

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works ...
—Hebrews 10:24

Stir It Up

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to The Towson Unitarian Universalist Church on this first Sunday of February!

“Some of us are bringing our best selves to this space, and some of us are bringing our struggling selves. All of us are welcome here, and all of us are loved.

Some of us already have open hearts; and some of us aren’t quite there yet, because our hearts have gotten a little beat up this week and might’ve forgotten how to trust and open.

Your heart is welcome here, no matter how bruised. We welcome you among us.”

Words of the Rev. Erika Hewitt.

The Covenant

(Read in unison)

WE PLEDGE TO WALK TOGETHER
IN FELLOWSHIP AND LOVE,
TO CULTIVATE REVERENCE,
TO PROMOTE SPIRITUAL GROWTH
AND ETHICAL COMMITMENT,
TO MINISTER TO EACH OTHER’S NEEDS
AND TO THOSE OF HUMANITY,
TO CELEBRATE THE SACRED MOMENTS OF LIFE’S
PASSAGE,
AND TO HONOR THE HOLINESS AT THE HEART OF BEING.

Opening Words

Peggy Senger Parsons

To promote spiritual growth and ethical commitment, a father used to give his children their allowance—on Saturday night, after the candy store had closed. He gave each of his children ten dimes, with the expectation that on Sunday morning, each child would put one of their dimes in the offertory plate at church. One of his children, Peggy Senger Parsons, reflected on what she learned from her father’s expectation that she would follow his example of tithing 10% of her income. She wrote:

“Here are some things I have found to be true about giving. It does not matter how much you have or how much you give. If you have ten dimes, you can part with one. It is good for you to part with one. It is especially important to give when you don’t feel like it, when it seems risky. It changes you, and you change your world.

There is no magic here except this. When you give away some of your stuff you are freed from the slavery to stuff. You place your bet on the kindness of the universe. You trust. And that changes you and frees you from the terrible lie that says there is not enough to go around, and then you find that you have plenty.

And you feel a lot richer. People who are not fearful and mistrustful are more productive.”

Peggy Senger Parsons on how giving changes you, and you change your world.

Chalice Lighting

“Nurture This Precious Light”

Rev. Naomi King

Delivered by Anita Cox

(Read responsively)

How shall we begin to live out our free faith?

NURTURE THIS PRECIOUS LIGHT!

When we do, we are beacons of freedom creating a safe place to rest, explore, and innovate.

NURTURE THIS PRECIOUS LIGHT!

How we keep this lamp of truth and justice affects how and whether we are transforming inequity through witness and action.

NURTURE THIS PRECIOUS LIGHT!

As we nurture this precious light together, we become a light of hope turning isolation into community, anguish into peace, sorrow into joy.

NURTURE THIS PRECIOUS LIGHT!

As we do, our faith burns a steady flame of innovation banishing illusion, creating a new and renewing way together.

NURTURE THIS PRECIOUS LIGHT!

With our living connections, with our glowing stories, with our flame of freedom moving hand to hand, we . . .

NURTURE THIS PRECIOUS LIGHT!

Together, we turn this world from bleak to bright one flame, one fire, one light at a time.

Prelude

“Let This Be a House of Peace”

Jim Scott

TUUC Choir

Story

Mama Panya’s Pancakes: A Village Tale from Kenya

Written by Mary and Rich Chamberlin, illustrated by Julia Cairns

Delivered by Joyce Duncan

Our story today, *Mama Panya’s Pancakes* involves stirring. It’s title is *Mama Panya’s Pancakes: A Village Tale From Kenya*.

What do you suppose gets stirred? Pancake batter!

Let’s see what else gets stirred . . .

[Story summary: Adika, a Kenyan boy, and his Mama, Panya, set off to the market to buy the ingredients for pancakes, a favorite of Adika’s. Mama Panya has money for just enough, and a little bit more, but that doesn’t stop Adika from inviting all the friends from whom they buy their supplies to join him and Mama Panya for a delicious pancake dinner. Mama Panya worries that there will not be enough to feed all of those who eagerly accept Adika’s invitation, but she needn’t have been concerned. As the guests arrive, each brings food to contribute to the feast, and one even brings music in the form of a thumb piano. As Mama Panya and Adika have repeated through the story, they have just enough . . . and a little bit more.]

Adika was stirred to extend the invitation to partake of pancakes to all of his family’s friends. His mother was worried that they would not have enough ingredients to feed all of their friends. But what happened? Everyone contributed: milk, butter, flour, fish, plantains, spices. And they had more than enough. Adika trusted his heart, trusted kindness to others, trusted kindness from others, trusted the blessing of generosity.

Hymn

#1033 “Bwana Awabariki”

Reflection

“Apron and Spoon”

Lora Powell Haney

[Text not available.]

