of the bear, hibernating to replenish strength and wisdom. The second, the pilgrim, is associated with the salmon that heeds the call to leave everything behind, as every generation has done.

"The monk in me feels the call of moving inward. My inner monk knows the deep wisdom to be found in rest, in slowness and spaciousness, in not letting the productivity of the world keep me running ever faster, that the only person who can say "no" and stop and open up to the eternity of this moment, is me. Like the bear, I know the power to be gained from following my natural rhythms, rather than those the world around me demands. I know how much more sustainable my work is and how much more joy I discover in it when I come from a place of replenishment rather than depletion. And I know how powerful of a witness it is to the world to live this way.

"The pilgrim in me feels the call of moving outward. My inner pilgrim feels a longing to travel, to walk across new landscapes, to find myself the stranger so that everything I think I know can be gently released in favour of the deeper truth only revealed in the wandering. Like the salmon, I know the power of the inner voice that says you must leave behind everything you know and travel far across the ocean to a place called home. I know the miles and miles of ease and flow and the mighty rivers which test my strength and resolve, and I know that to refuse this endless longing is to refuse the life and radiance that are mine. And I know that death, the release of things I once held dear, is an essential part of the new birth."

(1) Paintner's poem and essay can be found here: http://abbeyofthearts.com/blog/2013/08/19/following-an-ancient-call-a-love-note-from-your-online-abbess/

Reflection or Journalling Prompt: Which orientation is strongest in your life right now? Do you feel yourself called to rest and silence, like the bear, or do you long to discover new and ancient ways of being? Is your inner journey one of stillness or movement, evolution or transformation?



A Covenantal Community

Some of what follows comes from a presentation given by Sheila Moore and Joan Brewer at a Sunday Service this past January and many of the words are taken from a CUC workshop they attended. As well, some of what follows is from workshops offered by Rev. David Hutchinson two years ago.

What does it mean to be a Covenantal Community?

Sometimes Unitarian Universalists are asked, "If you don't need to all believe the same thing, what holds you together?" The answer lies in the tradition and practice of covenantal community. UU congregations, at their best, are communities where people come together with an explicit agreement regarding the ways they'll communicate, engage and explore together. Sylvia Hale reported in a previous Touchstone that Rev. David Hutchinson said that covenant is about how we talk with each other and also about how respectful we are of people who are not present. "The principle of respect for the inherent worth and dignity of every person requires that we accept limits on what we can say about others" and what we say to others. Covenant is a practice that is applied each time two or more people in the group are present. Rev Hutchinson indicated that it is important that we learn together to have a shared vocabulary, to have clear agreements and to have shared accountability.

Unitarian Universalist theologian James Luther Adams says human beings, individually and collectively, become human by making commitments, by making promises. Uniting in the common bonds of relationship rather than in obedience to a religious dogma is a distinguishing feature of UU. Most of us realize the amount of theological diversity engendered from the absence of dogma and creed. Why in this small congregation alone we have agnostics, atheists, Buddhists, Christians, pagans and probably others that I am not aware of. But, says Rev. Adams, theological diversity and absence of dogma and creed are not to be understood as a philosophy of anything goes. He goes on to say that the gifts and blessing of free inquiry, skepticism and seeking bring with them responsibility. Our fourth principle speaks to this with clarity. We affirm and promote the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. Adams says that for some people this principle of theological free thinking, religious progressivism and

spiritual seeking are translated as acceptance and tolerance of behaviour that can undermine, even harm, the religious and spiritual life of others and the well-being of our institutions. Most congregations have no clear context from which to respond to uncivil, inappropriate behaviour or disagreement. He goes on to say that while we can take pride in the theological differences that unite us, these differences are not always the best foundation for building a strong community. There must be something more.

Church historian Conrad Wright understands this dilemma and writes that Covenant emphasizes that the church is a community of mutual obligation which involves a sense of commitment. He goes on to say that even the freest of free churches needs that much discipline if it is to last long enough to accomplish anything of value in this world. In the absence of a shared and uniting religious creed, we commit with each other through the promises we make about how we will walk our mission toward creating the Beloved Community. The promises and commitments we make become our covenant. A covenant can provide the context from which we can take action; a covenant can support the creation of an accepting, safe congregation. The promises and commitments we make become our covenant.

Rev. Hutchison spoke about the four agreements proposed by Don Miguel Ruiz as being the following: Be impeccable with your word; don't take anything personally; don't make assumptions; always do your best. These agreements might form our covenant with each other

When you tell someone you attend the Unitarian Church, you might get asked "What do they believe?" I'm not sure how you reply. I usually say something that feels very inadequate. Rev. Thom Belote, a minister of a UU congregation in Kansas City tells us that the question is a creedal question and we are a covenantal faith, not a creedal faith. We share a covenant of how we try to be together, not a creed of what we all must believe together. Rev. Belote thinks that often we answer the question by stressing what we are not, rather than what we are.

