The religious landscape in America is much different from what it was half a century ago. Mainline Protestant churches have been in decline while non-denominational Evangelical churches have been on the rise. Unitarian Universalists have grown in numbers, too, though not anywhere nearly as dramatically as the Evangelicals.

Diana Butler Bass is an observer of religious trends in our country. In addition to a five-year stint as a religion columnist for the New York Times, Bass writes and teaches extensively all across the United States. Recently she spent a year visiting mainline congregations around the country – those bucking the trend of declining membership. She visited congregations that are growing and flourishing, despite the odds. A sense of vibrant purpose and communal warmth abounds within and beyond their walls.

Some common practices permeate these congregations, practices derived from faith teachings. Bass describes them in her latest book, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*. I’ve taken the liberty of recasting these practices in UU-friendly terminology. They comprise the themes we will be exploring together in the coming months -- in the Transforming Times, in Sunday Services, and Covenant Circles.

**Diversity**: moving beyond mere tolerance of human differences to an embrace of diversity as an enriching and enlivening gift.

**Hospitality**: opening doors to welcome the stranger.

**Reflection**: delving into one’s faith tradition to reflect on beliefs, thoughts, and actions in order to find deeper meaning in life.

**Contemplation**: regular and consistent communal times of meditation and prayer, both silent and spoken.

**Trust**: intentionally building relationships of trust among members, clergy, and paid staff.

**Justice**: putting faith values into practice by working for justice within the congregation and the larger world.

**Discernment**: listening for that still, small voice within, the voice of conscience that calls us to action, always asking, “Who are we as a people?” and “What are we called to do in the world?”

**Credo**: developing and refining personal beliefs and then living in alignment with them.

**Ritual**: joining in communal worship, coming together to mark the fullness of life -- sometimes to celebrate, sometimes to lament.

**Beauty**: developing appreciation for the transforming power of beauty, bringing beauty to all aspects of congregational life.

The coming year is full of both challenge and promise. Nourishing a spiritual life will sustain us through the challenges and make the promise brighter. Engaging these themes can be nourishing, especially if we do it together. Have you ever experienced true hospitality? Tell us about it. Do you have a contemplative practice? Share it with us. How has your credo changed over time? We’re interested to hear! The Transforming Times is one more place to spread a sense of vibrant purpose and communal warmth within our congregation.

Yours in the spirit,

**Diane**
How Do You Experience the Sacred? — Diversity of Sacred Experience and Language

In a recent worship service, the congregation took time to explore religious language. We considered where, when, in what circumstances we experience the holy, the sacred, the ultimate. Here are some of the wide varieties of response.

Some of us experience the holy in interactions with others:

- as love
- in community service and the personal interactions that come with it
- in open and non-labeling dialogue with others
- relationships with friends & loved ones
- birth and death
- being in love with someone
- watching children develop
- connecting to my ancestral past

Some of us experience the sacred in nature:

- by the ocean
- watching meteor showers
- fresh flowers
- observing the hummingbirds & butterflies in my yard
- beautiful sunsets
- woods, streams, lakes, the desert, on top of a mountain
- for the sense of solitude and scale that goes with it

Some of us experience the ultimate through action or spiritual practice:

- through acts of kindness, generosity, wisdom
- teaching children
- traveling and experiencing new cultures
- flying an aircraft
- in conversation, in listening
- working on my house, yard, and garden
- hiking with friends, feeling a part of the world as I move through it
- when I am moved to write

Some of us experience the holy in sacred places or spaces:

- in a Zen garden
- at the temple wall in Jerusalem
- in meditation
- at our Christmas Eve Service
- in quiet moments

Some of us experience the sacred in the presence of art or music:

- voices or instruments
- painting or carving or constructing I am part of something larger and more potent than myself
- reading literature or poetry
- melodies, harmonies, tambours, rhythms and verbal ideas of powerful music
- art that speaks to all across time and space

Often we find the experience of the sacred as an integral part of the ordinary flow of life, and anything is apt to become holy.
How Do You Name the Holy?
Diversity of Sacred Experience and Language (cont.)

