

Liberal Beacon

Issue 5 | August 2023

Welcome to the August 2023 issue of *Liberal Beacon*, the monthly publication of NAUA, the North American Unitarian Association. As your new editor, let me briefly introduce myself. My name is Kevin McCulloch, and I am a lifelong Unitarian Universalist. My parents were married at the UU Congregation of Atlanta, Georgia in 1969 and I was an active member of the YRUU youth group there in the late 1980s. Through the 1990s and early 2000s I was an active supporter of the UUA's young adult and campus ministry movement, attending numerous General Assemblies and national young adult ministry conferences and participating in the young adult group at the First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco, where I lived at the time. In 2006 I returned to Atlanta, Georgia to earn a Master of Theological Studies at the Candler School of Divinity at Emory University and became reacquainted with the UU Congregation of Atlanta as a worship associate and youth group advisor. More recently I served on the adult religious education committee at All Souls Church Unitarian in Washington, DC, where I developed a class on Unitarian and Universalist history. I returned to Atlanta for a third time in 2020 to help my elderly parents stay in their home, and I am now a visiting friend of the UU Metro Atlanta North congregation in Roswell, GA.

I drifted away from UUA involvement about fifteen years ago when I aged out of the young adult movement, but even then I was worried about the increasingly illiberal trend in our faith that denies the validity of alternative perspectives in order to advance a single party line on matters of identity and justice. I think this approach, which is sometimes described by anti-racist activists as the development of a "shared analysis," is driving a wedge between liberals and progressives.

Featured Articles

An Introduction to Humanistic Psychology by Candace Schmidt, Ph.D

The Parable of New Coke
by Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof

Dismantling The Wedge Issue
by Rev. Richard Trudeau

Book Review: Woke Racism
by Rev. Terry Cummings

Our Regular Features

Letters to the Editor
NAUA Member Profile: Barbara Becker Nelson
Voices of the Past
NAUA Academy News and Coming Events

When I say "liberal" and "progressive," I recognize that there's no universally-acknowledged distinction between these categories, so let me clarify what I mean. I've long felt that there are two distinct sets of values among left-leaning people in general, and UUs in particular. The set of values I think of as "progressive" are justice-centered: they include a clear moral vision, commitment, solidarity, and a passion for improving the world. The set of values I think of as "liberal" are tolerance-centered: they include respect for a diverse set of views, a recognition that no single perspective is ever definitive, a commitment to letting everyone have their say, and what I call intellectual humility (the acknowledgement that your views

might be wrong and a willingness to reexamine your views in light of new evidence). I think the justice values fit the word “progressive” because they are fundamentally about progress: moving from an unjust past to a just future. I think the tolerance values fit the word “liberal” because they reflect the liberal philosophical tradition’s concern for individuals: individual well-being and respect for the individual right to make up one’s own mind about things.

Although these value sets are distinct, they don’t necessarily define a hard-and-fast line between people. Most left-leaning people share both sets of values in some measure, and most of the time these values pull in the same direction. For example, we want to see *justice* for gay, lesbian and transgender people because we’re *tolerant* of different sexualities and gender expressions.

But these two value sets do come into conflict, particularly when we convince ourselves that the expression of certain viewpoints harms the cause of justice. Campus speech codes are one area where this comes up. I think we mostly agree that we should not tolerate explicit racial ani-

mus: slurs, stereotypes, or arguments that one set of people are inherently inferior. But what about conservative arguments against affirmative action? Should we tolerate these arguments in the name of open discourse, or do they create a hostile environment for people of color? There are serious arguments on both sides.

As a lifelong UU, my vision of a just world is fundamentally a progressive one. But I remain, at heart, a liberal, in that I believe that we cannot achieve justice except by reckoning with a full diversity of views and considering every critique, even ones that the most passionate among us find wrong-headed or exasperating. I suppose this means, to repurpose an old joke about where UUs want to go when we die, that I don’t think we can get to “heaven” by doing an end-run around “discussion about heaven.” And I think that the discussion needs to acknowledge every perspective, especially the ones that are critical of the larger consensus among us. I invite you to join us in making *Liberal Beacon* such a forum.

Kevin McCulloch
August 2023

An Introduction to Humanistic Psychology

Candace Schmidt, Ph.D.

Imagine, if you will, living in the first half of the 20th century. You’ve heard about this thing called therapy that might help you with a seemingly intractable problem. What are your choices? You have a friend back East who underwent psychoanalysis for five years and has appeared to gain some benefit. But would you want to commit to seeing a psychoanalyst five days a week, for years, while being instructed to forego making any major decisions until the therapy is deemed complete? Not to mention the cost of such a commitment! Having a professional delve into your psyche, looking for unconscious

defense mechanisms and past trauma, might not sound very appealing.

