Faith Journey Can Be Thorny  
by Rev. Diane Dowgiert, Minister

A few years back, when my family and I moved into a new home in Northern California, the fence running along the back of the property was covered with wild blackberries. They grow like weeds there. Not wanting our yard overtaken, I set out to be rid of the unwanted intruders. Armed with a well-sharpened pruning shear and elbow length gloves made of thick leather, I went to work. One by one, I cut away, thorny branch after thorny branch.

As I cut deeper into the thicket, I noticed the branches getting thinner, the leaves smaller. I wondered if roses were part of the prickly, tangled mess. I slowed down, paid closer attention, made my cuts much more judiciously.

At the end of the day, the blackberry thicket was tamed. Two tenacious rose bushes stood free of the fray, ready to thrive and bloom.

The faith journey of a Unitarian Universalist can be like that thorny fray, pulling away overgrown beliefs choking out the fragrant unfolding of life. The challenge comes in recognizing that which ought to be rejected and that which must be retained.

To let a wild blackberry be the only definition of thorniness would be to overlook other possibilities, other definitions. To do so might even mean shearing off something of immense beauty, like a rose.

When I meet with my inter-faith colleagues, casual mention of atheists – those who do not believe in God -- often arises. I’ll gently insert myself into the conversation, asking, “Do you mean the good folks in my congregation?” knowing full well that not every Unitarian Universalist is an atheist, but wanting to push the thorny envelope of faith beyond traditional bounds.

As you cut through your deep thicket of belief, what do you find that ought to be rejected? What do you find that must be retained?

It’s easy to let others define faith and then reject the very idea of faith based on their definition, harder to tangle with the thorny issues of faith for oneself, but fruitful in the end. Many a rose graced our dining table in Northern California, roses liberated from an overgrown blackberry bramble. Though the wild blackberries were tamed, they never went away, and for that, I am glad. Turns out that wild blackberries make darn good pie.
Our church program-year (August-May) is fashioned around nine theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church’s offerings each month are by no means limited to the themes. However, these topics provide an axis around which many elements of church life gain more meaning and depth. They provide us with a set of common stories and ideas that become elements of an ongoing community conversation. Be warned: seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

January — Hope
February — Healing
March — Integrity
April — Faith
May — Transformation

Our Shared Path to Ministry
Lisa McDaniel-Hutchings, Seminary Student
Meadville/Lombard Theological School

You may have noticed that I changed the title of my article last month to reflect what I believe is the relationship between the congregation and me. Since I am attending theological school at the same time as serving as your religious educator, we are in this together! Residential students generally complete a Masters of Divinity degree in three to four years. For modified residency students like me, it can be twice as long or more. With my work and family commitments, I plan to complete the degree in eight years. That puts me right at the halfway point since I just completed my fourth January and half of my requirements. Needless to say, we are in this for the long haul!

In the meantime, I see this as a win/win situation. The congregation wins by having an Adult Faith Development Director with ever growing skills and a growing variety of offerings inspired by my coursework at Meadville/Lombard such as Art as Spiritual Practice and sermon topics such as Why God is a Verb, on process theology. I get to take theology and arts of ministry courses, then return to our congregational setting and discover how theory plays out in real life. All of these topics can spark conversations that we might not otherwise have had, for example last month’s Transforming Times article on Integrity & God. If things I write strike a chord or cause a reaction in you, please contact me to continue the discussion. This is a great opportunity for shared faith development among us.

Faith Into Action
by Green Group

Get rid of unwanted electronics responsibly by consulting this partial list compiled by Tucson Clean & Beautiful:

* Tucson/Pima County Household Hazardous Waste Program, 888-6947: Accepts computers & peripherals from households for proper recycling (no charge). Computers also accepted at Tucson & Pima County landfill and Transfer station at the ABOP Recycling stations and on the first Saturday outreach locations. [http://www.tucsonaz.gov/hhw](http://www.tucsonaz.gov/hhw)

* American Retroworks-West, Inc. Call toll free 1-877-382-850: Accepts working and non-working televisions, working/non-working computers and other electronics.

