

# GOOD NEWS

"Witnessing to the Transforming Power of the Holy Spirit in our Lives"

March/April 2006

Lent/Easter

www.uuchristian.org

**In** the shower this morning I started thinking about what I was going to do for Lent. Looking back, I realized that all of the giving up for Lent that I've done in the past, I've now made a regular part of my life. It kind of startled me, because I never had the intention at the time of making any of the changes permanent.

The main reason I decided to try giving up something for Lent was to see if I could build up a little will power. I've never been good at keeping at things or forming new habits. I rebel against doing anything daily. But I thought maybe if I could manage to give up chocolate for a few weeks, it would build up strength for more important things on down the line. So that first year it was chocolate. The next year it was alcohol. It's not that I have anything against either chocolate or wine; I think it's more to do with their being optional. And it did seem like it would do more good to give up something I enjoy than something I really don't care about.

After Lent had passed, I happily went back to eating chocolate and drinking wine. It's only a couple of months ago, after years of cumulative small changes in my ways of thinking and seeing the world and God, that I decided I wanted to stop buying sweets and alcohol for good. I haven't mentioned this to anyone before because (a) I'm not entirely sure of my reasoning and (b) I know how I would have reacted to such a statement from anyone else up until I reached that receptive point myself. For me, at least, these kinds of changes have to happen little by little, not in one great moment of complete turnaround. I don't think I'm a Damascus road kind of person. What brought on the decision was reading and thinking more about poverty and unequal distribution of wealth. I found I couldn't justify spending money and taking up resources to supply myself with items that were so optional, such icing on the cake. I hope my will power has been built up to where I can stick with this decision, at least for the most part. I hope that it will grow to include other things I don't really need. I hope I don't sound unbearably smug.

So I'm going to have to think of something new if I want to give up something this Lent. Last year I thought I'd try to give up criticizing people. That was tougher to keep track of than chocolate consumption. The biggest shock was realizing that the person I criticized most was myself. Also that a lot of what I thought of as entertaining conversation was based on snarky comments about other people. That resolution I've tried to keep up with, in spite of the fear of being boring.

So what will it be? It feels like the Lenten season started a little early this year. Last week one of my younger brothers was diagnosed with colon cancer. I had a breast biopsy scheduled that same week, but got better news. Meanwhile, two of our oldest friends were back East helping his mother ease out of life, feeding her as long as she could eat, washing her, keeping her comfortable, the cancer too advanced to treat any other way. On Ash Wednesday, instead of attending service, I'll be back East myself, tending to my brother after his surgery. It sounds like he has a very good chance of being cured by the operation, but he still has to get through it. That may be enough for this Lent, trying to find hope in these broken bodies. "This is my body, broken for



## Giving Up Something for Lent By Julie Leonard

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

Cecil Bohanan, President  
[cbohanon@comcast.net](mailto:cbohanon@comcast.net)

Kathleen C. Rolenz, editor  
[kathleen.rolenz@gmail.com](mailto:kathleen.rolenz@gmail.com)  
[Katrolenz@aol.com](mailto:Katrolenz@aol.com)

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UUCF members also receive the  
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### Contact information for the UUCF

P.O. Box 6702  
Turley, OK 74156-0702  
918-691-3223

[UUCFOffice@aol.com](mailto:UUCFOffice@aol.com)

Other Contact information:  
Rev. Ron Robinson, Exec. Director  
The Living Room  
6305 N. Peoria Ave  
Turley, OK 74126

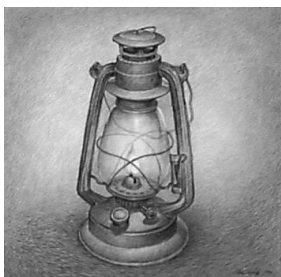
home phone:  
918-430-1150  
home address:  
563 E. 63rd St.  
North, Turley, OK 74126

# When The Light Comes Back On

*An Easter Message by Ron Robinson*

**I**t is the single kerosene lantern that we talked about later as we left New Orleans' lower Ninth Ward. It is the single kerosene lantern I am still thinking about as I approach Easter, and as I think of each of you wherever you are.

