

WELCOME

Movie night

Music in the Great Hall returns to TUUC on Sunday, November 4, presenting pianist Solomon Eichner. Mr. Eichner is a Baltimore native known for his compelling interpretation of the romantic keyboard repertoire. The program begins at 2 p.m., and TUUC members are offered a discounted ticket price of \$10.

Auction 11/17, 5 PM

COVENANT

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**LOVE IS THE DOCTRINE OF THIS CHURCH,
THE QUEST OF TRUTH IS ITS SACRAMENT
AND SERVICE IS ITS PRAYER.**

**THIS IS OUR GREAT COVENANT:
TO DWELL TOGETHER IN PEACE,
TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE IN FREEDOM,
TO SERVE HUMAN NEED,
TO THE END THAT ALL SOULS SHALL GROW
IN HARMONY WITH THE DIVINE**

OPENING WORDS

Our opening words describe the first form of sanctuary any of us know—that we find with a parent.

Hundred Acre Wood

James Arthur

**Some of these stories are too sweet for me.
Winnie-the-Pooh is so innocent; his little songs leave me cold.**

**But I like this—your hand across my hand,
your head against my shoulder. Your first winter, I carried you
even along the margins of the highway,**

strapped against my chest in a sling. You never can tell with bees,
says Pooh, who seems to believe that almost nothing can be told,
but I am your morose, restless father,
and you are four years old. You like front-end loaders
and every kind of train;

I like reading to rooms of strangers, and a few drinks at the airport
while I'm waiting for my plane.

I like the book's final chapter, a story you don't yet understand,
in which boy and bear

climb to Galleons Lap for one last look out across the land—
at the sandy pit, the six pines,

the Hundred Acre Wood. Don't forget me, says the boy to the bear,
who has no wish to understand

what he does not already know. Little boy who I carried
along the highway in the winter in northern Michigan,

I like hearing you in the morning
when you lie in your dark room, and sing.

CHALICE LIGHTING

Hug and kiss whoever helped get you - financially, mentally, morally, emotionally - to this day. Parents, mentors, friends, teachers. If you're too uptight to do that, at least do the old handshake thing, but I recommend a hug and a kiss. Don't let the sun go down without saying thank you to someone, and without admitting to yourself that absolutely no one gets this far alone

PRELUDE
“Blackbird”

TIME FOR ALL AGES
Thunder Cake

HYMN

When I'm Frightened

TESTIMONIAL

Reflection-Sunday

**The lonely wanderer searches
The soul is depleted
Yet the mind is keen but flitting-here, there, and everywhere.**

**What is a sanctuary?
How do you define your Sanctuary?
What is my sanctuary?**

I discovered mine quite by chance by a casual question to a friend-no, it wasn't my idyllic tropical island.

**"Can I go with you to your church? I asked.
She replied "You don't want to come to mine you want to go to TUUC!"**

So one Sunday, inquisitive –seeking, but I didn't know what- I walked through the doors of TUUC.

After a while - in spite of being a shy introvert, in a new place visiting alone-I felt curiously, "at home", I felt almost- "comfortable".

I discovered that it was a place that belonged to Unitarian Universalists who had 7 principles as its guiding foundation.

I discovered that it's safe to be who you truly are, warts and all and that donning your Sunday finery is not a prerequisite.

You are greeted with respect and acceptance which, if given a chance builds into unbelievable bonds of friendship, love and strength-a genuine community of individuals who care.

Like the granddaughter in our story today, I gained courage, confidence, and encouragement to try new things with the support from people in this congregation-sometimes I tried leadership positions and at other times I simply lead a new activity at TUUC, however, each one helped reinforce or grow new bonds within the church community.

"I don't believe in God" previously an unacceptable sacrilegious statement-doesn't send me to the back of the room being ostracized by fellow worshippers, but engages with others in a healthy discussion. It is safe, in fact, it is encouraged to develop one's own beliefs - indeed, it is written in our 4th principle.

From this safe place, this sanctuary, I gain strength with like-minded congregants in learning about worldwide causes and to take action to have an impact in creating a better world.

At the same time, I also gain support and solace when unjust and scary political decisions and consequences are made here and elsewhere on our planet.