A covenant is a promise or more precisely a statement describing the ideals of relationship the members of our community have agreed to aspire to live up to. It is a commitment that is able to maintain appreciation and affection even in disagreement and conflict. It means everyone can think differently and work together. We are not bound together by what we believe. We are bound together by the power of promising to be bound together.

Covenant is about how we keep our promises, not if we can; how we reconcile, not if we do; how we separate in good and loving ways if we can no longer live into our shared vision with all parties involved. Covenant demands reconciliation; requires consensus; and assists with growth and change. Its goal, and our goal as a community, should be to live into our promises and admit when we cannot. We are always to seek out the ways that we can begin

again in love. Rev. Nathional Hollister says that we only break community and rupture covenant completely when we fail to try to live into it together.

Covenant is what the 13th-century Persian Sufi mystic poet, Rumi, was talking about in the song Come, yet again, come. The power of covenant, of commitment to relationship, calls to us, whoever we are. The song says we are lovers of leaving and are always called to come back again. The song in our songbook has left out part of Rumi's original poem. Here's the whole thing:

Come, come, whoever you are.
Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving.
It doesn't matter.
Ours is not a caravan of despair.
Come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times.
Come, yet again, come, come.

That additional line, "even if you have broken your vows a thousand times," speaks to the nature of covenant. We fail. We fail in inevitable and daily ways to fully embody, to be fully present to the love that we have promised. Sometimes we even fail in egregious, heartrending ways to be the supportive presence we promised to be. Our heart fails to show up for the presence – to our spouse, our family, to our congregation – to which we committed it. It doesn't matter, says Rumi. Come, yet again, come. Even if you have broken your vows a thousand times, the vows still stand, broken but strangely unweakened, beckoning, inviting, calling, urging, whispering: return, re-commit, renew the heart's promise of presence and connection. Come, yet again. Come.

That's what covenant means.

Every time you say, "OK. I will come", or say again, "All right. I'm here, and I will stay with you." Every time you say something like this you re-enter the life of covenant. We abide in the life of covenant only by continually re-entering it. Sheila Moore and I feel strongly that it is the right time for us as a community to spend a day developing a covenant and presenting it to our Board and then our membership, asking for their acceptance of what is created. This fall we intend to ask all who want to be part of creating our covenant to come together for a day of creation. I hope you will join us in doing this.

Joan Brewer



Eastern Region Fall Gathering

Save the Date: October 22nd: *Heart, Head and Hands - Unitarian Universalism*. This year, the Lakeshore Congregation in Western Montréal will host the gathering. Check the CUC website cuc.ca/events for more informa-

tion as it becomes available. There will be a **youth** component!



Letters to Malcolm

Chiefly on Prayer by C.S. Lewis

The, author was an intelligent, questioning Christian. Yes, it's also the man who wrote The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe and several other popular children's books and the style is sometimes a bit whimsical and wandering, but in a discussion with his friend Malcolm he raises some interesting issues on why he prays and the form prayers take.

He sees prayer as a way of communicating with something greater than ourselves and as a devout Anglican he finds the formal language of set prayers makes him feel at home and allows him to make progress in the art of worshipgetting beyond himself,- without fussing in his mind about changes made in the wording. But he thinks prayer without words is the best a human can achieve. Words are an anchor, or at best a conductor's baton, but they are not the music. They are a reminder of what we ought to ask so that we do not just get desperate about present needs.

The set words remind him to confess his sins and make requests and he wonders what's the point in this if the greater spirit knows everything already. His answer is that it gets him in the habit of turning to a greater spirit for help.

So he follows this with analysis of The Lord's Prayer, maybe something many of us have already done. "Thy will be done", for him means I will put up with it and I will help to get it done. Others of us might just think of it as "May the good succeed. There are many references to Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane when he knew crucifixion was likely, asking to escape it- if that was God's will. "Lead us not into temptation", to him means into trials, because the original Greek can be interpreted that way, but he still has trouble with this phrase and suggests it means do not give me all that I ask for if it will give me snares or sorrows. Teach me to ask for what is good. He also wonders if it is worth concentrating too much on "our trespasses" as individual sins, so he might not be able to think of greater things.

Asking for things in prayer also worries him. Again he presumes the greater spirit knows all his needs and those of others he prays for. Concentrating on present needs is also likely to make it harder to get beyond ourselves. He sees this as another reason to use formal prayers as much as possible. Shared darkness can lead to greater contact with others and with the greater spirit. So, as Pascal says, prayer can confer on the individual the grace of being a cause. However he thinks the idea that someone only has

to "Ask and it shall be given" only works for those so close to the greater spirit that they know what the spirit can achieve. False hope only leads to extra pain.