* The Brewster Center, 320-7556: Accepts working cell phones. [www.thebrewstercenter.org](http://www.thebrewstercenter.org)

* City of Tucson Los Reales Landfill, 791-5151. 5300 E Los Reales Rd: Accepts working/non-working televisions and computers at CABOP center (computers, antifreeze, batteries, oil and paint). Residential use only.

* Country Fair White Elephant, 625-4119. 601 N La Canada Dr in Green Valley: Accepts working computers, televisions, small working appliances, other items. Benefits Green Valley and surrounding communities. [www.qwhiteelephant.org](http://www.qwhiteelephant.org)

* The Freecycle Network: This online community provides a free service for people to give away and/or receive reusable items. Everything posted on this list must be free. [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org)
Adult Faith Development
LisaMcDaniel-Hutchings
Adult Faith Development Director

As Unitarian Universalists each of us is on a spiritual path seeking our own truths. We are very intentional about planning programs to assist our children and youth in this venture. Since Unitarian Universalism is an evolving faith and we enjoy wisdom from so many sources (including the ever growing discoveries of science), it is important that we offer opportunities, encouragement and support to adults as well. (Surely you don’t believe that you learned everything that you need to know about your own spirituality and religious beliefs as a child. J)

Consequently, the Adult Faith Development Director is charged with creating and facilitating a comprehensive adult program of faith development. I take that to include both covenant groups and an intentionally designed structure of programs covering a range of themes critical to an evolving, progressive faith with offerings appropriate to those new to Unitarian Universalism and to long-time members.

Our program involves several strands:

- **Unitarian Universalist Identity and Beliefs**, which includes Unitarian Universalist Principles and UU History and Heritage (the evolution of our faith and values over 500+ years of history), with courses like Articulating Our UU Faith and Our American Roots.
- **Sources of Wisdom**, which includes world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and Humanism, Earth-centered Traditions and the teachings of science, with offerings like An Inconvenient Truth and Why God Won’t Go Away.
- **Life Transitions**, which help facilitate changes in life such as marriage, divorce, parenthood, loss, aging, death, sharing our wisdom within a Unitarian Universalist context and community, with courses like Lessons of Loss.
- **Ministry & Leadership**, which offer opportunities to explore our interests and develop our skills in sharing our gifts through ministry to our church and the world, with workshops like the Social Justice Workshop and our annual Leadership Day.
- **Evolving faith**, opportunities to integrate and to share our ideas about and experience of mystery and wonder, the possibilities of the sacred/God/spirit/oneness/The Universe, with offerings like Exploring Spirituality as a Unitarian Universalist and various spiritual practices like Yoga, Meditation, and Tai Chi.

Clearly this program will grow and evolve. Much depends upon the congregation’s interests and willingness to design and offer appropriate programs, as well as to participate in them. Thanks to those of you who participated in our survey earlier this year. Please visit with us at the Adult Faith Development table in Goddard Hall after worship.

Musings on the Transformation to UU Minister

The Transition Team provides Lisa McDaniel-Hutchings with support, challenge, and reflection on her journey to ordained ministry, while educating the congregation about the process.

This business of transforming oneself into a Unitarian Universalist minister is a decision that is at once both a mighty leap of faith and a million small steps. It is far more life altering than just a career choice, this call to ministry. It begins as a small, nudging inner voice that gradually forms itself into questions - How do I define a life of authenticity and integrity for myself? How can I best give of myself, my unique gifts and talents, to those around me? How do I find peace and spirituality in this Universe?

This inner voice eventually articulates itself into a need, a demand, a call to ministry that must be heeded. It requires the deepest examination of one’s entire belief system, of one’s assumptions and understandings, a reconstruction of one’s soul.

continued on page 4
Beauty As An Attribute of Faith

Agnes Paulsen
Minister of Music

Most of you know that my husband was a Lutheran minister for 33 years before becoming, in his words, a born again Unitarian. One of the sermons he preached at our church centered on the concept that we should constantly infuse in all our decision making the basic belief that beauty could save the world.

