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## Sunday Programs

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**September 4**

9:30 Adult Religious Education: The Life of Buddha. Leader: Rick Spradlin (MH)

10:40 Program: Marjorie Harlan  
Title: "**The UU Water Ceremony**"

Service Leader: Marj Harlan  
Opener: Chris Nix  
Closer: Paul Lee  
Greeters: Mark Berger and Bill Edwards

12:00 **First Sunday Potluck Lunch**  
Bring donated food or donation for Feeding the Valley Food Bank  
Bring a Friend Day

**September 11**

9:30 Adult Religious Education: Building Your Own Theology. Leader: Rick Spradlin (MH)

10:40 Program: Dr. Chris Markwood, Columbus State University President  
Title: "**TBD**"

Service Leader: Dave Walker  
Opener: Paul Lee  
Closer: Rick Spradlin  
Greeters: Kirstin Mix and Ann Newland

**September 18**

9:30 Adult Religious Education: Building Your Own Theology. Leader: Rick Spradlin (MH)

10:40 Program: Kirstin Mix, DVM  
Title: "**Animal Welfare and the Seventh Principle**"

Service Leader: Maureen Humphries  
Opener: Rick Spradlin  
Closer: John Kamisky  
Greeters: Ursula King and Robert Burnham  
**GATP: Chester Jackson**

12:00 Social Action Committee meeting

**September 25**

9:30 Adult Religious Education: Building Your Own Theology. Leader: Rick Spradlin (MH)

10:40 Program: Reverend Fred Howard, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Valdosta  
Title: "**Impressionism and Grace: Aging and Dying as a Work of Art**"

Service Leader: John Nix  
Opener: John Kamisky  
Closer: Emily Jones  
Greeters: Patricia Lassiter and Justine Wade

Thanks to Ed Wilson and Michelle Midgette for coordinating programs this month.

**Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Columbus**

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**A Welcoming Congregation**



## Activities

### Wednesday Night Discussion Group

This group meets every Wednesday night at 7 pm and is open to everyone. The topic to be discussed is announced on the website calendar a few days in advance of the next meeting. (MH)

### UU Women

The Women's GROUP meets monthly on the second Thursday. The time of day and the specific plans vary from month to month. The details are usually announced a month in advance and are found in the newsletter and on the website. This month the group will meet on September 8th at the Rankin Arts Photography Center for a private preview of the Columbus Photographers Exhibition. We will meet at the Rankin at 5:30 to view the Exhibition and will walk to Los Amigos Cantina for dinner after the preview.

### Women's Book Club

A monthly meeting is held on the fourth Tuesday evening of each month at 5 pm in the Meeting House. The current book is announced a month in advance, giving everyone a chance to read it before the meeting. We will meet on September 27th and review the book, Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging by Sebastian Junger. We welcome new members!

### UU Singers

If you are interested in music or singing, please consider joining our UU Singers. Rehearsals are held every Wednesday night at 6 pm. (GFH)

### Yoga

Unfortunately our yoga classes have been suspended indefinitely.

### Friday Lunch Group

This group meets at a different restaurant each Friday at 12:30 to have fun and discuss current events. All members and friends of the Fellowship are invited join the group for a lively discussion. Please call Bill Harlan at 605.390.0590 to see where they will be meeting this month.

### Exploring Spirituality

This new group meets the first and the third Thursdays in the Meeting House at 7 pm. The purpose of this group is to explore and grow in our own spirituality and to learn how our own spirituality expresses itself in our daily lives.

### Joys and Concerns

- Gerda Smith has returned after months of rehab.
- John Studstill and Florence Wakoko have a new grandson.
- GATP donation was \$187.00 to PAWS Humane in August.

### The UU Water Ceremony

The Water Ceremony, was first used at a UU worship service in the 1980's. Many UU congregations now hold a water ceremony once a year, often at the beginning of a new church year (September).

Members bring to the service a small amount of water from a place that is special to them. During the appointed time in the service, people one by one pour their water together in a large bowl. As the water is added, the person who brought it tells why this water is special to them. The combined water is symbolic of our shared faiths coming from many different sources.