Written by the Congregation
Reported by Lisa McDaniel-Hutchings,
Lifespan Faith Development Director &
Candidate for the Unitarian Universalist Ministry

After identifying our diverse experiences of the sacred,
we wrote the various ways we name the holy:

God 17*
Humanism
Source
Force toward organization
Connection 2
Loving divinity
Worship?
Friendship
The Universe 3
Children
Music
Great Spirit
Ultimate Reality
Miracle
Jesus Christ
Shared humanity
Love 3
Blessed Grace
Transcendent Goodness and Beauty
Awe, awesome 4
Awe of the large-life’s flow
Integrity
Grace, charity
Playing
The Light Within
Compassion 3
Creation
Spirit, Spirit of Life, Spirit of the Universe
God in the Workings of the Universe
Hope
Witnessing and Participating
I don’t have a name for it. 4
It doesn’t need a name. Instead of a name, I have a feeling of oneness. 2

Great Mystery 2
Our creator, Creator of the Universe 3
Giver of Life
Reality and Truth
Higher power 5
Oneness 3
Gratitude 2
Tranquility
Nature 2
Beautiful, Amazing, Meaningful
Mother, the Abundant Mother
The Beast
Tao
From confusion to understanding
Buddha
WOW
Light & Love
Almighty
The sacred, the wonder, the holy
Acknowledgement
Kindness
Meaning and Significance
Reverence and Awe
Special Moments
Mother Nature
Life 2
The Beloved, Dearly Beloved
Source of All
Most Valuable, Cherished
Cosmic Consciousness
Confidence, Education

*Some names occurred more than once, indicated by the number following the response. These are all of the responses I received.
We’re about to kick off another round of classes from the Our Whole Lives (OWL) Sexuality Education curriculum, and we need you all to know that it takes a whole congregation to teach OWL. Our Whole Lives is an age and developmentally appropriate fact- and faith-based comprehensive sexuality education program that focuses on self worth, sexual health, responsibility, and justice and inclusivity.

The Challenge and the Response
Today’s children and youth face difficult and sometimes dangerous situations unprecedented in our history. The Our Whole Lives classes offer our children and youth a safe environment in which they can learn the facts and discuss their thoughts and feelings with caring, trained adults. In addition, the curriculum is infused with our UU values of respect and justice for all. Parents are their children’s most important sexuality educators; however, the larger community also influences our children’s sexual health, so it seems natural that our children’s religious community take a proactive role in the process.

How you can help
Teaching OWL on a regular basis requires many volunteers. While parents are usually called on to help, the program is enriched when members from the greater congregation are willing to get involved. Also, we must have a pool of adults trained as facilitators to keep the program going. If you’d like to get involved, please contact Lisa McDaniel-Hutchings, Lifespan Faith Development Director, or Kathleen Hogue, RE Coordinator, at church or Heather Reed at 398-4345 or heatherreed@gmail.com.

The OWL class for 4th through 6th graders will be offered here at UUCT from Sept 28 to Dec 14, 2008. There will be a mandatory Parent/Child Orientation held on Sunday, Sept 21, at 12:00PM – 3:00PM in King Room. Parents, please look for letters coming to you with more information and registration materials. At least one parent/guardian must attend the orientation with their child(ren) for their child(ren) to participate in the class. There will be a fee for OWL participation. Scholarships will be available upon request. Please contact Lisa McDaniel-Hutchings if you would like to request a scholarship for your child.

Children from the UUCNWT congregation as well as the community at large are welcome to attend
Please invite any friends (and their parents) that you feel may be interested. For more information contact Heather Reed. Also, stay tuned for details on the OWL class for Kindergarten and 1st graders, which will be offered here in the Spring (Jan 11 – March 29, 2009).

Sincerely,
Heather T. Reed
Chair & OWL Coordinator,
Religious Education Council

Circle of Life: Anniversary of a Tragedy

This summer marks the thirtieth anniversary of a tragic accident that occurred within our UUCT community. The following portion of our UUCT history written by Susan Call and Darlene Matthews tells the story.

“A fateful issue was raised early in the year 1978, which had to do with the playground. The Religious Education Committee had met to discuss the state of the playground, and to formulate a plan to improve the area. This plan was eventually drawn up, and was being implemented during the summer when a terrible accident occurred and Virginia “Ginny” Teska, the president of the Board of Trustees, was killed on July 30, 1978, while working on the playground. Workers and volunteers were hoisting a forty-foot telephone pole into place to hold a “bridge” over the playground. The pole swung on its cable, slipped and struck Ginny on her head, killing her instantly. Sandy Szelag said of her, “While many of us put off till tomorrow what we could do right now, Ginny’s motto and practice was consistently don’t do later what you can do right now.” On May 20, 1979 we finally dedicated the new playground.”

Since that time a new playground, our current one, was constructed and dedicated in the early 2000’s. Ginny’s daughter, Lorraine Hedtke, participated in that dedication.

Our heartfelt thoughts and remembrances are with Ginny’s family and friends as they remember her untimely death and her life, love, and accomplishments.

Lisa McDaniel-Hutchings