A few ministerial colleagues and I sat at a table in the middle of a damaged house talking with a small group of volunteers who had come from both the east and the west to help the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina. They were young adults. They were radical in politics and committed to



Kerosene Lantern, 1995  
charcoal on canvas  
Artist: Gu Xiong

solidarity across racial lines, and to rebuilding anew with environmental sustainability. They came there willing to work with anyone to help those who had been displaced from their homes to be able to come back and be a part of their community again, to work with one another. They were part of a grassroots support group called Common Ground Relief. They were doing small ordinary things in an extraordinary place and time--helping people get tools, to find medical and legal help. to be present with those who were coming back, and to represent those who hadn't or couldn't come back.

We had come to see, and listen to what was going on, and take back information about what was needed. In various ways we were involved in helping in our areas with people who had been displaced. The conversation quickly moved from facts, though, into the life of the Spirit—what sustained them—what broke them—and, what kept them coming back after they had left before.

We heard about the death of their friend, and the planting of an organic garden and bio-remediation amidst the toxic pollution of the earth especially after the flooding. We heard about the politicians and the rumors and the cynicism and the incredible acts of compassion and commitment. We saw the devastation of the homes swept off foundations, the oil barge still stuck where it had broken through the levee, and the juxtaposition of empty homes, streets and entire neighborhoods. We witnessed the constant activity of cleaners and repairers.

And yet it is the kerosene lantern that sat on the table as we talked that stuck with us. We were there on a warm humid bright sunny day in January, and we left before dark. If we had stayed past sundown, as they had stayed since soon after the Hurricane sleeping on cots in this donated damaged house with no windows, we would have seen the darkness sweep across the area still without any electricity these months later. The only light, they said, that you could see for miles as you crossed the canal bridge and looked down into the bowl of the Lower Ninth Ward, was the light coming from the kerosene lantern that burned in this house where people were camping out. They dreamed big dreams of having solar panels to use as a model of how to provide electricity here, and as a possible sign of a new world to come; but in the meantime, they gathered at night around a kerosene lantern in a damaged house.

*Continued on page seven*

# A Lenten Journey

In reflecting on the season of Lent and Easter, I find I am drawn to the wisdom of the early Christian mystics, the people called the "desert fathers and mothers." There is something about that which emerges from their experiences that resonate with the kinds of "deserts" we find ourselves wandering through today.

We find ourselves broken intellectually, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and communally. We describe our world today as "post-modern;" it doesn't have a coherent center like it once did. We have so many material objects that are meant to bring us a life of convenience, yet we find ourselves busier than ever. We have sophisticated communications systems, yet we remain isolated from one another. We've learned that even the wonder of email is not an effective way to communicate anything deeply human, especially our emotions.

The desert mothers and fathers urge us to acknowledge our poverty and brokenness. They describe the mystery they call God, and how we need to daily hand our lives over to this mystery - not in some abstract way, but in the here and now, concretely - with who we are, whom we are with, in the situations within ourselves, within our immediate communities including families, friends, and church.

The early Desert Fathers and Mothers taught Four Renunciations, or the Four Surrenders. They are the steps taken in the desert experience, which lead us to live life as conscious awareness, rather than heedlessly. They allow us to "receive God as God".

**The first stage** is renouncing our former way of life, our "false self", that which is characterized by the attraction of the ego. It is living selflessly in the political, social and interpersonal domain, and "doing all things for the glory of God." **The second** is renouncing the attractions and satisfactions of things external to our true self. These are not bad things in themselves, but they can become "attachments" such as food, sex, or emotions. The focus instead becomes seeking the spiritual journey that is interior. **The third** is renouncing our self-made thoughts about God. We need to give up our very concept of God, even the way we perceive God coming to us and our experience of the divine presence. **The final renunciation** is letting go of our thoughts about our own self. We can give up all of our false illusions - even the illusion of our illusions!

We can begin to see life as a gift, as a wonderful luxury. Every moment is pure wonder.