## Children's RE Lessons

September 4	We believe that each and every person is important.	
September 11	We believe that all people should be treated fairly and kindly.	
September 18	Art Project	Paul Lee
September 25	We believe that we should accept one another and keep on learning together.	



## Children's Story

September 4	Maureen Humphries
September 11	Kirstin Mix
September 18	John Kamisky
September 25	Emily Jones

September 6	Robert Burnham
September 6	Sidney Wilson
September 10	Justine Wade
September 15	Molly Gross
September 16	Julie Bouchard
September 17	Jean Puckett
September 18	Marshall Simpson



September 18	Beth Cooper
September 18	Hal Midgette
September 19	Maureen Humphries
September 22	Kayla Spradlin
September 22	Ron Ussery
September 26	Anna Hensley

## *Bits and Pieces:*

- The Board has voted to re-coat the roof on Grace Fellowship Hall. It will be guaranteed for 10 yrs.
- A new toilet has been installed in the handicapped accessible stall in the men's rest room.

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GATP: This month we will give away the plate to Chester Jackson, the owner of East Coast Body Shop on Farr Rd. He has been featured on the Today show for his charitable work building and repairing bicycles to be handed out to needy children at Christmas.

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Board meetings are held the third Tuesday evening of every month at 7 pm at GFH. Meetings are open to everyone.

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Donations for Feeding the Valley Food Bank should be non-perishable food in unbreakable containers (no glass). Checks made out to Feeding the Valley and cash are also welcome. **We need a volunteer to take the food to Feeding the Valley on the Monday after our first Sunday collection.**

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On the third Sunday of each month our Social Justice Committee designates a local charity to be the recipient of our Give Away the Plate (GATP) offering. The money collected in the offering which is not pledged for the operations of the Fellowship is donated to the charity.

## **Christmas in July**

**We have a black Christmas tree set up in the Social Action Corner. Why black? Because Christmas will be very dark for children in poverty. Your donations of green \$\$\$ from July 24 to November 13 will provide funds for the Social Action Committee to help local children who have been identified by the Salvation Army as having specific clothing needs. A shopping day will be announced in November for those who would like to participate. Thanks for providing your green to support a child!**

## *Notes from the Social Action Committee*

- ◆ There will be a Social Action Committee meeting after services on September 18.
- ◆ Standing on the Side of Love T-Shirts are still available through the UUA.org website.
- ◆ If you plan to do some fall cleaning and have gently worn clothing that you would like to donate, please contact someone on the Social Action Committee. Maureen and Jim Humphries recently donated 7 large bags of clothing to the House of T.I.M.E. and 2 large bags to the Safe House.

For the latest news, visit our dynamic new website:  
[www.uucolumbusga.org](http://www.uucolumbusga.org) for all the latest info about programs, schedules, announcements, etc. Our website is a blog, so click on "subscribe" on the home page and you will be notified by email whenever a new post is made.

## Big Religion by Rev. Ed Wilson

How big is your religion? How many people can shelter under your umbrella? Within UU there are many thousands of personal religions, for each of us has our own. For UU to work, we need loving tolerance for one another. When your UU brother or sister talks about God, do you listen attentively? When your UU brother or sister expresses humanist thoughts, do you listen attentively? In either case—or any case—is our personal religion big enough to extend loving acceptance to those with whom we disagree? That, it seems to me, is the essence of the UU way.

Unfortunately, Humanists sometimes tend to disdain those who reach out for connection with a higher power. And sadly, believers in a higher power sometimes tend to dismiss those who find their inspiration only in the wonders of the natural world. But if the personal religions of all of us are big enough we can and will uncomplainingly, respectfully and lovingly, accept others with whom we may agree or disagree.

Indeed, “acceptance of one another” is one of the principles we focus upon every Sunday morning. And it is of the essential substance of the UU religion. So UU encompasses your personal religion. The question is, does your religion and does mine encompass the multiple religious ways of our brothers and sisters? Do we extend loving tolerance to all?

UU offers a wonderful, exhilarating, inspirational religious experience to all who are willing to open their hearts to the kaleidoscopic religious environment of a UU congregation! It takes introspection and cultivation of love to expand one’s personal religion. But the personal effort will bring priceless personal rewards. Promise!