On the other hand, you’ve heard about another approach in psychology, one that has purportedly uncovered what might be causing your baffling behaviors and troubling thoughts. This method, called behaviorism, claims that everything we do and are is determined by our history of rewards and punishments. Behaviorism proponents view “the mind,” “thought,” “memory,” and “reasoning” as mere grammatical traps that people could fall into. And what, you might ask, did experiments

with animals kept in cages and taught to perform certain acts have to do with people experiencing perennial life struggles such as grief, loss, and overwhelming circumstances? That might not be for me, you might think.

It has been about fifty years since humanistic psychology came on the scene in North America, when it was considered the “third force” in psychology and contrasted with the gloomy outlook of psychoanalysis and the reductionism of behaviorism. After a series of horrific experiences in the first half of the 20th century, including World Wars I and II, the Holocaust, and the Great Depression, Western societies thirsted for a deeper understanding of the human condition and what it meant to be human. Humanistic psychologists began to revise psychology and therapy in less professionalized terms, and to make it more understandable and accessible to everyone. This pivot, at the time, was considered revolutionary! One did not have to be “neurotic” or “nonfunctional” to seek therapy. Instead, humanistic psychology offered an avenue for self-discovery and personal growth. It provided an optimistic outlook to solving personal problems, an enlightened path to self-understanding and a positive outlook for the future.

Abraham Maslow was a pioneer of this more approachable psychology. He put forth the idea of a hierarchy of needs, familiar to most of us in the pyramid diagram, where the highest level is self-actualization. This concept is described as a drive or need present in everyone and characterized as the fulfillment of one’s talents and potential. Self-actualization is a state in which a person experiences open and honest relationships and a creative and meaningful life that allows for challenge and growth. It is the state at which the highest form of moral development is achieved. Maslow believed, however, that this drive for fulfillment could be tempered, or even overpowered, by aversive life experiences, unless these obstacles could be removed or overcome by the individual.

Carl Rogers was also an early pioneer of this approach, developing in the 1940s and ’50s client centered therapy, which put the person/client at the center of the therapy experience. Rogers promoted listening to and validating the experience of others, regarding the therapist-client relationship as an I-Thou encounter, and responding positively to emotions. He stressed the importance of three essential ingredients for a successful therapeutic outcome: empathy, unconditional positive regard for the client, and congruence (therapist authenticity).

A consistent theme of many of the early theorists of humanistic psychology is the idea that, underneath the façades people project and despite their various life struggles, people are okay at their core. Another theme is the emphasis on the integration of the whole person, which encompasses emotions, physical sensations, reasoning, and spirit, all of which are the responsibility of the individual. The process of growth is another important concept, viewing personal change and development as a natural state of being. Finally, the theme of abundance is integral to humanistic psychology. Rather than viewing problematic behaviors as the result of some deficiency in peoples’ backgrounds, human beings are seen as motivated by achievement goals, the need for a variety of experiences, and by a natural curiosity of the world. This humanistic approach certainly offered a more hopeful and even cheerful view of a person’s journey through life!

What tradition did humanistic psychology grow out of? Was it an outgrowth of humanism? While it is interesting to note that “A Humanist Manifesto” was written in 1933 and Abraham Maslow introduced his concept of a hierarchy of needs in “A Theory of Motivation” in 1943, the two movements had separate origins. With deep roots in the early Greek philosophy, humanism grew during the Renaissance and flourished during the Enlightenment period. In contrast, Abraham Maslow was heavily influenced by Gestalt psychologist Max Wertheimer, who from his studies

concluded that we perceive things by seeing the whole, and not by understanding individual parts of a phenomenon. Anthropologist Ruth Benedict, whose theories were based on decades of fieldwork with indigenous peoples, was another important influence. She concluded that culture played a significant role in shaping a person's behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes, and demonstrated how small a portion of the possible range of human behavior is incorporated into any one culture. Other influences included Carl Jung, who believed the whole of the individual's experience should be respected and that the psyche possessed an intrinsic striving toward wholeness.

Although the origins of these movements do not appear to overlap, both humanism and humanistic psychology promote similar values: the welfare of individuals and the common good, compassion, freedom of thought, creativity, and individual growth. While humanism hopes to enhance the democratic process with its ideals and eschews adherence to any religious dogma or creed, humanistic psychology is more focused on improving quality of life for individuals so they can live more fully and abundantly, and in turn are able to contribute more fully to their communities and society.