The location of TUUC, nestled in the woods provides a peaceful haven from the rush and turmoil of the outside world. Listening to the leaves rustle in the breeze, the birds singing, the fountain of the Memorial Garden flowing-catching the occasional sight of deer or a butterfly encourages me to tend to the grounds-

Sometimes, just for 5 minutes pulling weeds or clearing some sticks off the parking lot, and at other times for much longer.

This is my sanctuary, a rich oasis, and as it provides for me, I too, in turn, try to give back to the people, the place and the spirit.

Anita

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

No One Is Alone

READING

Back up Quick They're Hippies

BY LANI O'HANLON

That was the year we drove
into the commune in Cornwall.
“Jesus Jim,” mam said,
“back up quick they’re hippies.”

Through the car window,
tents, row after row, flaps open,

long-haired men and women
curled around each other like babies

and the babies themselves
wandered naked across the grass.

I reached for the handle, ready, almost,
to open the door, drop out and away
from my sister's aggressive thighs,
Daddy's slapping hands.

Back home in the Dandelion Market
I unlearnt the steps my mother taught,
bought a headband, an afghan coat,
a fringed skirt—leather skin.

Barefoot on common grass I lay down with kin.

OFFERTORY
Feels Like Home

SERMON

A few weeks ago, Reverend Clare led this congregation through a meditation. She asked us to imagine the ocean, then informed us that we were not standing on the shoreline watching the waves roll in but rather in a boat surrounded by water. I visualized myself on a rickety homemade raft, like Tom Hanks in *Cast Away*, and I was certain I would die alone. Food supplies running low. Hot sun beating down. No fresh water. It was terrifying. The instructions were open-ended enough that I could have imagined myself drinking margaritas on a cruise ship, but apparently I'm not wired for optimism.

Now, what interests me about this exercise isn't why I visualized what I did, but why it disturbed me as much as it did. I was reminded of a quote from Stephen King. "Alone," he said. "Yes, that's the key word, the most awful word in the English tongue. 'Murder' doesn't hold a candle to it and 'hell' is only a poor synonym." And if anyone should know what lays the foundation for existential dread, it's Stephen King.

If you were to make a thorough study of his stories and novels, you will notice that many of his characters find themselves cut off from others, separated from society the same way a gazelle might be separated from the herd shortly before the lion shows up. *The Shining* follows a family snowbound in a haunted hotel. The main character in *Cujo* finds herself trapped in a broken-down car with a rabid Saint Bernard pacing outside. *Gerald's Game* is about a young woman whose lover dies shortly after handcuffing her to a bed in a secluded cabin they've rented for a romantic getaway. Time after time, King's work reminds us that being alone can be truly scary.

Certainly, most—if not all—of us have felt fear brought on by isolation at one time or another. When you're by yourself, the shadows seem to move in suspicious ways. You can hear every strange noise your house makes when no one is there to talk to you. Worse—at least for me—solitude can lead to savage self-evaluation, where I over analyze and enlarge every social miscue or interpersonal failing until I'm certain that I deserve to be alone.

There's a reason those gazelles I mentioned earlier roam in herds. To some degree, it's probably the same reason many of us are here. Life is a lot less frightening in a group. This congregation offers a sanctuary where we can breathe a little easier—a place where someone you barely know can smile at you and the problems waiting outside these walls seem a little less daunting.

Our analysis of Stephen King would show another interesting (and related) trend. A group of people—even if individually they are weak or disenfranchised—can overcome the worst the world has to offer if they unite. There are numerous examples, from *'Salem's Lot* (where a writer, a teacher, and a young boy battle vampires) to *The Stand* (in which survivors of a plague unite to fight a modern Antichrist), but the most famous example is probably *IT*.

Yes, this is the book where a clown—or, really, some sort of arachnid alien in clown form—feeds on the fear of children. (We could argue whether “clown” is almost as scary a word as “alone,” but that’s another sermon.) What interests me here is not the villain, but our heroes, a group of misfit kids discarded by mainstream society. Bill stutters to the point of incomprehensibility. Beverly’s father abuses her. Ben’s weight makes him a target for bullies. Richie is a joker who’s never learned when to shut up. Eddie has asthma and an overprotective mother. Mike is a black kid in an otherwise all-white town. Stan’s Jewish heritage isolates him from most of his classmates. Over the course of a summer, they

form a friendship strong enough to save all of their lives and (spoiler alert) eventually the world.