## The Challenge of Tolerance

delivered by Rick Spradlin

August 7, 2016

In regards to spiritual matters, there can be no greater opportunity for growth than that offered by the challenge of tolerance. Tolerance bids us to open our arms and extend our circle of experience. It offers us a window outside of our own bubble and a chance to at least try on a new point of view. Now there are some who would say that being tolerant is not enough, that we need to be accepting of one another. I suppose this breaks down into a semantical argument because to me the word “acceptance” means to agree with an action or a point of view. And while there are many points of view in this world to which I cannot agree I would say as Voltaire did, “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” I believe that tolerance is more closely related to the freedom of speech. [*On a side note to be discussed after the talk, while the “defend to the death” quote properly summarizes the political beliefs of Voltaire, the French enlightenment thinker, the words themselves were never said by him—they were said **about** him, in a 1906 biography called *The Friends of Voltaire*. English writer Beatrice Evelyn Hall published the book under a pseudonym, S. G. Tallentyre, and intended for the line to be a reflection of Voltaire’s attitude towards another French philosopher*].

Freedom, Reason, and Tolerance; *the order in which they are normally stated, three words that are often heard together in UU churches*, was coined in 1934 by historian and Unitarian minister Earl Morse Wilbur when he wrote the introduction of his book, *A History of Unitarianism*. He said,

“I have spoken of [Unitarianism] as of a single movement in religious history. For although its developments in the countries with which it has been chiefly associated - Poland, Transylvania, England, America - have been so loosely connected or so little dependent upon each other that they might indeed easily be treated as distinct movements, yet they are in fact all joined together by very clear, even if sometimes slender, threads of historical sequence; and it will be shown that throughout their course they exhibit in common certain distinctive marks and principles which fundamentally characterize the movement as a whole...first, complete mental freedom in religion rather than bondage to creeds or confessions; second, the unrestricted use of reason in religion, rather than reliance upon external authority or past tradition; third, generous tolerance of differing religious views and usages rather than insistence upon uniformity in doctrine, worship or polity.”

The history of religious tolerance in our county is, sadly, a rather intolerant story filled with violence and persecution . The Pilgrims left England and sailed to the Netherlands to find religious freedom. There they found more freedom than they cared for so they set sail for the wilderness of the New World so that their children would be sheltered from the overly tolerant views of the Dutch. As the European colonies were being settled, the Catholics persecuted the Huguenots, the Puritans persecuted the Catholics, and everyone persecuted the Native Americans, the Jews, and anyone from their own ranks who questioned the accepted dogma.

But, since the adoption of our Constitution, which separated the power of the church from the power of the State, religious tolerance has been a stated national and cultural goal.

are more “live and let live” when it comes to other worldviews but you only get one chance to make a first impression and so I decided to take a harder look at my own spiritual growth. Ok, so I took an inside look at myself. I’ve come to the conclusion that I didn’t believe what I had believed for so long. But talking about who I’m not is a terrible way to describe who I am. So I told myself to stop expressing my disbelief and just move on. If I’m still talking about it then it still has a hold on me.

### The Paradox of Tolerance

Now, as you have probably heard before, some people from outside our circle believe that we are too open and that we have taken tolerance too far. Which brings us to something called the Paradox of Tolerance. Philosopher [Karl Popper](#) defined the paradox in 1945 in [The Open Society and Its Enemies](#) Vol. 1. He wrote, "Less well known is the *paradox of tolerance*:

Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are tolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them”.

Popper concluded that we are warranted in refusing to tolerate intolerance: "We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant”.

1971, philosopher [John Rawls](#) concludes in [A Theory of Justice](#) that a just society must tolerate the intolerant, for otherwise, the society would then itself be intolerant, and thus unjust. However, Rawls also insists, like Popper, that society has a reasonable right of [self-preservation](#) that supersedes the principle of tolerance: "While an intolerant sect does not itself have title to complain of intolerance, its freedom should be restricted only when the tolerant sincerely and with reason believe that their own security and that of the institutions and that of the institutions of liberty are in danger”.