Today, many concepts historically promoted by humanistic psychologists have been absorbed into the many types of therapies offered to those seeking help with life struggles. The triad of qualities deemed necessary for patient growth (empathy, unconditional positive regard, therapist authenticity) are now considered essential to positive outcomes in most therapies. The field has also expanded to include transpersonal psychology, which in turn has become a field in its own right. This approach also stems from a part of Maslow's research that investigated peak experiences, which tend to be triggered by intense, inspiring occurrences. Peak experiences are those moments when we are deeply excited by and absorbed in the world around us. Maslow considered the most intense peak experiences as rather rare, occurring when individuals see unbounded possibilities before them. Feelings of wonder and awe and ecstasy are common during peak experiences, and are often described by people as having spiritual dimensions. Transpersonal psychology, along with humanistic psychology, can be a feature of all kinds of counseling with therapists who are open to this dimension of human experience.

The author is a licensed Counseling Psychologist in Washington State.

The Parable of New Coke

Why New UUism Is Not and Classic UUism Isn't

Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof

In 1985, Coca-Cola decided it would be a good idea to reformulate its extremely popular, century-old soft drink and to promote doing so by adding the word "New" to its iconic red and white can. The new recipe was noticeably sweeter than the old and was widely received with mockery and upset. Coca-Cola quickly realized it had made a colossal marketing blunder. Only three months later, the rebuffed company reintroduced

its old formula with a new label, "Coca-Cola Classic." This maneuver boosted sales and may have prevented the company's potential ruin, but for those who remember its taste before "New Coke" or "Coca-Cola Classic," the soft drink has never been the same.

The reason for this, some have argued, is because the original recipe was reformulated at precisely

the same time the American food industry began replacing sugar with government subsidized high fructose corn syrup, which tastes sweeter. We may never know the real reasons Coca-Cola thought changing its successful formula would be anything but a disaster. Maybe it was to compete with sweeter competitors like Pepsi, or to market the significantly sweeter taste of corn syrup as something exciting and new. What we do know is that because of the switch to this one ingredient, Coca-Cola isn't what it used to be.

The parable of "New Coke" has some parallels with what's currently happening in Unitarian Universalism, especially regarding the UU Association's proposed rebranding of its seven principles. If the proposal receives final approval during its 2024 General Assembly, these full statements will be replaced with just seven words—justice, interdependence, equity, transformation, pluralism, and generosity, surrounding the core word, love. These seven euphemisms, depicted as six colorful petals emanating from a chalice pistil called "love," may seem sweeter and easier to swallow than the far more substantial principles they are meant to replace, but, in my opinion, they fall flatter than a can of New Coke that's been left open too long.

As of late, I've been hearing some of those disheartened by the reformulated "New UU" calling for a return to "Classic UUism." Few have openly expressed their dismay over the illiberal direction the UUA is heading more than me, yet I am perplexed by the emergence of this new term. What is "Classic UUism?" Unitarianism and Universalism have been around in some form for nearly two millennia. If we go back to its beginning, Unitarianism merely referred to a humanistic Christology, the belief that Jesus was born human and became God's son through his works. Universalism was the belief that God would not

condemn anyone to Hell forever, just long enough to purify their eternal souls. Most UUs don't hold either of these beliefs today.

If "Classic UUism" is in reference to the seven principles, it should be remembered that they were only adopted in 1985, making them only as old as New Coke, which means there is nothing "classic" about them. Unitarian Universalism itself has only been around since 1961, when the two distinct religions joined, which is why today's academics and researchers classify it as a new religious movement (NRM). And, throughout their mostly separate histories, both denominations underwent dramatic theological and ideological changes and schisms, including the transcendentalist controversy in the 19th century, and both the humanist debate and the controversial merger itself in the 20th century. Since then, Unitarian Universalists have found it increasingly difficult to find the best words to describe what their religion is about.



Still, it is understandable that some are now searching for the best way to describe the feelings of bewilderment, anger, and loss in response to the sudden and unexpected illiberal turn the Unitarian Universalist Association has taken. It's understandable that our distaste for its "New UUism" would prompt our

desire for the original formula, "UUism Classic." But I reject this distinction. The takeover of the Unitarian Universalist Association by a relatively small group in leadership may be "New," but there is nothing "UU" about it. Nor should those of us troubled by what's occurring in our Boston headquarters relabel ourselves as "Classic UUs." We are simply UUs.

The 42-year-old Seven Principles are a recent rearticulation of the Enlightenment liberalism that is more deserving of the term "classic" than anything that has emerged since 1961. I prefer

to summarize such liberalism as a profound commitment to the inherent worth and dignity of every person and all peoples that is sustained by freedom, reason, and tolerance. However we articulate our values and principles, it has become clear to many that those occupying the UUA leadership do not share them. And this, again, is the real issue: What they are demonstrating isn't "New UUism" or any kind of UUism at all. And those of us pushing back are not "Classic UUs," we're UUs!