*Felicia M. Urbanski*

**F**or the first time in over thirty years, I don't have to go to church on Sundays. I am learning what Sunday, the Sabbath, is really about—resting one's body and spirit to get ready for the coming week. I realize it must seem paradoxical to hear a minister say he'd rather be home reading a good book or taking a walk on Sunday, but that's what I feel after a year into my exile.

I think it's very important that I speak from first-hand experience of what it feels like not to have to go to church. I'm not speaking now as a minister who is supposed to be in church every Sunday. I'm speaking as one of millions of people who don't belong to any religious organization or even want to.

I know this must appear quite strange—a minister confessing he doesn't need organized religion to be a spiritual

person. But **WHAT I WANT AND NEED IN A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY**

I am reminded of others who

**John C. Morgan**

reached the same conclusion: The German Lutheran martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, before he died at the hands of the Nazis, said he awaited the day of what he called a "religion-less Christianity," one in which all the outward forms of the church would collapse and nothing would remain for a community but the presence of Jesus. The Unitarian minister and writer Ralph Waldo Emerson said he preferred the silence before worship more than anything else. Henry David Thoreau confided he often would hide Emerson's hat on Sundays so the two of them could walk the Concord woods instead of attending church services.

So, for the first time in many years I am forced to rethink about what I want and need in a religious community—not what I think others need. It's a new experience for me.

Here is the paradox: I am finding that I need a spiritual community more than ever--not the Brand X Sunday Only Church, but a dynamic, caring group of people who know me by name and travel at least in the same direction as I do. I don't need more diversity; I do need more depth, which requires both solitude and community.

Being religious and being spiritual is not the same thing. You can be religious by following all the rules, attending all the services, following the requirements of your faith. But spirituality is more about the depth of living you are doing—your deeper connections to self, others, and the divine. I am finding I need more the touch of a hand than the doctrinal sermon; I desire a person, not a set of principles—which may explain why like the late vineyard work-

# UUCF Board Retreat: A New Journey begins

The UUCF Board retreat was held Friday, February 17—Sunday, February 19th at the Sisters of Saint Margaret Convent in Roxbury, MA. It had been a long time since members of the UUCF Board of Trustees had been able to meet face to face. The article that follows is a brief summary of some of the highlights from the afternoon session of the retreat. The full report of this retreat will be available on the UUCF website. Perhaps the most important reminder that we took away with us is the creation of a statement of purpose and suggestions for reorganizing the Board's work into specific portfolios. —written by Rev. Ron Robinson, edited by Kathleen Rolenz

In attendance: Cecil Bohanan, Anita Farber-Robertson, Kim Hampton, Felicia Urbanski, Tom Schade, Dave Dawson, Abby Davis, Kathleen Rolenz, Ron Robinson

**Saturday, February 18, '06.** We discussed a model based on the UUMA Exec Board, with board members having defined portfolios. As a result, we decided to implement the Portfolio Model. We decided on four major portfolios: Events, Publications, People and Vision (see chart below) Under each heading, we grouped the various tasks, projects and areas of outreach that either currently exist or ones that we can imagine for the future. By re-organizing our Board, we realized that there are then slots for the six Executive Committee members as the Vision Team, and then twelve portfolios for other Board members to fill as leaders.

We would keep the current size of the Board under this model. Some Board members may choose to be a part of more than one Portfolio Leadership. There will be job descriptions for each of the Portfolios, and the Board members would work with staff to create their own Portfolio Ministry Teams bringing in others as way of carrying out the work and nurturing new leaders. Board President Cecil Bohanan and Executive Director Ron Robinson will be working on the job description proposals, and recruit others as needed for it, and get these out in time to do the Nominating Committee work putting this in place by June's Annual Meeting.

The most important goal we hope to accomplish is that each Portfolio Team will be able to arrive at specific, observable, measurable goals. All other needed and desired work and outreach will fall under "Permission-Giving Projects" and people will take them on and we will help carry out as possible and they will report back to us through the Exec. Dir. or one of the Portfolio teams they are close to in mission. Being conscious of time commitments for leaders, we would also keep our current schedule of the Executive Committee and the Full Board meeting on alternating months. In between time the separate Portfolio Ministry Teams would meet as needed, as does the Revival and GA teams and others have done now.

