

## WELCOME

Good morning! Welcome to The Towson Unitarian Universalist Church.

My name is Clare Petersberger and I extend a special welcome to visitors this morning.

Do we have visitors to introduce or who would like to introduce themselves?

Welcome! We look forward to getting to know you and to having you get to know us.

To this end, everyone is invited to remain for coffee and conversation following worship.

We have come out of the cold and a (predicted) wintry mix into the warmth of The Towson Unitarian Universalist Church. So we begin worship with a song about opening the door seeking sanctuary in order to be protected from the elements.

## PRELUDE

*Mangwani M'pulele* (Sotho Children's Song, arr. Mike Brewer) The TUUC Choir

## CHALICE LIGHTING

Thank you TUUC Choir for your joyous song.

Our chalice lighting is also about seeking home. It is adapted from Anne Lammott's book *Traveling Mercies*.

As Ms. Duncan lights our chalice, please join in a responsive reading of Anne Lamott's words printed in your order of service.

One day a seven year old girl got lost.

**SHE RAN UP AND DOWN THE STREETS OF THE BIG TOWN  
WHERE HER FAMILY LIVED, BUT SHE COULDN'T FIND A SINGLE LANDMARK.**

Finally a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his squad car. They drove around until she saw her church.

**SHE POINTED IT OUT TO THE POLICEMAN.**

She told him firmly,

**"YOU CAN LET ME OUT NOW. THIS IS MY CHURCH,  
AND I CAN ALWAYS FIND MY WAY HOME FROM HERE."**

We light our chalice for our beacon of free-thinking religion.

**BECAUSE NO MATTER HOW BAD WE ARE FEELING,  
HOW LOST OR LONELY OR FRIGHTENED,  
WHEN WE SEE THE FACES OF THE PEOPLE IN OUR  
CONGREGATION, AND HEAR THEIR TAWNY VOICES,  
WE CAN ALWAYS FIND OUR WAY HOME.**

We may arrive feeling bad, lost, lonely or frightened. We may arrive feeling happy, centered, loved, and courageous. We may arrive feeling a mixture of emotions.

Here, we help one another to find our way home.

So you are invited to come forward to drop a stone for a significant milestone, millstone, or stepping stone as we join our excellent voices in singing hymn number 1000.

## OPENING WORDS

Today is TUUC Celebration Sunday. The Latin root from which we get the word “celebration” means “large assembly.”

It’s hard to celebrate alone!

We gather in beloved community to worship, to learn, to see friends, to serve, and to celebrate!

Over the past few weeks, our students have remembered ideas, places, people, and events that were special for them this year.

### CELEBRATING 9:30

Students in our PreK/K class have been exploring Creating Home. They will now share an art project that celebrates what they learned. (Children made paper dolls that represent themselves and the special gifts they have. Would teachers like to share the two gifts that each child identified about themselves? (eg, Jane has a paper doll showing that her gifts are being helpful and loving animals.)

Students in our 1st-3<sup>rd</sup> class on “Moral Tales” will now introduce us to a game illustrating one of the most meaningful things they learned... (We are all one.)

Students in our 4th/5<sup>th</sup> class entitled “Windows/Mirrors” created three posters to illustrate this metaphor.

### CELEBRATING 11:15

Students in our PreK/K class have been exploring Creating Home. They will now share their favorite place in our religious home (the playground.)

Students in our first through third grade class, Moral Tales, have created a poster illustrating what they are celebrating. (wonderful illustrations!)

Students in our 6th/7<sup>th</sup> class entitled “Riddle and Mystery” will share in ONE PHRASE what they have found most meaningful this year.

Finally, students in our 4th/5th class entitled “Windows/Mirrors” made T-shirts to celebrate activities each member found most meaningful.

Students and Teachers in our Religious Exploration Ministry

#### 9:30

Pre-K-K *Creating Home*

1st-3rd grade *Moral Tales*

4th/5th grade *Windows and Mirrors*

#### 11:15

Pre-K-K *Creating Home*

1st-3rd grade *Moral Tales*

6th/7th grade *Riddle and Mystery*

4th/5th grade *Windows and Mirrors*

## HYMN

Hearty thanks to our students and teachers reminding us that one light through many different RE classes shines.

Thank you for enriching our Celebration Sunday by sharing gifts you’ve given and received in this congregation of open minds, loving hearts, and helping hands.

Let one song with many voices now rise from our hearts. It is printed on the insert in your order of service.