In a 1997 work, [Michael Walzer](#) asked "Should we tolerate the intolerant?" He notes that most minority religious groups who are the beneficiaries of tolerance are themselves intolerant, at least in some respects. In a tolerant regime, such people may learn to tolerate, or at least to behave "as if they possessed this virtue". Well, these gentlemen are much more intelligent than I am. But, what I take away when I read this is that moderation and limitations are necessary for the stability of any society. Tolerance needs reasonable limitations just as the freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion needs reasonable limitations. The necessity of a stable society dictates the suppression of intolerant groups when they act to actively persecute or deny the rights and liberties of others.

Now, I know this may sound a little strange, but sometimes I actually go out and look on the internet for criticism of Unitarian Universalism. So far, I haven’t been baited into any arguments. If someone disagrees with our message then that’s fine. We have no desire to convert anyone only to find those who may already be looking for us without realizing it. As I read some of the comments on various blogs I find that the only criticism I find comes from the far right of the religious world view. Most of the warnings that get posted about us is based on various biblical passages that have been used since at least the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century against all forms

In the 1800's, Universalist Christians, like Hosea Ballou, were bold enough to proclaim that God was a loving father whose forgiveness knew no boundaries; a father whose arms are outstretched in limitless grace and who engineered a plan of perfect and total salvation in which none would be left behind rather than a narrow path of salvation that rewards only a handful of initiates. Later, in 1961 when the Universalist Church of America joined with the American Unitarian Association and formed the UUA, the tolerance of these two organizations, now joined as one, would be confronted by the challenge of tolerance when they saw their numbers being joined by a growing number of Earth centered spiritualists and in 1984 the UUA added the Seventh Principle and Sixth Source to our list of values we affirm to promote. The UUA also has the distinction of being the only originally Christian denomination to accept humanists, agnostics, and atheists as welcome spiritual partners rather than empty vessels needing to be filled.

Many denominations have been challenged by the call of tolerance within their own ranks. Most major churches have a theologically liberal and conservative camp. But this was the first time in our nation's history that any religion of Christian origin opened its doors, expanded its circle of tolerance to include, as members not just as visitors, those whose spiritual base comes from outside the Judeo Christian worldview.

Now, I'm not saying that this expansion of tolerance within UU has been made without some disagreement. We're only human after all. There have been some who believe that we have become too liberal and open in our theology and have become too politically active. In 2000, several UU Christians left the UUA and founded the American Unitarian Conference, an organization dedicated to promoting classical Unitarianism and serving Christians and non-Christians who embrace generic or [philosophical theism](#) and [Deism](#). Their motto is Faith, Freedom, and Reason. They do not require the acceptance of a creed and do not require members to accept a liberal Christian view although in practice nearly all do. They also do not engage in political activism or release political statements except in cases that involve religious freedom and church/state separation. The AUC still uses the same schools for seminary as the UUA and many in fact still meet with UUA denominations. There still seems to be more UU Christians within the UUA than those that prefer a more classical Unitarian message. My point is this; liberal Christians are in fact very, very tolerant. Now, most of you know that I'm not a believer. I was... passionately, but slowly over time I ceased to be. I lost faith as they say. But I want to say today that it is thanks to the tolerance of those liberal Christian UU's that came before us that I have a spiritual home today.

### My Own Growth Since Joining

When I first started coming here, I loved the fact that I could openly question and even criticize many of the tenets of the fundamental faith that I had grown up with and had come to no longer believe. I loved that I could openly identify as atheist without it affecting my acceptance and I must confess that I occasionally adopted a rather snarky and somewhat arrogant view concerning matters of unconditional faith. Looking back I don't even think I realize that I was doing it. It just felt so free that I could come in and find someone of like mind and say something like, "Well, its Easter. If Jesus sees his shadow it's 6 more weeks of winter". I was like a rebellious teenager whose parents had gone out of town. Challenging the old order that has been taboo to question is a natural part of growth, as is rebellion. I certainly didn't mean any harm. But then one day, a few years ago when we were still in the house on Double Churches Road, my older daughter was getting her hair cut and she overheard someone say that they had visited us for the first time and was very impressed with our non-creedal approach but that she didn't think she would be going back again because she had overheard several comments that were critical of fundamentalism. She said that she had many problems of her own with that worldview but she preferred more of a "live and let live" philosophy. I hate that she decided not to return because I actually think that we