In recent years, we have witnessed the silencing and excommunication of dissenters. We've seen interference in the internal affairs of our once autonomous and independent congregations. We've seen any avenues for open dialogue and feedback disappear, including the complete elimination of letters to the editor in *UU World* magazine. We have observed the erosion of democratic processes, resulting in fixed elections through the effective prevention of any serious challenges to the leadership's chosen candidates, or candidate. And we have heard those in power use the most hateful and unfounded slurs in reference to our venerable religion, and sometimes in reference to us as individuals. We have heard them openly proclaim that our religion is founded upon an unholy trinity of errors and must be redeemed by creating a "doctrine of church" rooted, not in freedom, but in "covenant." We are now witnessing our seven principles whittled away to nothing, replaced by seven euphemisms, none of which are words like dignity, individuality, equality, freedom, reason, or tolerance. There's nothing UU about any of this, "New" or otherwise.

So, I'm not going to legitimize this illiberal behavior by unintentionally branding it as a "new" kind of UUism. It isn't. Nor am I willing to accept my own enduring liberal religious values as an outdated thing of the past by calling them "classic." They're not. Let those who have ears to hear, pop open a can of Coke and listen.

Dismantling The Wedge Issue

Rev. Richard Trudeau

“UUMUAC” stands for the UU Multiracial Unity Action Council (uumuac.org). Just as NAUA seeks to provide services to congregations that the UUA seems no longer capable of providing, so also do we at UUMUAC, except that in our case we focus on one specific service: providing common-sense support to congregations on matters of racial justice.

We are a member organization of NAUA.

The counsel we provide is simple:

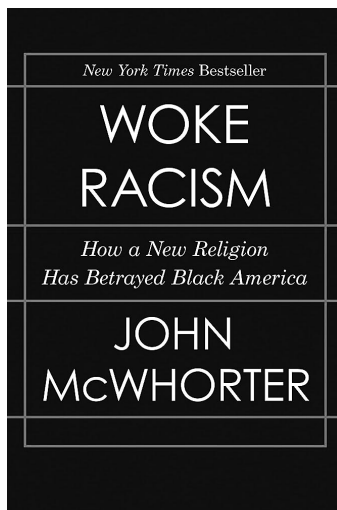
- (1) Live the seven UU principles;
- (2) Follow the playbook of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We believe that the UUA approach to racial justice, whose slogan is “dismantle our white supremacy culture,” is not only ineffective but is actually increasing racial tension.

This racial-justice ideology was the wedge issue that the authoritarians now running the UUA used to seize power. Suggest to the average white UU that they are racist and they become first paralyzed, then compliant. Given the UUA's seriously flawed governance structure, the stunning outcome is actually not surprising.

Studies have shown that very few whites in the U.S., regardless of religious affiliation, are racist to any significant degree. Whites who are UU are overwhelmingly not racist.

Our message to UUs is: You are almost certainly not racist. Trust your experience. Rely on the seven principles, which may be what attracted you to UUism in the first place. Have faith in the MLK playbook, which is the only approach to reducing racism that has worked in your lifetime. Stay the course.



*Woke Racism: How a New Religion
Has Betrayed Black America*

by John McWhorter
(Penguin Random House, 2021)

Book review by Rev. Terry Cummings

Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America is a thought-provoking response to what the author identifies as the extreme anti-racism that is progressively dominating the conversation about white privilege in America. It is particularly thought provoking for those who identify as Unitarian Universalist these days.

Prof. McWhorter is an associate professor of linguistics at Columbia University. He is a distinguished academic with many years' experience as a teacher in higher education. In this, his latest book, he demonstrates his talent for approaching hard-to-talk-about topics with common sense and reason. His conversational writing style makes the book an easy read, and he covers a lot of ground about a complex subject in under 200 pages.

Prof. McWhorter cites numerous instances in which the eagerness of those in power to listen to the voice of a new "religion" has led to absurd and unjust results. His narrative mixes humor, irony, occasionally biting sarcasm, and more than a hint

of outrage to support his argument that anti-racism extremists have forged this new religion. A religion that he argues is, like many others, intolerant of heretics who dare to question its claim to ownership of ultimate truth. And, worse, a religion that causes harm to the members of the black community it wishes to redeem from the clutches of white supremacist culture.

While the book's target audience is moderate liberals in general (the author has no expectations that "the Elect" will pay attention to him), it could easily have been written for those Unitarian Universalists who are grappling with the current direction of their denomination.

I found myself therefore reading the book through two different lenses, the lens of the average reader, and the lens of a UU minister. Regardless, no doubt like many other readers, I brought my own commitment to undoing racism into my conversation with this book, a commitment forged in the congregations and organizations where I have either worshipped or served; a commitment informed by several of the books that have been making the rounds in the last few years. Books like Robin DeAngelo's *White Fragility*, and others, which Prof. McWhorter criticizes in concrete terms.