**On the second verse, students and teachers are invited to gather up front to leave for classes.**

*One Light Through Many Windows* (see insert)

## **PRAYER/MEDITATION**

Let us continue in the spirit of prayer with a meditation, printed in your order of service.

Since we Unitarian Universalists like to choose, I will leave it to you to decide if you are on the right or left side of the meeting room.

The final line of the meditation is said in unison by everyone! With this in mind, let us begin with those on the right side of the room.

### **Right Side:**

Some came here looking for solace.

Some came here and gave it to them.

### **Left Side:**

Some came here seeking music.

Some came here and gave it, joyfully.

### **Right side:**

Some came here seeking laughter.

Some came here and created it.

### **Left Side:**

Some came here seeking learning, growth.

Some came here and provided it.

### **Right Side:**

Some came here looking for a sense of security, a safe haven.

Some came here and provided it.

### **Left Side:**

Some came here seeking an escape from hectic lives.

Some came here and enabled them to have it.

### **Right Side:**

Some came here seeking the joy of community.

Some came here and created that.

### **Left Side:**

Some came here wanting to serve.

Some came here and made it possible for them.

**Everyone:** We thank them all.

We do thank them ALL....However, what is missing from this litany is how some came here seeking beauty and some came here and created beauty. In the recent new member class, we watched the TUUC 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary video.

Jay Cherry shared how, when he was President, he asked Arthur Conrad to Chair a Committee to design a pulpit.

When Arthur died, unexpectedly, his wife picked up where Arthur left off. She imagined a pulpit that would remind us of the trees around TUUC growing up out of the ground. A year later, Jay Cherry selected the pulpit chairs to compliment the pulpit. And then June Woodward crafted the table to go between the chairs.

Alas, all good things come to an end. The original pulpit chairs had long pieces of duct tape hanging from under the cushions. Evidently, some members waited and wondered who would, sit down one morning, and fall through.

So Sue and Herb Shankroff took action. Sue consulted with the aesthetics and special gifts committees. They researched pulpit chairs. As a result, we hereby, formally welcome and dedicate our new pulpit chairs with this hope:

May all who sit in these two chairs, find grounding, comfort, and support to seek, speak, and preach truths that inspire, companion, and guide who we are, who we are becoming, and whose we are.

We thank Herb, Sue, and members of the Aesthetic and Special Gifts Committees as well as donors to the Special Gifts Committee for these beautiful chairs.

And speaking of works of art, our congregation is fortunate to have a rotating art gallery.

Lottie Green founded Gallery Unicorn. For the past two decades, Dawn Murr has served as either Chair or Co-Chair of Gallery Unicorn. This entailed contacting artists; arranging the calendar of shows; creating the list of works; hanging the show...which requires an artists' eye as well as physical labor; and hosting receptions, to which Dawn always brings her highly complimented punch recipe.

Dawn is retiring from the position of Co-Director and passing the mantel to Gail Ogin and Emily Tarsell. Gail says, "Dawn taught me everything I need to know to hang artwork properly." Gail continues, "It is more involved than I ever imagined. However, Dawn passed on her knowledge and wit to me."

This is a good thing, as the featured artist of the Gallery Unicorn exhibit from May 15<sup>th</sup>-June 19<sup>th</sup> is.....drum roll....Dawn Murr.

We thank Dawn for her labors of love that all seekers of beauty might find creators of beauty, here.

Dawn, we thank you for all your labors of love that all seekers of beauty might find creators of beauty, here. On behalf of Gallery Unicorn, and all of us, please accept a token of our appreciation.

## **MUSICAL INTERLUDE**

*Celebrate!* Clif Hardin Women of the TUUC Choir

Today is the culmination of our annual focus on Stewardship. For the past month, we have been thinking about what it means to walk through these doors---into a community of information, formation, and transformation. Week after week, this community orients us to what is most worthy of our faithful love.

With this in mind....

# STEWARDSHIP TESTIMONIAL

## Why I Contribute to TUUC

*David Sumler March 27, 2011 9:30 Service*

### Community

Having been raised a Southern Baptist, I was repelled by the rigidity and intolerance of the churches I attended. As a young adult, I looked for a religious community that was tolerant and open to a diversity of ideas and beliefs.

My wife, Claudia (who was raised as a Presbyterian) and I have moved several times, and always found a Unitarian-Universalist Church where we felt at home. That included Champaign, Illinois; the Eastern Shore of Maryland; Columbia; Maryland; Cherry Hill, New Jersey; Now here at TUUC...