Meditation

From *A History Of Church, Including Yours*

Rev. Sean Neil-Barron

I chose today’s meditation by the Reverend Sean Neil-Barron because the 59th anniversary of our congregation was January 10th. And it’s not too soon to begin thinking about our 60th which is less than 12 months away. Let us continue in the spirit of prayer to remind ourselves of the blessings of religious community.

“One day, your church was born.

A few brave souls answered a notice in the newspaper, curiosity piqued by the announcement of a religion where free-thinking and tolerance were bedrocks.

Your church was born, a gathering of people—humble, caring, anxious and quirky all at the same time—who covenanted, to be with one another on the journey of life, death and everything in-between—and so it began. A faithful few. Beautifully imperfect, called to that central task—that human task—of connecting, loving, and serving.

It was just a baby, and yet it was thrust deep into the human condition. Tasked to hold minds and souls, bodies and hearts along the roller derby of disease and birth, infighting and joy, and Christmas pageants. Sometimes all of those at the same time.

They gathered to hear the world broken open, for insightful sermons, rejuvenating music, and a community whose fierce devotion to each other's wellbeing rivaled a mama bear's for her cubs.

But it wasn't always like that of course. There were the trying times—when the church almost split in half or when the minister crossed that line, and the people couldn't speak about it for decades.

New people came, and they changed things. Small things, big things. Things that nobody noticed as it happened . . .

The history of the church is the history of human enterprise, evolving in its sights and sounds, yet revolving always around its 'core' covenant, that we are the ones who will be here with and for each other and with and for those who are yet to come.”

In moments of silence, let us reflect on where we are on the journey of life, death and everything in-between. Let us reflect on the ways we are connecting, loving, and serving this congregation so that, in January of 2060, those who follow us will have stories to tell about us.

Gathered here in the mystery of this hour, Spirit, draw near.

Hymn

#389 “Gathered Here”

Stewardship Testimonial

“Filling the Need for Comfort and Community”

Dr. Neil Porter

[Text not available.]

TUUC Stewardship 2019: Stir It Up!

Monica Sweidel

Good Morning! Today is the day that our stewardship campaign, “Stir it Up,” officially begins. I hope you are

planning to join us after the service for brunch and fellowship and to receive this token of thanks from the stewardship committee. (Wooden spoon)

You should have already received your stewardship packets. In it you received a yellow form with your personal information already printed on it. Please give careful thought to your pledge. We rely on your pledges to keep the church and its vital programs going. Approximately 75% of our income is from your pledges. You also received this “Suggested Fair Share Contribution Guide.” I urge you to look it over before deciding on your pledge amount.

Consider the importance of TUUC in your lives and what it means to you to have a beacon of liberal religious ideals working towards our personal spiritual growth along with social, racial, and environmental justice. As part of our stewardship campaign, we have organized small neighborhood dinners at various members' homes to promote fellowship during our annual pledge drive. There will also be a luncheon at TUUC on February 8. These meals are open to all members and friends and we encourage your participation!

You can sign up at the stewardship table in the lobby after the service or email specialevents@towsonuuc.org

As we heard in our opening words, many years ago, the congregation used the offering plate to fulfill their pledges of financial support. Nowadays many of us have set up automatic transfers from our checking accounts. But passing the offering plate was never just a practical exercise. It has always been a ritual. Even when our pledges are paid, it is worthwhile to bring a dime or a dollar to drop into the plate, as a ritual reminder of that form of love we call generosity. The practice of giving changes us and the world and helps bring forth the realm of love. The offering will now be given and gratefully received. Fifteen percent of undesignated gifts will be returned to our community partners as described in your order of service.

Offertory

“Turn the World Around”

Harry Belafonte/R. Freedman

Jason Shelton, arr.

TUUC Choir

Sermon

Stir It Up!

Rev. Clare Petersberger

The theme “Stir It Up!” for our stewardship campaign came from our annual auction in November. That evening began with a memorable bidding war. The first item up for live auction was a reserved parking space here at TUUC. Somewhat in the center, I could see Nick Troxel putting his paddle up and bringing it down and putting it up and bringing it down. At the end of a table in the back, Jeff Savoye sat like a statue, his paddle with the number one raised, not putting it down between bids. Feeling surprised, I thought, “Wow! He REALLY wants that parking spot!”

I did not know that Jeff was proxy bidding. I did not know that the person for whom he was proxy bidding had not set a spending limit. I did not know that Jeff was taking his role as a proxy bidder very seriously. All I knew was that the kindness of the universe was made visible in Paddle Number One being held high and steady. When the bidding finally stopped at over \$1,000, there were gasps and looks of “Did what I think just

happened really happen?” and laughter and loud applause. Paddle Number One won the parking space. More than that, the person behind Paddle Number One won being an exemplar of generosity.