He further went on to say that human beings will always choose the beautiful over the ugly. “A basic doctrine in many religions is that man is inherently sinful. Greed, selfishness, cruelty are all written into our makeup. Salvation is in finding an answer to these. Human beings are totally incapable of this and so they must be saved by a divine redemptive act that must come from above.”

“In such a belief system to make the statement that beauty will save the world is a rank and dangerous heresy. So be it. I choose to be a heretic. I believe that we are individually and as a group responsible for the kind of world that we live in. The depth and quality of our religion depends on the acceptance of that responsibility. All the prayers, the faith, the devotion of those who believe that the only answer has to come from a power on high will not save the world until human beings actualize their individual responsibilities.”

Now, some four years after his death, I read a new meaning into these words and how they can apply to the theme of faith. It seems to me that not only must we strive for beauty in our daily living but that it can be the best tonic we can ever take for our own health and well being. My personal faith acknowledges the existence of a higher power and I have no problem referring to that power as God. To me beauty is one of the attributes of this higher power. It can be everywhere – in nature and in our fellow human beings and somehow beauty can overcome the ugly in much that happens around us.

To me beauty also manifests itself in music and art; they are my companions every day as I am enriched by the intricate and profound sounds of music and the silent majesty of visual offerings.

My husband appreciated the beauty of humor. When I was looking through his sermon notes, I found this joke penned in blue ink:

Mother to son: “What are you drawing, Johnnie?” Son – “A picture of God.”
Mother: “But nobody knows what God looks like.” Son: “They will once I am finished” And then the sentence: “He grew up to be a minister.”

Musings on the Transformation of a UU Minister, continued from page 3 ...

Unitarian Universalist congregations expect their ministers to articulate the concepts of our faith, to put words in the mouthifications, attributes and character that are deemed essential to being an Ordained Minister in our religious organization; one In Lisa’s case, this path to ordained ministry requires sacrifices and challenges, not only for Lisa but also for her family. It is conferences. Each year Lisa spends a month at Meadville-Lombard in Chicago, away from her family. And finally, the juggling quite well.

Lisa has marked a number of milestones in her life. Her marriage to Mike, the birth of her two daughters, being hired as Director Lombard and requirements by the UUA, she will mark three more milestones—when she graduates with a Masters of Divinity members of Lisa’s Transition Team, committed and passionate Unitarian Universalists all, are proud of, and humbled by, the

In faith,
Next Steps in Journeys of Faith Development

Rebecca Froom
Director of Religious Education

Many of you are familiar with the phrase Religious Education is Lifespan Faith Development. Our 4th UU principle is to affirm and promote A free and responsible search for truth and meaning. This search, and the learning done within contexts of religious education, becomes part of each individual’s journey of faith development. When we come together to share the wisdom we have garnered on our journeys, to commend, question and challenge one another in our search, then we become a community engaged in Lifespan Faith Development (LFD).

I am aware that we are all in the middle of a crossroads on the journey of faith development. In my own individual journey, my next steps will be in theological school, on my path towards Unitarian Universalist Ministry. I write from a place of discernment, wondering which school will be the right place for me to continue my journey. I have developed an interest in religious community as site for nourishing individual, communal and global processes of healing from experiences of violence, suffering and systemic oppression. I wonder if I will be capable of really engaging this topic. I wonder how the study of liberal religion will line up with my interests. I wonder how I can possibly be so presumptuous to think I can grow up to be a minister.

I remind myself that doubt is part of the journey.