Perhaps because of my own commitment to anti-racism, or perhaps because I, too, have been indoctrinated enough to set aside my own objectivity, I experienced a sense of guilt in offering to write a review of *Woke Racism*—what standing do I have as a privileged white person to offer an opinion about a book about racism in America? I found it reassuring that early in the book, the author, who is black, tells his readers that "I write this viscerally driven by the fact that the ideology in question is one under which white people calling themselves our saviors make black people look like the dumbest, weakest, most self-indulgent human beings in the history of our species . . . [a] version of this book written by a white writer would be blithely dismissed as racist."

Prof. McWhorter's thesis is that people of a certain ideology are threatening to transform America on the basis of racism, that the ideology is a religion in all but name, a religion that is harmful to black people despite claiming to be anti-racist, a religion that black as well as white people should resist. He identifies the people in question as "the Elect", and he is clear that this ideology is not *like* a religion, but is in fact a religion.

He points to several factors that the ideology shares with religion, including the "Original Sin" of whiteness, evangelism, and intolerance for those heretics who question it. The author lists the benefits and comforts that people derive from holding religious beliefs, and makes the analogy that the anti-racist ideology offers the same benefits. Nevertheless, the author sees a red flag. "We must ask ourselves whether the Elect approach actually shows signs of making any difference in the lives of black people, other than by making educated white people infantilize them while actually harming the people living in those structures. It is a terrifyingly damaging business."

I confess to being less convinced by Prof. McWhorter's discussion of the actual harm to black people being caused by the Elect than I was by other portions of his book. But perhaps therein lies the limitations of my own whiteness and my inability to relate to the black experience.

It seems ironic that the Elect of the new religion, of which the author writes, deny that their ideology is in fact a religion, in contrast to what the Elect in Unitarian Universalism currently appear to be claiming for that denomination. There is a healthy conversation to be had here, about what the author describes as harmful about the new ideology, and whether the increasingly dystopian Unitarian Universalist denomination is unwittingly becoming an accomplice to that harm. In all likelihood the UU Elect would dismiss such a possibility out of hand.

Readers on both sides of these contradictions

might find common ground in exploring the author's suggestions for making a real difference in the lives of black people in America: end the war on drugs, teach poor kids to read and write using phonics, and provide more practical job training at the college level as an alternative to the traditional (less than useful) four-year college degree.

I leave it to the gentle reader to form their own conclusions about *Woke Racism*, rather than sharing all of my own. *Woke Racism* certainly does raise an alarm. "It is neither progress nor messy for people to lose their jobs and reputations for not putting the overturning of power differentials at the very core of every single thing they do, express, or feel. It is neither progress nor messy for black people to be taught that our main value is not as individuals, but in how articulately we play victim in order to help white people feel good about themselves in feeling guilty about it. The Elect is not merely some mess. The Elect is a scourge and must be treated as such."

And, as the author makes clear early in the book, "they are coming for your children."

While offering an alternative point of view to that expressed in popular books, like *White Fragility*, in no way does *Woke Racism* undermine the relevance or importance of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, which arguably offers the most cogent reasons why America has a problem with systemic racism, a book that Prof. McWhorter refers to with approval.

Nor could one make the case that the extreme positions of the Elect are solely responsible for the anti-anti-racist backlash that is evident, for example, in recent claims that slavery was beneficial to enslaved people because it taught them valuable job skills.

Nevertheless, I recommend *Woke Racism* to anyone seeking a uniquely informed perspective on our current national conversation about (anti-) racism, and I recommend it to UUs in particular.

Letters to the Editor

My wife and I had our dental appointment yesterday. While my wife was finishing, I was at the counter and wanted to start up a conversation with the office manager who happened to be black, but I hesitated; the anti-racist groupthink that engulfs us made me think twice about reaching out. Gaining courage, I reminisced about coming to the office after I got out of the navy. In the following 10 minutes, we found out how much we shared; her father and brother had retired as E9 and E8 chiefs (my dad retired as an E7 chief); we both have fond memories of cross-country road trips; we both remember the back of station wagons and visiting relatives; we share a love of the national parks and monuments we visited on those trips. We both had stories of the toll of lengthy family separations, and how we coped with those separations and reunions. We were both associated with Alameda Naval Station and government service, and for a few years my wife had also been the office manager in this same office. There were so many things that linked our lives, and it brought home that who we are is not defined by our skin color. Later that afternoon it was great to hear the NAUA discussion on racial amity and that there just may be a future after we get past this madness that divides us. "Out of many, one!" This is what we need today.

