

SEPTEMBER 2016

SOUNDINGS



Unitarian Universalist
Church of Charlotte

DISCOVER DEEPER SPIRITUAL MEANING

Depth through reflection

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Blue Ridge Parkway, photo by George Weir

Reverence is the recognition of something greater than the self – something that is beyond human creation or control, that transcends full human understanding. God certainly meets those criteria, but so do birth, death, sex, nature, truth, justice, and wisdom.

— BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR IN *AN ALTAR IN THE WORLD*



The Mission of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Charlotte is to inspire children, youth and adults to discover and articulate deeper spiritual meaning evidenced in lives of integrity, compassion and stewardship of the earth.

La mision de la iglesia Unitaria Universalista de Charlotte es inspirar a los niños, jóvenes y adultos para que descubran y articulan un significado espiritual profundo, evidente en una vida de integridad, compasión y en el manejo de los recursos de la tierra

REVERENCE IN ZOMBIELAND

by Don Crawford



Don Crawford

I'm no zombie expert but it seems that the cold behavior of the undead isn't that different from what you see on the news. Senseless killings, mobs running away from the approaching danger, or standing at the edge of confrontation. One of the undead is even running for high public office. His

heartless attacks on any who oppose him hurt, humiliate, and dehumanize us all. For power. For profit. He is the poster boy for arrogance – the anti-reverence – and I identify closely with him.

My arrogance was just on a smaller scale. People not dear to me or not important to me were not given consideration equal to mine. Stepping around, over or on – there was usually a path to my goal. This regardless of how worthy the goal. I felt no heartbeat, no joy in these actions. I felt no pleasure in my pursuit. Only the drone of my selfish, misguided effort.

I believe now that my lack of empathy came from a bad decision taken in childhood. I drew the wrong conclusion when my family moved north for my dad's job, leaving dozens of close family behind. I thought it meant that people weren't important.

By having reverence for life, we enter into a spiritual relation with the world. By practicing reverence for life we become good, deep, and alive. –Albert Schweitzer

I cracked the door and Compassion knocked me over in the doorway and sat on my chest while it tuned me up. Reverence came in, looked around and left. I tried to reach out but I didn't know how to approach. I had to make serious promises to continue the relationship.

Considering where I've started, becoming a reverent person will continue to be a challenge for me. I feel that I haven't the tools for it yet. The path will be steep. It will be narrow and twisted but is also broad enough to include everything. Reverence for all living things implies broad changes in unexpected places.

I'm feeling much better now. I've been able to make some steps toward growth and find new attitudes to live with. I have learned to revere another person and to hold their needs higher than mine. You've been doing it throughout your life unless you were a zombie too.

Raising and holding others above myself is new for me. Although I helped raise children and grandchildren, I know that my heart wasn't as engaged as it should

have been. I missed the opportunity to grow older with my wife Marilyn while I continued to atone for my earlier mistakes. In my deepening appreciation for her while we were together I was struck by the magnitude of my debt to her. I had rarely treated her with the reverence she deserved and I had to work hard, trying to make up for it.



Two Blues, painting by Edie Gelber-Beechler
photographed by Elsa Lafferty

The conception of worth, that each person is an end per se, is not a mere abstraction. Our interest in

it is not merely academic. Every outcry against the oppression of some people by other people, or against what is morally hideous is the affirmation of the principle that a human being as such is not to be violated. A human being is not to be handled as a tool but is to be respected and revered. –Felix Adler

Now it's time for discovery. Time to find those things that make us remember our humility by showing us greatness. Time to remember our humanity by recognizing and revering excellence within or beyond humanity. Time to remember more positive approaches that foster respect and reverence for each other and the goodwill to move forward.

REVERENCE

by Debbie George



Debbie George

I'm struck by this word – that the experience of reverence and the way to the experience will be very different for each of us, but also the same. Certain aspects will cut across the differences: deep respect, a degree of awakened presence, an open, caring heart and, above all, love. There is a sacred aspect that

is going to be part of the experience: the opposite of taking for granted and “operating” on auto-pilot.