So praying shows that he recognises that what happens in this world is not governed, like a state, but created like a work of art to which every being makes its contribution and in prayer he feels conscious of this contribution and knows that every being is both a means and an end.

His conclusion still shows some doubts. What is the nature of this self and what is the nature of the other in this experience? So he doesn't provide all the answers. But he makes some interesting points to think about. This book is in the Unitarian library under Other Religions.

Sheila Andrew



Unitarians at Pride 2016



A small but enthusiastic band of Unitarians from Fredericton participated in this years Pride march, Heidi and her girls among them.



Electoral Reform

What's It All About

The last time we had a national referendum in Canada was in 1992. It was on the Charlottetown Accord. I must confess, although I cast a ballot, I was really not informed enough to understand fully what a yes or no vote really meant for Canada.

Now that I am a Unitarian, in keeping with our principles that support democracy, I feel I have an obligation to be better prepared and knowledgeable about a change in our voting system to proportional representation (PR).

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promised to end our current first-past- the-post (FPTP) voting system and to bring in PR before the next election. We don't know yet if there will be a referendum. The federal Liberal government may just chose a system for us. But there is a Special Committee on Electoral Reform set up to examine the issue and our own MP Matt DeCourcey has been appointed to the committee.

There will be an opportunity to offer our own views and hear from others when the committee pays a visit to Fredericton and holds a public forum here on **Friday**, Oct.7.

In an effort to begin to understand what our options are I attended a meeting on Aug 9, put on by a newly created Fredericton chapter of Fair Vote Canada.

The main presenter was Dave Meslin of Ontario who gave his presentation via Skype. Meslin worked for electoral reform in referendums in Ontario in 2007 and British Columbia in 2009. There has also been a referendum on PR on Prince Edward Island. None of them resulted in changing the voting systems in those three provinces.

Meslin believes FPTP elections to be unfair because the resulting Parliament, or provincial Legislature, will be run by a political party that rarely obtains even half of all the votes cast in an election.

"If the results don't reflect what the people asked for it kind of defeats the whole point of having an election in the first place," said Meslin.

He favours two forms of PR, Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) or Single Transferable Vote (STV). There are several other forms but these two seem to be popular in other democracies.

Under MMP there would be two types of members sent to Ottawa, one member who represents ridings, just as we have now. Then there would be additional seats in Parliament, it could be 20 percent of the total seats, or 30 per cent, up to 50 per cent. Each party would have a list of candidates and they would chose additional members from that list based on the proportion of the votes they got across the whole country.

The lists are created at a convention, voted on by party members, no different than how parties chose their candidates now.

"It compensates for lack of proportionality in the riding seats by allocating party list seats in the house... to create a Parliament that reflects the popular vote," said Meslin.

Advantages of the MMP system are that there are still single member ridings and it retains geographic representation and proportionality.

New Zealand and Germany have adopted the MMP system.

The Single Transferable Vote (STV) is much more complex and harder for voters to understand.

Under that system large multi-member ridings are created. As an example seven ridings in the Fredericton area could form a single riding with seven members sent to Ottawa.

On their ballot voters would be asked to rank the candidates in order of their preference, 1, 2 3, etc.

A complex formula is used to decide how many votes a candidate needs to win. On the first count of the ballots all the number ones are added up. The ones that hit the threshold are elected. If not enough candidates reach the threshold then the second choices are added on. Where the "transfer" occurs is if a candidate's votes tally up to more than the threshold number his or her surplus votes are transferred to other candidates that are still in the running, based on the count of second choices. Candidates with the lowest number of votes will be bumped off and their votes will also be redistributed among remaining contenders. The process continues until all the seats of that riding are filled.

One advantage to candidates is "it lowers the threshold that you need to win," said Meslin. As an example he said if 10 ridings merged into a multi-member riding with 10 MPs, a party with 10 per cent of the vote, which would never win a seat under FPTP, could be given one of those ten seats.

One advantage over MMP is every elected member is representing a specific riding and geographic area. Disadvantages are the confusing math and, in Canada's case, the creation of some very large ridings.

Two countries that use STV are Ireland and Australia.

Meslin encourages people to gain a good understanding of these two alternative voting systems but don't look for one that is perfect.

"There is no perfect voting system and if you are looking for the flaws you will find flaws in any system," said Meslin.

Some other sources to learn more about PR are:

www.electoral-reform.org.uk with the title "The 2016 Irish General Election, PR and the Local Link".

Library of Parliament, "Referendums in Canada, The Effect of Populist Decision Making on Representative Democracy" by Pierre Marquis

Meslin runs a group called Unlock Democracy which you can find at unlockdemocracy.ca

If you want to get in touch with the Fair Vote Canada Fredericton chapter email: andrewsmithmaclean@gmail.com

Then there is the web site of the electoral reform committee itself at:

www.parl.gc.ca/Committees/en/ERRE

Submitted by Glenna Hanley