### I contribute to Promote My Values in the Greater Society

In UU congregations, we always found people who shared our belief in the worth of every individual and all that implies in terms of civil rights, adequate housing, adequate food, and affordable health care.

While, as one person, I cannot be involved in all these issues, or even several, personally; I have found that, through a UU Church, I can support and strengthen all of these causes.

### My experience has been that I can trust the leaders of TUUC to use my contributions wisely.

In the several UU churches where I have been a member, I have been fortunate to be involved in many various committees and on a UU Church Board. I know, from sometimes painful but also rewarding experience, how carefully the Board goes through its budget process. The budget we, as the congregation, see at the Annual Meeting is the product of at least 6 months of gathering information from the Church committees (Education, Building and Grounds, Personnel, Sunday Service, Social Outreach, and so on) and, after gathering that information, trying to balance Church's revenues with all the needs of the various committees, and, finally, after 6 months of diligent discussions and analysis of financial reports, presenting a budget to the Congregation.

Having been a part of this process as a Board member at another UU church, I know it can be difficult and controversial, but I also know the budget is the product of the collective knowledge and consensus of the Board members and the Treasurer, with input from the Minister, the church's employees, and all the committee chairs. Therefore, I am confident that my Church is doing its best to support and nurture the shared values of the Congregation and my values as well –thereby multiplying my impact on the world 100 times over.

Thank you!

### Service and Balance in Life

Jen Larson 11:15

I am a person who is working to embrace change and figure out how to be of more service to others. I serve in the Air Force which gives me some practice in both of those. It involves relocating and changing jobs on a periodic basis and the expectation that I will put my work ahead of personal needs is a real one. I have very clear development goals emplaced on me by my profession.

My experiences at TUUC have helped me to develop the balancing sides of my being. Coming to TUUC has helped me to seek out change in my personal life to balance the professional side.

When my partner Kim and I relocated to Baltimore in late 2008, we started out simply attending services. I sat back and observed the church for a time. When I wanted to develop closer relationships with others in the church, I joined the Tuesday night chalice circle in 2009, aka the Naked Mole Rats.

I made enduring friendships as we probed our deeply held and deeply private experiences and beliefs. At this time I also engaged in some limited service projects with and within the congregation.

Last year, Mike Robinson invited me to serve as a steward visiting members and friends. I'm not sure if I did it right, but it was wonderful to sit down with people in their homes to talk about religious outlook, church involvement, and the concept of tithing.

I deployed to Afghanistan April to October of last year, and had many opportunities for personal reflection along with professional development. I value the experience of getting to know Clare better as I prepared for that.

So many member of the congregation wrote to me, sent me care packages, and checked on Kim while I was away.

I like to think it was also positive for TUUC to have two members deployed to Afghanistan. Happenings on the news can feel very distant without that personal connection. Beginning at the end of last year, I took on my biggest prospect for growth within the TUUC community by becoming an advisor to the high school youth group. As a conscious non-parent, it has been thought provoking and challenging to interact with UU youth. Not growing up within the UU tradition it is eye opening to see how the 7 principles are embodied in our religious education program.

Not quite a teacher, not quite a friend, not a parent, it has been a process of feeling out a good balance in advising this group. Many things are much easier to accomplish in a military environment, but they certainly aren't as much fun. I am really thankful for the opportunities for involvement TUUC has afforded me from embracing me so strongly through personal friendships and my chalice circle to putting me to work through stewardship and work parties, and finally to allowing me to mentor the youth of the congregation.

I feel like so many wonderful opportunities for adaptation and service have presented themselves to me over the past 2½ years, and the ones at TUUC have uniquely nurtured me and that is why I enjoy pledging to TUUC.

## **CELEBRATION SUNDAY**

9:30 Mike Robinson 11:15 Paul Konka

## **OFFERTORY HYMN**

#1010      *We Give Thanks*

We give thanks for this beacon of free religion. Let us join our hearts and voices in singing hymn number 1010 as our morning offering is given and received to sustain and deepen our common life and to feed the hungry, house the homeless, heal the addicted, and inspire a love of truth seeking through literacy.

## READING

Our reading is about sharing time with love and care. In his essay, *Childhood and Poetry* the Spanish poet, Pablo Neruda wrote:

One time, investigating in the backyard of our house in Temuco the tiny objects and minuscule beings of my world, I came upon a hole in one of the boards of the fence. I looked through the hole and saw a landscape like that behind our house, uncared for, and wild. I moved back a few steps, because I sensed vaguely that something was about to happen.