That first winning bid set a tone for the evening. The other auction items—many involving people enjoying each other’s company—all led to bidding wars. The magic of that evening and in the post auction sales was people, if not betting on the kindness of the universe, then standing in for the kindness of the universe by bidding out of their own kindness, and in recognition of the kindness of others. The magic was individuals bringing the holy ingredient of themselves and their talents and passions and caring, much like the characters in the story of Mama Panya’s pancakes.

Out of trust and faith in each other, those characters stirred up delicious pancakes through the blessings of their gratitude and generosity. Out of trust and faith in each other, the night of the TUUC auction and in post-auction sales, we stirred up \$30,000, also through the blessings of our gratitude and generosity. Gratitude, kindness, and generosity are spiritual qualities tied to connecting, loving, and serving.

The founding of TUUC to connect, to love, and to serve Unitarian Universalist values in Baltimore County is especially on my mind this year with the death of Anne Lee, who was a key keeper of our congregation’s history. She had so many stories of those who came before us, who chose to be with one another on the journey of life, death and everything in-between: the roller derby of long congregational meetings, and celebrations of the 25th and 50th anniversaries, of building this building, and teaching students who are now middle aged, of desegregating parks in Baltimore, and of Charlie singing in the TUUC Choir, of infighting and joy . . . and Christmas pageants.

Anne stirred things up by becoming the first woman president of this congregation while decisions were being made about the architectural design. So while she was in hospice care in October, she was happy to learn that the building was being cared for and that TUUC was getting a new roof and clerestory windows, thanks to a loan from our Endowment Committee. Anne was pleased that TUUC was beginning to serve as a teaching congregation, with Lora as our ministerial intern. And, as someone committed to making democracy work, Anne asked about the governance model with which we are experimenting. She would have been very pleased that at a recent Program Council meeting several people commented, “Unless I was coming to these meetings, I wouldn’t have known about the such and such program and now I’d like to think about how my program might work with yours.” It was like we were in the story of Mama Panya’s Pancakes and someone said “I have flour and you have fish and the person at that table has plantains—let’s see what we might create together when we share our resources.”

Anne often spoke about how our society had changed in the past 59 years. Women now had their own names and not their husband’s name in the church directory. Women now have their own careers, and don’t wear hats to church or serve coffee at hospitality hour wearing gloves. With so many demands on our time in this information age, planning programs for our ministries together takes more intentionality and a governance structure that will make it easier—not more challenging. Anne also knew that there were some constants in our spiritual and ethical journey together—like needing to join with one another and others to continue to work for social and racial justice and, now especially, for environmental justice.

So the person who stirred things up by becoming the first woman president of TUUC after serving so many other roles—teaching Sunday School classes, serving coffee at hospitality, working for social justice, raising money, and intentionally coming on special music Sundays in recent years, just to name a few—chose, in

hospice care in the fall, to pay her 2018-2019 pledge to TUUC in full. One of her last acts was generosity. Some of her last words were “Thank you.” She leaves a legacy of love.

Don't we all want to be part of a world where connection, love, and service, where gratitude, kindness, and generosity, still matter? Don't we all need comfort and community? From the TUUC People-to-People Auction in the fall, the answer is a resounding “Yes!” This is what stewardship is all about.

The purpose of stewardship is not to put a price tag on our beloved community—as if deepening our spiritual and ethical lives through working for racial, environmental, and social justice has a commodity sale price. If we had done that in the auction, we would not have raised \$1,000 for a parking space, or nearly \$200 for dinners, or \$165 for a hike, or way over \$100 for a single pie. Those figures were not based on commercial values, but on our trust in each other and what we are seeking to do together—the value we place on the Towson Unitarian Universalist Church and its mission to transform lives and change the world.

Stewardship is about trusting that we are the ones we have been waiting for when it comes to standing in for the kindness of the universe. Stewardship is taking care of our spiritual community, in memory of those who came before, and with anticipation and hope for those who will follow us.

Some of the goals for caring for TUUC that we hope to meet in next year's budget are listed in your order of service. As was true with our auction, we need one another to stir it up for our stewardship campaign. The goals listed in your order of service will require an average pledge of \$2,000 a member in the coming year. Not everyone or every family will be able to do this. Some will be able to give more. Some will need to give less. Don and I are going to try to increase our pledge so that we are giving \$4,000 as a couple. Please know that just as each and every contribution mattered to the batter Mama Panya stirred, each and every contribution will matter to the budget the board is able to create. As Anne Lee modeled, there is no magic except the magic of connecting, loving, and serving through gratitude, kindness, and generosity.

This is something to sing about! Let's stir it up by singing!

Hymn

“Hold Everybody Up!”

Melanie DeMore

Closing Words

Rev. Clare Petersberger

May we take with us some of the joy of this gathering . . .

May we go forward, together, with hope . . . to create the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need.

May we hold one another up, as we stir up more understanding, more love, more justice, more peace.

GO NOW IN PEACE.