We discussed which of the Portfolios the current leadership would be willing to take on, which ones we think other current leaders would be good to take on, and brainstormed of possible new leaders to bring in to fill Board Portfolios. The next step work to be done by a Job Descriptions Group, and Leadership (Nominations) Group.

We finished Saturday's session by voting on formally accepting **West Shore UU Church in Cleveland, OH as the site for Revival 2007, Nov. 1-4.** Unanimously approved. See page seven for more highlights from the Board.

EVENTS	PUBLICATIONS	PEOPLE	VISION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Revivals</li> <li>• Regional Revivals</li> <li>• General Assembly</li> </ul> <p>4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good News</li> <li>• UU Christian Journal</li> <li>• Liturgy &amp; Resources (A Living Liturgy for a Living Tradition)</li> <li>• Christian RE curriculum</li> <li>• Web Site</li> <li>• Messaging (i.e., advertising, pamphlets, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurture of Small Groups</li> <li>• Support for Christian or Christian searching Clergy</li> <li>• Support for Christian seminarians</li> <li>• Education of seminarians about UUCF</li> <li>• Membership cultivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive Team focused on UUCF purpose</li> <li>• Fiscal responsibility and oversight</li> <li>• Development of sound policies</li> <li>• Purpose &amp; mission focused</li> </ul>

# Revival 2006 in New York City

Nov. 2-5, 2006, Fourth Universalist Society, 76th and Central Park West  
Register Now! "God's Reviving Grace"

**R**evival 2006 will be held in New York City at the Fourth Universalist Society, Nov. 2 through 5. One of the keynote speaker will be Jim Mulholland, co-author of two popular Universalist books called *If Grace Be True: Why God Will Save Every Person* and *If God is Love: Rediscovering Grace in an Ungracious World*. The other keynoter will be announced soon.

Jim Mulholland is the pastor of the Irvington Friends Meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana. He grew up Free Methodist, spent his teen years in a house church, was baptized and ordained American Baptist, attended a Disciples of Christ seminary, and served as an inner city United Methodist pastor for twelve years. Ecumenical by experience, he has become universalist in theology. His belief in the presence of God in all people has led to his involvement with many social ministries with a special interest in helping men who are leaving prison.

In the past ten years, he has become nationally known as a theologian, writer and speaker. He has written *Praying Like Jesus*, co-authored *If Grace Is True* and *If God Is Love* with Philip Gulley, and contributed articles to several magazines. He is presently working on a book *Living With Lepers* - about his work with child molesters. He is married and has five children

This year's Revival, full of diverse worship and workshops and small group meetings and hospitality, will be held at an historic Universalist Church where Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt is now minister. The church is located at 76th St. and Central Park West close to the Museum of Natural History and many other New York City attractions and public transportation and located in a beautiful setting. See more on the church at its website at [www.4thu.org](http://www.4thu.org) (<http://www.4thu.org>).

We are reducing the usual registration fee and providing a wide list of lodging options (from seminary lodging to bed and breakfasts and various hotels and other venues) to help as many people as possible to attend (these will be sent to those who inquire and upon registration). The full early registration fee for Thursday, Nov. 2 through Sun., Nov. 5 is \$100 including a catered dinner. One day registration for either Friday or Saturday will be available for \$50. Full Registrations made after Oct. 2 will be \$150.

**Revival weekend in New York City is also the weekend of the New York Marathon so we encourage people to book their lodging as soon as possible.** We are also creating a Revival Schedule with New York City in mind, to provide more opportunities for free time. Register by sending a check marked for Revival 2006 to the UUCF Office, P.O. Box 6702, Turley, OK 74156. Include your email address if possible and you will be added to the pre-Revival Information Email list. The next issue of the Good News will have a full "Revival" schedule.