The members of this congregation also come from differing backgrounds. We are Jews and Christians, atheists and agnostics, Black and White and Asian and Latino, gay and straight. We disagree about theology and budgets and politics. But, as Reverend Clare is fond of saying, we need not think alike to love alike. And that love, that warmth which we offer each other, makes this place feel like home, makes it feel like somewhere you can (in Lani O'Hanlon's words) lie down with kin, barefoot on common grass.

This church is a sanctuary for misfits of all stripes, misfits like me and like you. We may arrive because we're escaping something—a previous faith, unsupportive family, the hectic pace of the daily grind—but we are bound together by the stories we tell each other, the songs we sing together, and the moments we share. We know that good moments and good friends fade away.

As Stephen King noted, “Time takes it all whether you want it to or not, time takes it all. Time bares it away, and in the end, there is only darkness. Sometimes we find others in that darkness, and sometimes we lose them there again.” The movie *Stand By Me* (based on King’s novella *The Body*) follows four young boys on an adventure that’s as much about self-discovery as it is their stated goal of finding a missing teenager and becoming local heroes. They bicker and brood and bond, helping each other escape oncoming trains, leeches, and tough older boys. They share something beautiful and life altering, and then they grow up and grow apart. It’s a reminder that we have each other, but only for a brief moment. There are no guarantees about tomorrow.

As our chalice lighting said, we should kiss and hug those who’ve helped us get this far. And then, I would add, we must pay it forward. We must be ready for the next wounded spirit who crosses our threshold looking for a bit of peace. We must offer them peace, offer them love, offer them a home.

This is harder than you might think. It involves more than just being present on a Sunday, although there are times when that’s all any given individual here might be able to muster. We have to be involved, and that’s not always exciting. Some days you might feel too overwhelmed with work to attend another town hall meeting. Perhaps coming out to join Todd for a house and grounds work party means you’ll have to set an alarm on a Saturday, which is admittedly unpleasant.

Or maybe you'd rather just hug the wall during coffee hour instead of saying hello to a newcomer. I understand. I make excuses, too.

But if we want to help each other, help the community, and maybe even save the world, we have to stand together, support one another, and do the less glamorous/more tedious things that keep the doors open. To be a people of sanctuary, we must first be committed to each other and to our shared vision of this church.

We may not battle sewer-dwelling clowns, but we all battle fear. We might not be menaced by rabid dogs, but we all can feel trapped by circumstances beyond our control. Vampires are a myth, but sometimes life sucks anyway. At least you are not alone. We have each other. We have our friendship. We have this place. We have now.

And when I went to bed on Friday night, that was my sermon. I hadn't planned to address current events, but yesterday's shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue demands attention. Our hearts go out to that community and to those affected. But I would also like to draw your attention to something Bari Weiss wrote in the New York Times last night.

They were reading from the chapters of Genesis we refer to as Vayera. The Torah portion opens on Judaism's founding father and mother: Abraham and Sarah. Three men show up to their tent — strangers — and the couple welcomes them: feeding them, giving them shade and washing their feet.

These strangers come with a shocking message: Sarah, then the ripe age of 90, will bear a child.

Sarah laughs, incredulous. But she soon gives birth to Isaac. And the strangers, tradition teaches us, are not strangers at all, but angels in disguise.

She continues:

Every Jewish community in America will now have to make sensible decisions about how to ensure that they are not the next victims of someone like Mr. Bowers. But those hard choices should not make us forget the core values that make communities like Squirrel Hill what they are: welcoming, big-hearted and profoundly decent.

**As we move forward making our own hard choices, may we always treat
strangers as if they were secretly angels. May TUUC be a place of rest and relief
for visitors and for the rest of us. It's a hard, scary world, but together we can
weather anything.**

CLOSING HYMN

Stand By Me

CLOSING WORDS

**Drive away and try to keep smiling. Get a little rock and roll on the radio and go
toward all the life there is with all the courage you can find and all the belief you
can muster. Be true, be brave, stand.**

Go now in peace.