How we get there (here!) is up to us.

There are many paths up the same mountain. Some meditate, some read poetry, some go to nature, some write comedy, some care for another who is hurting.

Some see their vegetarian diet as an act of reverence, while some experience gratitude and reverence for the gift of the life of an animal humanely raised, that sustains them to live vitally.

What is reverence for one might be quite irreverent for another.

But I sense a common thread – that reverence must be inspired.

Ask yourself, “What is it to be fully alive on Earth?” Reverence will be present in the answer.

For me, reverence is love in action. It's the way love shows up in the world. It is revealed in where a person gives their time and energy.

Reverence is a higher plane, a sensitive abiding, while knowing in the heart – not head – that this life is fleeting and this moment is full of possibilities.

The late Stephen Levine, a Buddhist meditation teacher, taught us to frequently pause and think, “If this were my last year to live, is this what I want to do today?” My answer points me to reverence, to what I do not want to take for granted, to the activities that wake me up to caring concern in this life that I live today, right now.

What is YOUR ANSWER to this question? “If this were my last year to live, is this what I would want to do today?”

To regularly reflect in this way as a daily practice is to live with reverence, honoring where and to what we are led, honoring one's Self and what one holds dear in this life.

My own “experiences” of reverence are many.

I know it when I'm remembering to be fully present as a loved one is sharing their thoughts with me. I'm not thinking of my response, I'm not trying to fix or solve anything for them. I'm deeply listening and they know they are being heard, their feelings respected.

I know reverence when I fully experience a bite of delicious food. I know it when I'm fully present with sadness, with longing or loneliness, and I'm not pushing it away or distracting myself. I'm letting the experience of life's sorrows wash through me. This feels like reverence. The truth that is healing feels to me like reverence.

Reverence feels like the sacred in the ordinary experiences of life – the sacred mundane that can be known any time I remember to pause, look around, and choose to be awake and alive to it all. Because one day I'll be gone. One day, it will all be gone.



Birch Trees Nova Scotia
painting by Edie Gelber-Beechler
photographed by Elsa Lafferty



Jay Leach

John H. Young's 1879 book *Our Deportment* offers detailed instructions regarding, as the subtitle explains, *The Manners, Conduct and Dress of the Most Refined Society*. Young devotes a whole chapter to "Etiquette on Calls" reviewing the appropriate times for social calling, reception days, first calls, and the proper

protocol for particular kinds of calls including "at summer resorts," "after a betrothal takes place," "visits of condolence," and even "New Year's calls."

Young then launches into another chapter on "Visiting and Calling Cards." He begins with a quote: "To the unrefined or underbred, the visiting card is but a trifling and insignificant bit of paper; but to the cultured disciple of social law, it conveys a subtle and unmistakable intelligence." (How many of us are now so "unrefined" that we do not realize that a calling card submitted with its left hand upper corner turned down signals the intent of "felicitation"?)

These and Young's other earnest items are, at best, stuffy, amusing, thoroughly dated. They signal to us not intelligence but irrelevance. At its worst the careful counsel that, for example, "Glazed cards are quite out of fashion, as are cards and note paper with gilt edges" comes across as a privileged barrier more about exclusion than etiquette.

In late summer 2016, the notion of "reverence" may have a similarly archaic tone suggesting some proper sense of things predating even the age of petticoats and plutocrats. Plato's *Protagoras* explains that Zeus, fearing humankind's self-destruction, sent Hermes to humans bearing reverence as a way to "adorn society and bind people together." But that was millennia ago.

In his 2001 book *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue* philosopher Paul Woodruff admits that "We have the word 'reverence' in our language, but we scarcely know how to use it." And acknowledges: "Right now it has no place in secular discussions of ethics or political theory."

With the echoes of viciously partisan political conventions still reverberating, in the anticipation of an election promising unprecedented incivility, what place could there possibly be for a notion like reverence in contemporary political theory? Isn't the

bitterly divisive world of politics just too rough-and-tumble for the seemingly quaint notion of reverence?