All of a sudden a hand appeared, a tiny hand of a boy about my own age. By the time I came close again, the hand was gone, and in its place there was a marvelous white sheep. The sheep's wool was faded. Its wheels had escaped. All of this only made it more authentic. I had never seen such a wonderful sheep.

I looked back through the hole but the boy had disappeared.

I went into the house and brought out a treasure of my own: a pinecone, opened, full of odor and resin, which I adored. I set it down in the same spot and went off with the sheep.

I never saw either the hand or the boy again. And I have never again seen a sheep like that either. The toy I lost finally in a fire. But even now, in 1954, almost fifty years old, whenever I pass a toy shop, I look furtively into the window. But it's no use. They don't make sheep like that anymore.

I have been a lucky man. To feel the intimacy of brothers is a marvelous thing in life. To feel the love of people whom we love is a fire that feeds our life.

But to feel the affection that comes from those whom we do not know, from those unknown to us, who are watching over our sleep and solitude, over our dangers and our weaknesses, that is something still greater and more beautiful because it widens out the boundaries of our being, and unites all living things.

That exchange brought home to me for the first time a precious idea: that all of humanity is somehow together. It won't surprise you then that I attempted to give something resinous, earthlike, and fragrant in exchange for human brotherhood.

Just as I once left the pinecone by the fence, I have since left my words on the door of so many people who were unknown to me...

That is the great lesson I learned in my childhood, in the backyard of a lonely house. Maybe it was nothing but a game two boys played who didn't know each other and wanted to pass to the other some good things of life.

Yet maybe this small and mysterious exchange of gifts remained inside me also, deep and indestructible, giving my poetry light.

## INTERLUDE

“The Poet Speaks,” from *Scenes of Childhood* Robert Schumann Joseph Gascho, piano

# HOMILY

## Celebration Sunday

Rev. Clare Petersberger

I was reminded of Pablo Neruda's childhood memory, yesterday. Friends and family gathered in this space to dedicate themselves to the care and nurture of Malia Sky Battaglia. Malia smiled throughout the ceremony.... especially when the rose touched her head and her lips.

Family and friends brought gifts symbolic of their hopes and dreams for her. There wasn't a sheep. There wasn't a pine cone. But Malia's grandmother shared a personal memory.

She was told, as a first grade student, in a Parochial school, that she had a guardian angel who was always a loving presence. She went to the nun who was her first grade teacher to ask if this were really true. When the nun said "Yes," Malia's grandmother made a decision. The rest of the year, she sat on only half the chair in her classroom. She wanted her guardian angel to have a place to sit, too. No one ever questioned why, throughout first grade, she sat halfway off her chair.

Pablo Neruda wrote, "To feel the affection that comes from those whom we do not know, from those unknown to us, who are watching over our sleep and solitude, over our dangers and our weakness, widens out the boundaries of our being, and unites all living things." For Malia's grandmother, the idea of a guardian angel watching over her widened the boundaries of her being.

Malia's grandmother gave her granddaughter a small guardian angel in honor of the memory of always knowing, as a child, that she was loved....with the hope that Malia always would, too, without having to sit halfway on a chair in first grade!

For me, another highpoint of yesterday's dedication was when this baby's big sister, Faith, was asked, "Do you promise to care for your sister?" This was the first time I'd seen Faith since officiating at HER ceremony of dedication only two years ago. I was fearful that her response might be a favorite word of two-year-olds...."NO!" Instead, Faith vigorously nodded her head up and down and gave her baby sister a hug and a kiss.

Yesterday, people ranging in age from six months to 86--- assembled in this room---once again----to transmit the passwords of gratitude, and love, and hope from generation to generation. This is part of the mission of our church: to mark significant rites of passage... when we wed, when we die, and when we welcome new life.

Sometimes, just as Pablo Neruda did not know the boy who gave him the sheep, we don't know the baby, or the couple, or the person who has died. But, like Pablo Neruda, we know that all of humanity is somehow together.

Today, we feel the love and support of people we did not know who, over the past 51 years, nurtured and cared for this beacon of free religion. Our response is gratitude. At its heart, when we celebrate, whatever the specific occasion, we are gathering with others to express gratitude.

Expressing gratitude is why we gather Sunday after Sunday to worship: to praise, to bless, to extol, and to magnify what we have found to be most worthy of our faithful love.