Our congregation also stands in the midst of a crossroads, as we prepare for a momentous transition on our paid religious education staff. As a religious community, this moment is also a moment of discernment. What is the vision and mission of our Lifespan Faith Development program? What is our community’s commitment to LFD? This year the Religious Education Council and Adult Faith Development Team have been engaging some of these questions, and we are currently in the process of drafting a LFD mission / vision statement. On April 19, 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m the REC will host a congregational workshop on Living our Vision for Religious Education. This workshop will be an opportunity for members of our religious community to give feedback on a draft LFD mission / vision statement, and think creatively about how we want to translate this vision into programming in years to come.

As I work with the RE Council to plan next year’s Religious Education Program, I wonder what the next steps will be for this community in its faith development journey. Will you be excited by a Lifespan Faith Development mission/vision statement? Will volunteers come forward to carry this vision into the future? Will a transition in religious education staff have the support it needs from the congregation? And, will the faith development journey of the community be supported by each individual’s search for truth and meaning, remembering that while there is freedom on this journey, there is also responsibility.

Carol Evans, Michael D. Greenbaum, Kathy McDaniel, Rev. Rod Richards, Randy Springer
Faith Builds A Future
Carolyn Cooper, Finance Chair

The Annual Budget Drive is in the last stages of winding down. Currently, the Drive has raised $305,000 from 146 Members and Friends pledging units. Thank you to the 45.2% who raised their pledges over last year’s Drive and to the 33.6% who maintained their financial commitment. We have not received commitment forms from 39 pledging units. If you know that you have not sent in this form, please give either your visiting Steward or Lyman Grover a call. We anticipate that we will raise around $330,000, about the same as last year. The Empowerment Team will take this number and finalize the 2008-2009 Budget. This will be presented at the Annual Meeting on May 4th. Please plan on attending this meeting.

The Finance Committee wants to heartily thank Lyman Grover, this year’s Stewardship Campaign Manager. He followed the format presented in UUA’s Wayne Clark’s book, Beyond Fundraising, and worked countless hours assembling people, creating brochures, training groups of Team Leaders/Visiting Stewards, and much, much more.

We also want to thank John Schaefer for being the Annual Budget Drive Chair and Susan Call and John Shepard as Co-Chairs. Judy Thompson and Jim Periale worked with this team to plan many of the social events of the campaign. There were 7 Team Leaders, 23 Visiting Stewards and 4 Follow-up callers that helped make up the entire Annual Budget Drive team. Again, thanks to everyone who participated. Next year we hope that the number of volunteers grows and more people participate in this annual event. The funds raised in our Annual Budget Drive make up 83% of the income for UUCT. Your support sustains our church home and its mission.

Moving towards a Covenant of Right Relations
Carolyn Saunders, President

Over the past two years the Board of Trustees has discussed implementing a Covenant of Right Relations at UUCT. This seems to be an important step in coping with the many changes in church life that can cause stress and unpleasantness within a congregation. I found the following definition of such a covenant on the UUA website:

*Developing a Covenant of Right Relations is an important step in clarifying expectations and creating a safe environment for congregations. “Covenant” is Latin for “come together” and means a “solemn agreement” or “promise from the heart” regarding a course of action between parties. Although the process of creating a covenant is unique for each group it may be helpful to review the sample found on the UUA website at [http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary](http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary).*

However, developing such a covenant is not a quick process. It would involve at least a year’s work to get to the point where we were ready to adopt the covenant that would be the best fit for our congregation. So what can we do in the meantime to help our church home be the peaceful environment we all want it to be?

Well, we can begin acting “as if” we already had such a covenant. That would require the following actions:

1. Begin every conversation about our church with a positive, affirming statement—not a negative, derogatory statement.
2. Be direct with one another. If you disagree with someone else about something that is occurring within the church, talk directly to that person about your differences in a calm, loving way.
3. If you have a complaint about the minister and don’t feel comfortable going directly to her, go to the Committee on Ministry.
4. People often say, “The church should do this, or the church should do that.” Consider, who is “the church” if not you and I? Think about what you can do as a part of the church.