The great Indian social reformer B.R. Ambedkar didn't think so. Ambedkar was an advocate for India's most maligned – the *Dalits*, regarded as outside of and completely beneath the carefully constructed world of castes. He is still held with high regard by many. This influential 20th-century Hindu turned Buddhist asserted that democracy is "essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards our fellow [human beings]." Imagine: reverence not as some antiquated notion but as an absolutely essential element of democracy.



Vigil, Muslim American Association, photo by Nancy Pierce

Unitarian Universalism's principles proclaim our religious commitment to democracy. What if we were to aspire to engage in the democratic process with an attitude of *reverence* toward others? What if we stopped before speaking, writing, posting and asked: do my words reflect a *reverence* for others? What if we were to commit to a spiritually deep attitude, one determined that, no matter the course others may choose, we will be those acting as if democracy depends on *reverence*?

John H. Young's fusty 19th-century book on "deportment" includes an epigraph commending us "to be kind unto all, rich, poor and oppressed" explaining:

For kindness and mercy are balms that will heal
The sorrows, the pains and the woes that we feel.

His insistence of the proper way to submit a calling card may be utterly useless to us. But this – his call for kindness and mercy – just may be the reverent salve we need in these times.

Our spiritual journey begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. We invite parents to use the material presented in LET'S DIVE IN! to engage their children in this journey.



Chalice Lighting

We now light our chalice. If we are still and quiet, we will notice the beauty of its glow. Sometimes, when we are quiet, we can notice and appreciate the beauty all around us.

HOW TO FEED A HUMMINGBID

by Kathleen Carpenter



Kathleen Carpenter

Iris and Lily were twins. Everyone at church loved them. Some said it was because of their smiles. Others said, "It's because they're so friendly." Everyone agreed that the twins made people happy. Everyone except Mr. Chung and Ms. Goodwin, their religious education teachers.

Mr. Chung said, "I try to teach a song and they sing too loudly and off-key. Soon the whole class is laughing. They need to sing quietly."

Ms. Goodwin added, "I try to tell a story, and they start off listening. Then Lily giggles and soon the whole class is laughing. They need to listen."

Ms. Carter, the Director, listened quietly. The twins weren't bad children. They were just disruptively happy. "I might know what to do," she said.

The next day, Ms. Carter called the twins' house. She asked the girls if they would like to go to the zoo to see the new hummingbird exhibit. They thought that sounded wonderful. They begged their mom to let them go, and she agreed.

At the zoo exhibit, a hummingbird darted by Iris's face. "Wow," she giggled.

"Let's catch one!" Lily yelled. Laughing, the twins chased the hummingbirds. But the beautiful birds stayed out of reach.

"I guess you can't catch a hummingbird," Lily said.

"You can, if you know how," Ms. Carter replied. "Girls, do you know what reverent means?"

"Sure," Iris answered. "It means fold your arms and don't talk – like in church."

Ms. Carter smiled. "Well, being quiet is part of it, but

that's not really reverence. Reverence is a feeling. Maybe I can show you. She poured a little sugar water from the hummingbird feeder into two bowls and set one in each girl's outstretched hands. For several minutes they sat there with their hands cupped in front of them.

The only sound in the room was the buzzing of the birds' tiny wings.

Then, one of the birds darted toward Iris and hovered over her bowl, sipping at the water. She giggled, but Ms. Carter put her finger to her lips. Iris sat very still, watching the hummingbird drink until it zipped away. Another took its place. Soon Lily had several hummingbirds drinking her water too.

A warm glow filled the girls. They had tried hard to catch one of the tiny birds, and now, just by being quiet, each had several eating from their hands. The girls sat in awe of their tiny visitors.

Ms. Carter whispered softly, "Reverence is like these hummingbirds. You don't catch a hummingbird. You let it come to you. You don't catch a reverent feeling, either. It just comes to you when you are quiet. It's the warm feeling you are feeling right now. When you're in your class next Sunday, think about how quiet you had to be to have these hummingbirds feed from your hands. Then when the teacher asks you to enter into a spirit of meditation, see if you get that same reverent feeling."