What other individuals found to be most worthy of their faithful love has been part of this week's news cycle. Elizabeth Taylor and Geraldine Ferraro died this week. These very different women, both found ways to serve the larger community---Elizabeth Taylor in working to alleviate the suffering of AIDS from the very start and Geraldine Ferraro as a trail blazer in new leadership roles for women.

Their deaths may lead us to feel the movement of time and our own mortality. Their deaths may prompt us to wonder about our own legacy--- and how the good things of life we seek to pass on to

others we will be remembered. So we gather, with gratitude, for these days we have been given to grow into the people we have always longed to be.

In an unpredictable world, with radiation leaking in Japan, the firing of US Tomahawk missiles in Libya, and violence sweeping the middle east, we need to assemble, to reflect and meditate and get our bearings. We need to share our children's vision of the future to find our way. Then, perhaps, we will not only go from here in peace but also through the week.

In the recent adult religious exploration class on what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist, Al Peabody shared how, when he was introduced to the acronym for our congregation, TUUC, he thought it was pronounced TUCK. But then he realized, since we are a church, maybe the "c," which is followed by an "h," would be softer... leading to the pronunciation "Touch."

In fact, we HAVE been touched by this congregation. This was clear in feedback solicited by the Healthy Congregations team at the January Congregational Meeting.

I am grateful to Samantha Saalfield for compiling--- not a top ten list---but a top 17 list. When it comes to worship, we were touched by "having kids upstairs for the first part of the worship service and having the youth (voluntarily) attend one service a month;" by the "communion with the music and the minister;" and by "consistently excellent summer sessions in addition to the services the worship associates conduct during the (formal) church year."

When it comes to life-span religious exploration, someone shared "My kids feel very connected to church: they love RE mainly because they love the people they encounter." Another wrote, "The 'graduation' ceremony for seniors makes me feel something is going right."

A new member shared, "There are many opportunities to meet people, develop relationships, learn new things." Another person lifted up "The variety of activities supported and presented by the congregation...shows a deep level of acceptance and consideration for people's ideas."

A specific program of adult exploration which has touched our lives is Chalice Circles---with its thoughtful discussions, connections with new friends, and the ministry participants do together.

In terms of Fellowship, someone observed "There is a general air of relaxation, welcome, enthusiasm, and warmth from the moment someone enters the church."

Another person confessed, "It's tough to leave after church because there is always one more person to talk to."

We are touched by the great positive energy of coffee hour, the warmth among members at potlucks.

We are grateful for "fabulous devoted people" "the impressive number of members who give huge amounts of time and imagination to TUUC" and "observ(ing) a large percentage of members volunteering in various roles. It is wonderful to have this team effort."

We are particularly touched by "the great involvement of many members in community projects;" "helping hands reaching out to the wider community" and "the sense of unity that often pervades."

We have much for which to be grateful on this Celebration Sunday!

My thoughts on stewardship, this year, are influenced by Pablo Neruda. Like him, I found myself the recipient of a wondrous gift--- not a toy sheep---but a beacon of free-thinking religion, a beloved community of memory and of hope, and a congregation of helping hands to transform the community and to build the world we dream about.

This inspires me to want to give a treasure of my own in return--- though not a pine cone fragrant with resin.

This coming year, I'm pledging five` percent of my net income to TUUC...or \$3,500.

I want to give the gift of this congregation to all who need our open minds, loving hearts, and helping hands.

Stewardship widens the boundaries of our being. Through the mysterious exchange of gifts of time, talent, and treasure, we, too, experience something deep and indestructible.

May our lives be illuminated with gratitude.

## **HYMN**

**In affirmation of this, let us join in singing a song of blessing and celebration,**

**Hymn number #1033**      *Bwana Awabariki*

## **CLOSING WORDS**

Rev. Charles Howe (adapted from T. S. Eliot)

What life have we, if we have not life together?

There is no life not lived in community, and no community not lived in celebration and praise!

**Go now in love and peace.**

Our thanks to the TUUC Choir and Joseph Gascho for their gifts of music; to the students and teachers in our religious exploration ministry for celebrating milestones in their exploration together; to David Sumler and Jen Larson for reflecting on what TUUC means to them; to Mike Robinson and Paul Konka, faithful stewards of TUUC's Stewardship campaign; and to all who offer this liberal faith tradition, through your generous giving and your generous living, to a world where voices of reason and tolerance and courage are needed.