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## GENERAL ASSEMBLY at St. Louis, MO—2006

*The Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship will continue to have a presence at this years General Assembly through workshops, a communion service and our annual presence at the exhibition booths. Come visit and us!*

**Friday, June 23, 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.** UUCF sponsored Communion Worship Service  
America's Center Room 274. Preacher: Rev. Derek Parker

**Friday, June 23, 4 to 5:15 p.m.:** *Christian Voices in Unitarian Universalism*. With Skinner House Books.  
Speaker: Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, editor new anthology of essays. America's Center, Room 226.

**Saturday, June 24, 8:30 to 9:45 a.m.** UUCF sponsored Communion Worship Service (repeat slot).  
America's Center Room 274.

**Sunday, June 25, 1:45 to 3 p.m.** *Christian Voices in Unitarian Universalism* (repeat slot). America's Center 260.



*Continued from page three*

ers in one of Jesus' parables, I am trying to be a disciple of Jesus.

I really wouldn't come to a church because the minister gave great sermons. Of course, if the sermons were boring, I wouldn't come back, either. I also wouldn't come to church because I liked the building. Too many churches suffer from what I call "the edifice complex"—people putting most of their time and energy into raising money to keep the roof from collapsing or the building heated. And I certainly wouldn't stay long in a congregation which did not affirm and support my Christian journey.

Let me tell you why I would come to a spiritual community. I would come because I felt at home. It's something quite simple and almost indefinable—like knowing what house you are going to purchase the minute you walk through the door. I find as a newcomer, I can often feel the tone of a community long before I get any facts.

A few weeks ago I attended a service at a church I might never have attended. But the music was fantastic. I didn't have to read one verse ahead to see if I agreed with the words—I just sang my heart out. And as we sang the old benediction—"God be with you 'til we meet again"—I found tears in my eyes and a deep sense of peace.

I would also appreciate a place where I could find support for my spiritual journey. Would it surprise you that after two master's degrees and a doctorate, I have come to the place in my life where I don't know much at all, but know this much—I need people around me who want to grow. I wouldn't care if the community were six people or six thousand. Size is not a measure of spiritual depth. In fact, if truth be told, I find more spiritual depth in house churches or small groups than in large ones. I prefer being a participant, not a spectator.

## **WHAT I WANT AND NEED IN A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY**

**John C. Morgan**

I want a place where my soul can sing—that's the bottom line, the real measure of a spiritual community. I want a spiritual community that has heart and spirit. My soul sings when I am touched by music or poetry or people who are gentle or who care about each other and the world around them. I want a religious community to care about and nurture the feeding of souls. My soul is not nurtured by intellectual debates or arguments over whether the word "God" is appropriate in the sanctuary or if we can talk about Jesus once a year on Easter.

I have discovered a paradigm or model for what I want and need in a spiritual community. *I want a religious community to be high in relationships, low in institutional maintenance, and deep in theology and service to others.* I know I am not alone with this desire.

I want a religious community low in institutional maintenance, where people don't spend the greater part of their time raising money to pay ministers or fix the buildings, but where everyone pitches in to help, where ministry is not about a professional providing services to clients but where everyone ministers to one another, where gifts are honored and used, whether it is playing the piano, leading a study group, or putting chairs away after a service. And I want a religious community that is deep in theology, where you can be a pilgrim and not just a passing tourist, where you can wrestle with life's great meaning with others.

Too many congregations take Jesus' first miracle in Cana—turning water into wine—and reverse it: They turn the wine back into water. Maybe it is time for the Spirit to move in our midst, turning the water back into wine once again, helping our souls to sing and soar.