The next Sunday the twins sat quietly with their class.

Lily listened to Mr. Chung talk about compassion. Iris closed her eyes and thought about the power of kindness. Slowly the girls felt a warm feeling come to them.

"Look at the twins," Ms. Goodwin whispered. "What did you say to them?"

Ms. Carter smiled. "I showed them how to feed a hummingbird."



photo by Evan Visco

REVERENCE

by Lincoln Baxter



Lincoln Baxter

One summer night, when I was a teenager, I found myself sitting on a dock looking out over Siders Pond being proselytized by some evangelical peers. By that time I had read all four Gospels from beginning to end (in response to their efforts), but I had ended up pretty much where I started. Their assumption was that if I read the “true word of God,”

I would just believe it. As I looked out at the night air thinking about what they wanted me to say I believed, the air seemed electric; it seemed to swirl with color (though objectively it was just dark), and I knew I could not look at “God” or “Christ” the way they did. When asked about my experience of God, I found myself talking about this presence within us and around us, an all-pervading presence and life force. I couldn’t describe it very well; I still can’t, but I believe I was in a state of spiritual reverence.

Reverence is deeply embedded in our UU traditions and principles. Every one of the principles involve reverence in one way or another, but I see it embodied especially in the seventh:

“Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”

The “interdependent web of all existence” pretty much summarizes my experience of God that night on Cape Cod.

I hold our congregation in reverence. What an awesome community. I revere the role I’ve been asked to take on over the next three years. And I hold our new vision with reverence. This was the result of two years’ work, meetings with various groups providing input. The team produced a statement that captured what we aspire to accomplish as a community. I revere that effort, and the bold goals we have set for ourselves. When I listened to one of the discussions in our congregational conversation last June, I was struck by how

the comments aligned with this vision. One statement in our newly adopted vision especially resonates with me:

“We are known throughout the region for our open-mindedness, inclusivity and acceptance of and engagement with other spiritual communities and practices.”

To say I’m a member of this congregation and have folks know who we are? I can’t wait for this to happen! This will require reverence from all of us, especially reverence for other faith groups with whom we share common purpose even though they read and interpret the Judeo-Christian texts differently, or read entirely different scriptures. As Rev. (there’s that word – a cousin of reverence) Leach has regularly been teaching us, there are ways to interpret traditional religious language, expression, and stories meaningfully. I love the way he does Easter for instance. He doesn’t shy away from the story, he interprets it. When we transform our understanding of the practices of others from being “apart,” and instead find meaning in their stories, we respect their “inherent worth and dignity.” This enables us to come into reverence with them, and they will enable us to achieve other parts of our vision.



photo by Phyllis Bertke

Nancy Greene

With respect, kindness and integrity, Nancy Greene has served in diverse roles and impacted many lives in our congregation. When asked why she’s done all this, “Because that’s what you do”, was Nancy’s answer.



Nancy Greene

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Charlotte is Nancy’s fifth UU congregation. When she arrived here 26 years ago, she had already spent years volunteering in other congregations and wanted to continue volunteering here. With her experience, she felt she could make a difference in Membership. While hosting new member dinners at her home, she enjoyed meeting new people, helping them get involved and connecting them with other members.

Not long after starting with Membership, Nancy noticed additional ways she could contribute. She volunteered with Sunday morning coffee service. She introduced what we now call February Friends, which gives children an opportunity to connect with older youth or adults. She was a Coming of Age mentor and later sewed quilts out of squares created by Coming of Age youth. Nancy also sewed costumes for our musical comedy Follies.

These days, she shares her musical talents in our Handbell Ensemble. On some week days, she answers phone calls as she serves at our front desk. She cares for our gardens on Building and Grounds work days. For the last four years, she has helped to make our memorial receptions possible. Nancy explained she wants to do this “to help bring closure or a sense of peace to those who are grieving”.

Nancy’s leadership roles at the UUC have included serving on our Board of Trustees, as Chair of our Congregational Care Team and on the Ministerial Search Committee that called Jay Leach.