Another important asset that we have as a church is the collective wisdom of past leaders of the church. The Rev. Dowgiert is interested in forming an advisory Presidents’ Council to capitalize on past leaders’ institutional memory. If you have been a president of the church in the past and would be interested in serving on such a council, please contact Rev. Dowgiert.
In Memory of Cora Miller
(1918-2008)

Farewell to Cora, full of grace
Her skin transparent, waxen --
subject to dissolving at my touch?
A dancer once:
her nimble form and unshod feet
would smoothly glide across the stage
trailing chiffon clouds of glory;
reveries evoking spirit
up into a new dimension,
ethereal but still earth-rooted
springing as a force of nature.
Now returned unto her source:
absorbed into a dance eternal.

Joyce Hardin. 3/15/08

Mark the Calendar

On April 27, Rev. Dr. Beth Johnson of Palomar UU Fellowship, and
Rev. Tom Owen-Towle, interim minister at UU Fellowship of San
Dieguito, will lead the Sunday Service held at the Marriott Del Mar as
part of District Assembly. Choirs from Palomar and Chalice UU Congre-
gation in Escondido, will perform. "This is a great opportunity to feel the
power and joy of the wider Unitarian Universalist community," reads an
item in Telescope, the Palomar newsletter.

When submitting articles for church publications:

1) Submit your text electronically via email. Plain text is best.
2) Include your name and daytime phone number.
3) Not all submissions will be published. Submis-
sions may be edited.

Questions?
Call Jean Griffiths at 748-1551.
Upcoming Highlights

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<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>April 6</td>
<td>Town Hall Meeting Introducing 08/09 Budget</td>
<td>12:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Holland</td>
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<td>April 13</td>
<td>Newcomers Orientation</td>
<td>4:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Holland</td>
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<td>April 19</td>
<td>Amber Norgaard Concert</td>
<td>7:00 p.m.</td>
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<td>April 20</td>
<td>Social Justice Town Hall on No More Deaths</td>
<td>12:15 p.m.</td>
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<td>April 26</td>
<td>Tom Clowes Concert</td>
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<td>April 25-27</td>
<td>District Assembly in California</td>
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Sunday Service Times: 8:30 & 10:30 a.m.

To Have Faith Is to Trust

by Mary Wiese, Membership Coordinator

Faith is a belief in something or someone. It is similar to trust in that our personal experiences of the past are the foundation for what we believe will happen in the future. There is no absolute proof of either one because proof is of course based on evidence; not on what may or may not happen tomorrow.

There are extremes of opinion when it comes to faith. Fideism is an example of one extreme that believes primarily in a religious teaching as a basis for the future. Fideism comes from the Latin word fide meaning faith. Then there is the other side of pendulum that believes only in scientific evidence. My personal philosophy falls somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

When I was 17, my 16 year old, blind, toy poodle, wandered out of our yard as the sun was setting. I frantically searched for her for next 3 hours. I then sat down, took a deep breath, and asked for guidance. What I got what not so much a message as a feeling of calm. I went to sleep and awoke as the sun was coming up. I then felt my self drawn in a certain direction and walked straight to her...a ½ mile away! Okay, it may just be coincidence but I have other similar experiences. In 1985, my husband Brian was camping in a remote area of Northern France among some ancient standing stones. On a whim, he closed his eyes and put both of his hands on one of the standing stones. He immediately received an image of a fetus. What he did not know at the time was that I was pregnant. I was waiting until he returned home to tell him. These are my personal experiences that make me trust that we are all connected in ways that cannot be explained.

Another type of faith is trust in people. Although I have had my share of difficulty in my life, I have also been fortunate to experience the kindness and generosity of family and close friends many times. These are people I can count on; therefore, I have faith in them.

Although we live in troubling times I have faith that good will prevail. I also have faith in our church community because I believe in our spirit of determination to work together to keep this community strong and to be positive force that can make a difference in our community at large.

Trust in that which is good and you too can have faith!

Yours in community spirit and faith,
Mary