Roy Dickerson

Reflections on UUA GA 2023

The most irritating aspect of GA in the last couple of years was the obligatory self-identification that was required for every speaker at every instance to declare their pronouns, gender, sexual orientation, race, body size, clothing, hair, and other visible attributes. Another irritating aspect was the constant use of the words love and beloved

with no sincerity at all. Case in point, a UUA employee who strongly advocated that the UUA divest from fossil fuels was fired on the spot. His GA credentials were taken and his hotel room was withdrawn. Others have experienced a similar backlash, myself included, for asking that the UU-United Nations Office merger agreement with the UUA be unwound, as well as many UU ministers who have made critical remarks about UUA actions. When people grumbled that we only had one candidate for UUA president selected for us by the UUA, we were told we were racists and sexists. So, the UUA's expressions of love and beloved are disingenuous to those who question their actions.

So many urgent world issues of interest to most UUs were never addressed at the 2023 GA. No mention of aggressive action on climate change. No mention of American and global poverty and what to do about it. Nothing about the proliferation and danger of new and more deadly nuclear weapons. No mention of the tradition of UUs who had been working for global peace for the past 6 decades. No mention of how the war between Russia and Ukraine was causing hunger in the Middle East and Africa. No mention of the precipitous slide of the United States and other countries toward authoritarian fascism.

Here's what I suggest for the next GA: Instead of cultish self-identification rituals, let's address global warming, let's work for international peace, let's demand decent and accountable government that works for the improvement of America and the world. Let's work for the end of poverty everywhere. Let's fight fascism and authoritarianism everywhere. And if we aspire to love and consider calling those we love, beloved, we need to do a great deal of work on our humility and kindness.

Many of us are discouraged and wonder if the

UUA is capable of salvation. I'm skeptical. It seems the UUA is firmly on a path to greater authoritarianism with diminished kindness and love. We can't learn what we think we already know. It is only when we hear views that are unfamiliar or even in opposition to our current thinking that we can be exposed to new ideas and

learning. I have advised that we do all we can to fortify and enable the North American Unitarian Association (NAUA) to be a place of love and kindness where such diversity of ideas and points of view are welcome.

Bruce Knotts

NAUA Member Profile: Barbara Becker Nelson

This month's member profile is of NAUA member Barbara Becker Nelson of Spokane, Washington. She submitted this script of a presentation she gave at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Spokane in 2021 discussing why she was a UU and why she was a member of UUCS. —Candace Schmidt

I grew up in a military household mostly attending base Sunday schools. My parents had no strong church affiliation, so I went alone or sometimes with my sister. My first independent search to find a faith-based/spiritual community was when my father (an Air Force officer) was transferred to the Pentagon and we moved to the DC area. It was there I started watching a local Sunday morning TV show from one of the area's Unitarian churches. The seeds of my Unitarianism were planted. I specifically remember one lesson where the teacher asked kids questions as she showed them a bowl of dirt:

- What would your mom think if you walked in the house tracking dirt all over her freshly mopped kitchen?
- Have you ever made mud pies after the yard was soaked by rain?
- How important is soil to a farmer trying to grow corn or peas?

She listened patiently while the kids offered their answers. Dirt? Mud? Soil? Different—but still the same. These images provided me with a basic foundation of trying to look at situations from different perspectives. The lesson stuck with me all these years.

The Air Force moved us around the country—but never overseas—and I continued to go to the base churches. However, in Hawaii I started going to the Episcopal cathedral, and continued off and on for several years in different places where I lived. I enjoyed the music and, honestly, the liturgy, even though I didn't buy it all.

Later, living in Federal Way, Washington when my children were small, I started going to the Episcopal church there. I volunteered to run the Vacation Bible School and was also on the bishop's committee. However, even then I considered myself "spiritual, not religious." When I stopped attending the Episcopal church after my divorce, only one couple reached out to me to see how I was doing!

Eventually, I started attending Saltwater UU in Des Moines, WA. I found enrichment and friendships, became a lay reader, and attended Chalice Circles—small discussion groups in people's homes. I especially enjoyed those.

During that time, an earthquake struck and devastated large portions of Haiti. My career in emergency response and recovery made me want to go but I knew I didn't have the skill set they so desperately needed in the immediate aftermath. However, a year and a half later I joined a group of

UUs from around the country to fly there—not to do for, but to do with, in support of a community of Haitians building villages on the central plateau to create new lives for themselves. I was fortunate enough to go two more times as a trip leader. I saw first-hand the demanding work they put in every day to build their villages, grow their own food, and dedicate themselves to creating better lives for their families.

All three trips offered powerful insights into the challenges and determination of the human spirit. We saw dirt transformed into rich soil enabling them to grow their own food. They built their own houses and created communities where they could learn and grow. I thought about the lesson from the UU Sunday school class so many years ago.

In 2017 I retired and moved to Spokane. Two days after moving here, I attended my first demonstration at the Gathering Place in downtown Spokane. As I listened to one of the speakers I thought—wow—his oration style reminds me of a Baptist minister. Well, it was Rev. Todd Eklof, who I soon learned was once a Baptist minister. When the gathering was over I went and introduced myself. Todd greeted me with a huge hug! He said, “I heard you were coming. Welcome!”