Nancy feels she gets much more out of volunteering than she gives. When she started volunteering, she was motivated in part by a desire to show her children how they fit into the larger congregation. She thinks having them witness her volunteer commitment helped them stay involved as youth and come back to our congregation as adults. Her son Pete confirmed, “As I have grown and returned to the church as an adult, I knew that I wanted to follow her example and get involved, both as a way of getting to know more people and to help my UU community.” Having three generations of her family active in our congregation is just one of the many gifts Nancy has given us.



General Assembly UUA, photo by Nancy Pierce

Above & Beyond

We thank Lib Jones for her many years of caring for, and contributing to, our UUC gardens. You’ve no doubt noticed the beautiful plants around the circle at the entrance of our building. Over a decade ago, Lib and her husband Tom Nunnenkamp offered their expertise, plants and labor to improve this area. Ever since, Lib has lovingly planted, weeded, watered and pruned season after season, year after year. The beauty she created and maintained has been enjoyed by countless people who have visited this building over the years. As Lib retires from this extraordinary service to our congregation – which she will be doing soon – take an extra moment to appreciate Lib and the lovely gardens she has made possible.



Lib Jones

MEET OUR NEW MEMBERS



Bob Atwood

Bob Atwood

“I am universal in my views – we are all basically spiritual beings living a physical life on planet earth. Let’s learn to get along, love our brothers and sisters, and serve them with unconditional love.

My background is math and GED teaching, computer programming, being a motorman and conductor on an old trolley. I am an avid spiritual seeker.”

Laura Austin

British by decent, I grew up in New York State and moved to Charlotte in 2000. My spiritual journey led me to embrace myself first and then find the joy of discovering all the wonders within those people I meet along the way.



Laura Austin

Hayley Mockler

“After visiting for almost two years, I finally decided to join. I am an active member of the Young Adult Group and enjoy meeting new people each Sunday. Social justice and activism are important to me, so this community is perfect.”



Hayley Mockler

REVERENCE

When I see her, I am embarrassed I did not wear my finery as she is certainly in hers. Her graceful motions inspire sparkles and strappy shoes, not morning workout gear, but she pays that no mind.

Around her, green stems bend and straighten almost by an invisible force until I notice the hundreds of winged creatures hovering above, around, in between and almost everywhere. The buzzing offers music to this perfectly timed dance, a celebration of what lies inside each purple, horn-shaped flower.

She is the largest of the bees. I watch her go from flower to flower flying, smelling and tasting, then repeating the steps again and again.

She looks at me. Her large black eyes are reflective and mysterious and I immediately lower mine.

I am in awe of her and the universe that has led me here to witness this simple, beautiful prayer and asks only that I respond with gratitude.

Reverence is small. A simple emotion given plenty of room to grow without noise, complications, distractions or doubt. It is rare and powerful. It cannot be fabricated or replicated. It just is, much like the bees, much like this morning.

I leave the bees to their rhythmic, soothing work admiring the way they operate on instinct, trust and grace and as I slowly leave them, I hope I can try to do the same.

– Courtney McLaughlin



photo by Phyllis Bertke

FOR FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

Below you will find a list of books, reflections, movies, lectures and much more for further engagement on the subject of Reverence

BOOKS:

Adult

Reverence for Life: The Words of Albert Schweitzer, by Albert Schweitzer, Harold E. Robles, 1995

A Haunting Reverence: Meditations on a Northern Land, by Kent Nerburn, 1996

Meditations of the Heart, by Howard Thurman, 1999

Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey, by Jane Goodall, 2000

Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue, by Paul Woodruff, 2001

Thich Nhat Hanh: Essential Writings, by Thich Nhat Hanh, 2001

What Does It Mean to Be Human?: Reverence for Life Reaffirmed by Responses from Around the World, edited by Frederick Franck, 2001

The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar, by B.R. Ambedkar, edited by Valerian Rodrigues, 2004

The Language of Reverence, edited by Dean Grodzins, 2004

Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the 21st Century, by William R. Murry, 2006

Creating with Reverence: Art, Diversity, Culture and Soul, by Claire Campbell Park, 2009