of liberal religion. But occasionally I find the charge that we are hypocrites for claiming to be tolerant when in fact we are tolerant of every theological position there is except theirs. We are intolerant of the belief that eternal hell awaits any who has not accepted Christ. We are intolerant of the belief that homosexuality is a chosen alternative lifestyle and an abomination in the eyes of God rather than a biological orientation and part of human diversity. We are sometimes portrayed as being tolerant of everyone except Christians. Personally, I don't see this as a very valid criticism because it seems to be confusing the meaning of tolerance and acceptance. Very few, if in fact any, UU's subscribe to the fundamentalist biblically inerrant worldview. That means that we don't *accept* it. But we have never taken any action to prevent anyone from preaching what they believe to be true or lobbied for laws that would limit their rights. Tolerance means allowing someone to be who they are as long as they don't harm anyone else. It doesn't mean you have to believe the same.

However, I have also heard what I think is a fairer criticism from liberal Christians within the UUA. Christians, like the few who left to form the American Unitarian Conference, who said that they felt like the Humanist/Atheist presence in UU had become so strong that they no longer felt comfortable expressing what God means to them without being looked upon with disapproval.

In our Religious Education class, which meets every Sunday morning at 9:30, we study other religions and we often notice that what we generally refer to as religions are actually families of religions that are usually very different from one another even though they may share the same name. We are quick to point out that all religions have a liberal and a fundamental divide and that the hard liners of these faiths tend to be in the minority. It's important to note that with the overwhelming majority of liberal Christians, we UU's have very close bonds. It's not as easy to see here in the Bible belt, but for example, the UUA and the United Church of Christ (President Obama's actual religion) teamed together to produce a course on human sexuality called *Our Whole Lives*. And in other parts of the country, the United Methodist Church has actually invited UU ministers to speak at some of their conferences prompting some conservatives within their denomination to accuse their more liberal counterparts of trying to make the Methodist church more like UU, an accusation that liberal Methodists have not entirely denied.

The fact is, there are far more liberal Christians in Columbus who would probably be just fine with coming here than there are atheists looking for somewhere to go to on a Sunday morning.

Now some of us have had bad experiences in our lives that stemmed from encounters with hardline fundamentalists but we shouldn't let them define the faith. The majority of Christians are actually much more liberal. They're much more like our Christians here. That's something that I'm reminded every Sunday when I come here. Thanks to the tolerance that I've been shown, when I hear someone talking about Jesus coming back from the dead, I think not of a medical miracle but of a spiritual resurrection. I think of the Christians here who accept me even though I don't believe. To me, their love is the love of Christ, their example is his witness and they are the true Body of Christ.

I'd like to close with these words from the 1999 Statement of Conscience found on the UUA website:

We live in a global village that brings people of diverse economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds into close and interdependent contact. The resulting challenges are immense. They defy traditional efforts to ensure socio-economic fairness. While we hear the plea for a more just society in the teachings of many faiths, intolerance towards people of other faiths inhibits cooperative efforts.

The commitment of Unitarian Universalism to religious tolerance dates back to the first guarantee of religious freedom in Europe, issued in 1568 by the Transylvanian King John Sigismund, a Unitarian. Today, we accept others' rights to their own religious beliefs. However, our acceptance does not extend to tolerance of actions flowing from those beliefs that violate individual human rights and dignity. Acceptance thrives only where mutual respect exists, understanding is encouraged, and dialogue is nurtured among people of different faiths and philosophical traditions.

Contemporary Unitarian Universalism is a pluralistic faith, drawing its strength from its openness to many different sources. While religious interdependence is an integral characteristic of our living tradition, we are not immune to religious intolerance. There is still hard work to be done within our ranks to ensure that Unitarian Universalists with different theological and philosophical beliefs feel equally at home in our congregations. We need to grow beyond the stereotypes, symbols, and semantic barriers that divide Unitarian Universalists from one another.