I made a purposeful effort to get to know UU Spokane. I became involved with different groups and soon made friends. It felt right and so I stayed.

Then came a different kind of earthquake: the UU GA in 2019 right here in Spokane. I remember sitting in some of the sessions wondering if I was in the right place. What was I missing? What is WOKE? Was I WOKE enough? Then there was something about a book Todd wrote. Who even had time to read it? They did WHAT to Todd? This was (and IS) not what I thought being a Unitarian is all about!

Then the pandemic. The empty chairs. No choir. Watching Todd alone (with the exception of the pianist and a lay reader) in the sanctuary, his sermons speaking to a virtual audience. It was hard

on all of us—but a fraction of how difficult it must have been for him. The double whammy of the unfair attacks by the UUA and its subsequent fall-out PLUS the pandemic. . . a lesser person would have left. BUT HE STOOD UP!

His strength and resolve are why I am still here. UUUCS has come back--slowly at first as COVID restrictions began being lifted, and now more fully. We are bringing back what was taken from us and expanding beyond what we once were. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the thrill of hearing the choir again! I still miss some of the people who are no longer here. But I also see new faces and feel a new energy. We are Unitarian Universalists—adhering to the SEVEN (not 8) Principles that first drew me here and continue to guide me along the way.

Voices of the Past: Margaret Fuller

Margaret Fuller, who was born May 23, 1810, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and died in a shipwreck off the shores of New York on July 19, 1850, packed much into her brief forty years. As the first woman allowed access to the Harvard library, Fuller was widely regarded as the most well-read person in New England. She worked as a successful journalist, editor, and author, and her seminal book, Women in the Nineteenth Century (1845), is regarded as the first major feminist writing in the U.S. Although she occasionally attended Unitarian congregations, and is often regarded as a Unitarian, Fuller was not a joiner and preferred an informal relationship with religion. As the following excerpt from her book, Life Without and Life Within, might intimate, she also had some affinity for Emerson's transcendentalism, but, as with Unitarianism, Fuller never called herself a transcendentalist.

Every person, who can be said to really live at all, leads two lives during this period of mortal

existence. The one life is outward; it is passed in reading the thoughts of others; in contemplating the struggles, the defeats, the victories, the virtues, the sins, and fine, all things which make the history of those who surround us; and in gazing

upon the structures which Art has reared, or paintings which she hath inscribed on the canvas; or looking upon the grand temple of the material universe, and beholding scenes painted by a hand more skilled, more wondrous, in its creative power, than ever can be human hand. The life passed in examining what other minds have produced, or living other men's lives by looking at their deeds, or in any way discerning what addresses the

bodily eye or the physical ear,—this is often wise and well; essential, indeed, to any inner life; but it is outward, not self-centered, not the product of our own individual natures.

But the thought of others suggests or develops thoughts of our own—the history of other men, as it is writing itself imperishability every day upon the souls, or already has written itself in letters of living light or lines of gloomy blackness—gives

rise to the internal sympathy or abhorrence of the part of us who look on and read what is thus writing and written. Our own spirits are stirred within us: our passions, which have been sleeping lions, our affections and aspirations, before angels

with folded wings,—these are awakened by what others are doing, and then we struggle with the bad or yield to it; we obey or disobey the good, and our internal moral life begins; The outward universe or the Great Spirit in our hearts speaks to our souls, leading first to inward dissatisfaction, then to aspiration for an attainment of holiness, and now the inner spiritual life, which shall transfigure all outward life, and throw its

own light and give its own hue to all the outward universe, has begun. These two lives are parallel streams; often they mingle their waters, and each imparts its own hue and characteristic to the other.

[Life Without and Life Within; or Reviews, Narratives, Essays, and Poems by Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Edited by Arthur B. Fuller, The Tribune Association, New York, NY, 1869, p. 3f.]



NAUA Academy News

The NAUA Academy held its fourth evening program on Tuesday, July 18th. The speaker was Dr. Joyce Francis, who is a member of NAUA, the NAUA Academy Advisory Board, the Quimper UU Fellowship and her county chapter of the Friends of Race Amity (FORA). The title of her presentation was “Race Amity: America’s Other Tradition.” She described the Race Amity Movement, which provides an alternative for Unitarian Universalists concerned about the UUA’s divisive and dogmatic anti-racism approach. Race amity promotes social justice through cross-racial friendship and collaborative action. She gave examples of this with a series of short videos. These examples serve to inspire us to action through stories of those moments in our history when individuals and groups transcended racial prejudice and cooperated in actions of social justice. She also gave examples of the work of her own local Friends of Race Amity organization. While the roots of the race amity movement are in the Baha’i faith, it has become a national, secular movement.