Practicing Reverence: An Ethic for Sustainable Earth Communities, by Ross L. Smillie, 2011

Teaching with Reverence: Reviving an Ancient Virtue for Today's Schools, edited by A.G.G. Rud, 2012

Preschool/ Early Elementary

In God's Name, by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, 2004

Brother Sun, Sister Moon Saint Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Creatures, by Katherine Paterson, 2011

A Leaf Can Be, by Laura Purdie Salas, 2012

Animals . . . and Their Families, by Barbara Nascimbeni, 2012

Doors in the Air, by David Weale, 2012

Step Gently Out, by Helen Frost, 2012

Global Baby Girls, by The Global Fund for Children, 2013

Namaste!, by Diana Cohn, 2013

Older Elementary

Walking with Henry: Based on the Life and Works of Henry David Thoreau, by Thomas Locker, 2002

Old Turtle, by Douglas Wood, 2007

Rachel Carson: Preserving a Sense of Wonder, by Joseph Bruchac and Thomas Locker, 2009

MOVIES:

The Boy Who Could Fly, 1986 (PG)

March of the Penguins, 2005 (G)

Disneynature: Earth, 2008 (G)

Nel giardino dei suoni (In the Garden of Sounds), 2009 (Swiss documentary)

Precious, 2010 (R)

The Way, 2010 (PG-13)

SHORT VIDEOS:

What a Wonderful World, performed by Louis Armstrong <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkTLIO2zanM>

BLOG POSTS:

Story from Church of Latter Day Saint website

<https://www.lds.org/friend/1993/06/reverence-in-the-mountains?lang=eng>

The Reverence Project Blog Posts

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/projects/the-reverence-project/blog-posts>

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS OF ART, POETRY, AND READINGS:

Phyllis Bertke

Phyllis has been a passionate amateur photographer since she discovered that experiences are richer if she has a camera nearby, even if she's not taking pictures. Her camera helps keep her present in the smallest of moments.



Phyllis Bertke

Nancy Pierce

UUCU member Nancy Pierce has worked as a documentary photographer all her adult life. Her client list reflects her interests in land and water protection, sustainable communities, active transportation, social justice and the common good. She has photographed General Assembly for the Unitarian Universalist Association every year since 1993. Nancy and her husband Mickey Shaver raised two sons in the UUCU.



Nancy Pierce



Edie Gelber Beechler

Edie Gelber Beechler

"For me, painting is all about color. Mixing colors, choosing just the right ones, excites me. For instance, if I've put a tiny line of blue somewhere where it just has to be, and it makes that one-inch section perfect, then I'm

thrilled – even if the rest of the piece doesn't work that well! Painting reinforces my spiritual path when it takes me out of time. All I know is the moment, the canvas, the paint, the brushstroke. That's all that matters."



Evan Visco

Evan Visco

Evan Lance Visco is a husband, father of two children and one cat, and a professional automotive repair technician. He enjoys NASCAR racing, nature hikes, and bike rides with his family.

Courtney McLaughlin

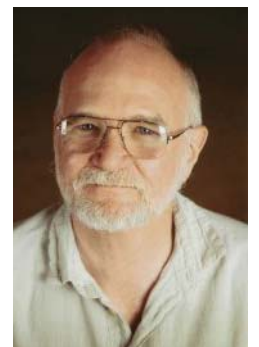
Courtney McLaughlin's passion for writing was sparked by the gift of a typewriter she received from her mother at age 8. She has been a freelance writer and editor for over 15 years. Her world and passion grew when she joined UUCU's Writing Your Spiritual Journey group in 2011. Through their support, friendship and sharing, she is constantly challenged to explore new ways of interpreting and experiencing the world using her love of words.



Courtney McLaughlin

George Weir

George will photograph almost anything that stays still more than 1/1000 of a second, more or less depending on the light. For George photography is a useful tool to remind himself to slow down and actually look at the world around him. He finds photographing children especially challenging but gets lots of practice as camp photographer for Chameleons Journey, an overnight grief camp for children ages 7-16 who have lost someone important in their lives.



George Weir

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