*John Morgan retired over a year ago after nearly thirty years serving Unitarian Universalist congregations. He is the author of two Skinner House books and two new books coming out in 2006. This article first appeared in the Herald, the oldest Universalist magazine still in existence where he is a contributing editor. He is a newly arrived disciple of Jesus.*

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*"And Jesus was a sailor when he walked upon the water and he spent a long time watching from his lonely wooden tower and when he knew for certain only drowning men could see him He said "All men will be sailors then until the sea shall free them" But he himself was broken long before the sky would open, forsaken, almost human He sank beneath your wisdom like a stone. And you want to travel with him and you want to travel blind and you think maybe you'll trust him—for he's touched your perfect body with his mind."*

*—Leonard Cohen, "Suzanne"*

## UUCF Board Retreat: A New Journey Begins

*Continued from page four*

Excerpts from the Board retreat:

- Guiding Questions: what is our purpose now? who is or should be our focus? What are our top priorities to serve our focus group? What is holding us back? What will help us move forward?
- Focusing on Spiritual Formation as a need in those we serve (various ways suggested through curriculum and small group to do this).
- Having a living mission statement and visual representation of it.
- More focus on devotional needs.
- Helping UU Christians help their churches.
- Leadership development--retaining leaders, why are we losing leaders when people leave the UUA for places like UCC?
- Reshaping Structure to help grow leaders and better fulfill mission
- RE Curriculum needed; apply to Skinner House book and to future issues of our publications.

## When The Light Comes Back On

*Continued from page two*

*A small group of people keeping a light on, keeping the spirit of life shining where others saw death and devastation only.* As I write this it is soon after our revitalizing UUCF Board Retreat in Boston too, where among many new commitments we stressed our need to start, nurture, and sustain more and more small groups of people carrying the free and inclusive light of UU Christianity. Small groups of people, just two to twelve and more, who would be Easter People all year round, sharing and spreading the "witness of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in their lives." They would be the UUCF. They would be the spirit of Revival. They would keep the light of Christ shining, as a beacon attracting others to where generosity and mission and passion had found an unexpected home. Please contact the UUCF if you would like to be in such an Easter Group and aren't. Board Member Dave Dawson of the Charlottesville, Virginia UUCF group will be facilitating our Small Group Ministry Team. Together, we will help you to provide resources and networking. It only takes a simple small start.

I don't know what will follow in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. I don't know what will follow in the UUCF. I don't know what will follow in your life, or mine. As at the end of the resurrection stories in the Gospel of John, if the Easter spirit of Jesus is there like a lantern then "I can't imagine a world big enough to hold" all of what will happen. *Ron Robinson*

## After Easter

So,  
It's after Easter.  
We're glad you are back.

It was touch and go that Easter weekend.  
Each year we relive the story  
Each year we shout with joy as you enter Jerusalem,  
Cry Hosanna waving palms,  
Gather with you in the upper room  
And hear in horror your acknowledgement of the end.

Never are we prepared to encounter your crucifixion

Which causes us to tremble, tremble, tremble  
With great sorrow, we lay you in the tomb,  
And begin the wait, the wait, the wait.  
Will it happen this year, again?

Will the light stay out, engulfing us in holy darkness,  
Or, will you return?

It feels like touch and go.

Will the promise be renewed?

Will we have you once again to heal and hold  
and guide us?

But that was then. A month or more ago it was.

You are back now. We can rest assured.

Can stop paying keen attention.

We don't need to worry...

So it seems,

And yet, the irony of the spirit life is this.

It is just when I feel so assured of your presence,  
that absence seeps in,

Just when I take your presence for granted  
that you seem to slip away,

Just when I think I've done the work you set before me,  
that something trips me up.

Easter's over, yes. Your blessed assurance is real.

And now is the time to heed your teaching and  
know that we are the maidens

waiting with our oil lamps

If we go to sleep we won't be ready,

We might miss the moment when you fling  
open the door

And walk into our lives

It is after Easter all right.

But it doesn't mean that we might not still find  
ourselves inhabiting Holy Saturday,

They day when you went away,

and we wept, inconsolable in our grief.

*Anita Farber-Robertson*

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## Mark Your Calendar!

### General Assembly at St. Louis, Missouri

Special Events: Friday, June 23, - Sunday, June 25, 1:45 to 3 p.m.

### Revival 2006 in New York City

Nov. 2-5, 2006, Fourth Universalist Society, 76th and Central Park West  
Register Now! "God's Reviving Grace"

### Revival 2007 in Cleveland, Ohio

Hosted by the West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church  
"UU Christians Rock!"



*Remember—You are Not Alone*

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