The program was well received and well attended with 48 registered participants. In addition, there were lively discussions in the breakout rooms after the question-and-answer session. A list of resources shared in this presentation is available at <https://tinyurl.com/RaceAmityAcademy>. An overview of the materials is also available through the National Center for Race Amity (<https://raceamity.org>).

There will be no NAUA Academy program in August.

September’s NAUA Academy program will take place on Tuesday, September 19th at 4:30-6:30 pm Pacific Time and 7:30-9:30 pm Eastern Time. Ken Ing will be our speaker, discussing the topic

of “Left vs. Left: What’s Happening Here Ain’t Exactly Clear”.

The ideological differences causing rifts in many UU congregations did not originate in Unitarian Universalism. Many countries that trace their heritage back to the Enlightenment are experiencing an ideological tug-of-war between traditional liberals and an identity-centric movement. Most traditional liberals don’t understand the belief systems underlying the identity-centric movement. Ken’s talk will attempt to explain those belief systems, and the reasoning behind them. He will be synthesizing the insights and perspectives of numerous books and other published writings. Ken believes we can’t resolve a conflict if we can’t articulate the perspectives of both sides.

Ken Ing retired in 2019 after spending his entire career in information technology. He lives in the northwest portion of the state of Washington. He is a frequent contributor to the local UU fellowship’s adult learning program, creating 13 talks over the past 4 years, usually about history or politics. He is a member of the NAUA Academy Advisory Board.

To register for the September NAUA Academy program please click the following link:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/30E0549A-BAF2DA6FE3-left>

If you have missed any of the previous NAUA Academy programs, you can find videos of those programs on the NAUA website by clicking <https://naunitarians.org/services-2/naua-academy>.

The videos of the previous programs are found at the bottom of the NAUA Academy page.

Stephen Polmar

Coming Events

**NAUA Monthly Worship Service – August 19,
10:00 a.m. Pacific Time, 1:00 p.m. Eastern
Time.**

After experimenting with holding our monthly NAUA service on both livestream and Zoom, we have decided to exclusively hold them on Zoom in the future, beginning in July.

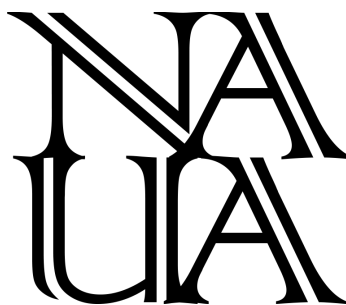
Our August 20th speaker will be NAUA Member Mary Bennett. Mary, a part of our NAUA Worship Team, is also a member of Living Interfaith Sanctuary based in Vancouver, and, at the local level, is active with the Vancouver Unitarian Earth spirituality group and the environment team.

Her sermon, entitled “Credos and Connections,” will explore the theory and practice of Henry Nelson Weimann’s concept of creative interchange. Weimann was a philosopher, professor, and UU minister (after Presbyterian and Congregationalist). Six days after his death in 1975 he received the Award for Distinguished Service to the Cause of Liberal Religion. If, as Marge Piercy says, “Connections are made slowly,” it may be that disconnections also can take some time. Mary will reflect on her own journey as a Unitarian and what it means to her currently to be a Unitarian during these times of challenge and change.

A link to the Zoom gathering will be posted on our website and sent out to our members and subscribers in advance of the service.

**NAUA Monthly Clergy Gathering – August 24,
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Pacific Time, 1:00 –
3:00 p.m. Eastern Time.**

Attendees at our monthly Clergy Gathering enjoy the kind of anonymity, open discussion, and supportive collegiality that has long been the norm among Unitarian ministers. Please plan to attend if you can.



Submitting Letters to the Editor

Thanks to those who have submitted letters for this issue. Those wishing to do likewise can address matters of interest to Unitarians and Universalists and other religious liberals, including current news and events.

Please email your submission no less than five business days before the end of the calendar month in order for publication in our next issue. Letters are shorter than opinion pieces and should be no more than 250 words. Form letters and letters considered libelous, obscene or in bad taste will not be printed. Anonymous letters will not be printed. NAUA reserves the right to edit all letters for length. The decision to print any submission is completely at the discretion of the editors.

Please write “Letter to the Editor” in the subject line and email your submissions to nauaedboard@gmail.com or mail them to:

North American Unitarian Association
Letters to the Editor
4340 W. Whistalks Way
Spokane, WA 99224

Letters must include the writer’s name, full address, and phone number for verification purposes. Only the name and town will be published.

If you’re interested in learning more about NAUA, please explore our website at www.naunitarians.org.

To become a member of NAUA, go to <https://naunitarians.org/membership>.