

DECEMBER NEWSLETTER



Spotlight On... Nick & Aaron

What's the chance of a seventh grader and a senior working together at a task? At first UU it is starting to be a tradition. Kate Morter used to be the kid guru of things sound and media related. There was a seventh grader, named Aaron Osmer who learned the ropes. Years went by and Aaron is off to college soon. Enter Nick, a curious, dependable seventh grader to carry on the tradition.



Nick Loncar is 12 years old. He loves to play football, but one major dream of the future is to be a band director. He currently plays the tuba. When he decided to be in the band he tried out many instruments and chose the tuba as the best. Nick started attending First UU a few years ago. And two summers ago he attended Hogwarts. There he met Aaron and liked him a lot because of the way he was with all of the kids. He went back again this past summer and it was even better. I asked him what he thinks of Aaron, and without hesitation he said, "Aaron is awesome! He is a really good teacher because he is patient and explains things over again if I don't quite get it." Nick quickly pointed out that he is a good student so he usually gets it the first time.

Aaron Osmer is a senior this year with two very strong interests; one is robotics and the other is choir (he sings in three choirs in his school). He is the youth representative on the Board of Trustees, active in YRUU, and everything media related. For you old timers who remember the puppet theatre, Aaron was one of the main puppeteers. I asked Aaron to pick an aspect of the church he liked the most. His answer was immediate, "The Youth Rallies: they are the most interesting and in many ways a life transforming aspect of YRUU." Recently I asked Aaron for some information for the newsletter. It was minutes before the start of the church service. Nick was sitting in the seat next to him by the monitor set up to show the DVD taping. "Nick you can handle this. Right?" he said, and Nick gave him a nod. Aaron dashed off to do the favor.



Right then I thought what a wonderful relationship and a great story to "spotlight."

Aaron and Nick work on the sound and tape the services - Aaron the teacher, Nick the student. Aaron will be off to college next year and Nick will be taking his place and another First UU tradition continues. *Linda Taylor, Publications.*



➡ Inside this Issue: Pick next year's Forums page 3, November Board Mtg. Summary page 5, Holiday Activities page 7 and 9. Janet Brightens the Holidays page 6. Paradox Players 10th Anniversary page 10. and much more...



IN THE INTERIM by Janet Newman

The December holidays are almost upon us. I'm always on the look-out for bits of advice and wisdom about how to survive the festive times; I know that for many of us, they are anything but festive and can be trying.

Here are some suggestions that I have developed for myself through the years:

Too often we are trapped by our own impossible expectations of ourselves and of others. We want to find the "perfect" gift for someone or else our holidays are ruined. And, at the same time, we're worried that loved ones are spending too much time looking for the "perfect" gift for us! Not to mention too much money.

Suggestion: lighten up. There's no such thing as perfection; what matters is that we gave some thought to the person and what he or she might like. It is the relationship that really counts, not the cost.

Another suggestion that helps me through this time of year: enjoy the "small stuff."

I find that the simplicity of a single strand of lights or a candle in the windows of a house as I pass by is enough to lift my spirits and make me realize the beauty of the season. Even better, I like to get a good whiff of Christmas trees in the sales lots outdoors and take home some boughs to decorate with. I look forward to reading Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* again and seeing the film versions of the story from 1937 and 1951, not to mention the updated versions on stage and screen. Small stuff, all of it, but it helps me enjoy the season.

So to all of us: Have a wonderful holiday season and a very happy new year!

Thank You Covenant Groups for Your Help!

When Covenant Groups decide to mix social time with service time, what does that look like at First UU? Some Covenant Groups participate in a Charity Walk or a Hands on Housing project together. Others will dig in the dirt or bring food to events. This month, the Open Minds Covenant Group will set up the First UU Tree and decorate Howson Hall in preparation for our Holiday Activities. **If your Group is looking for a way to mix social time with service time in a way that leaves your members feeling warm, not burnt out, the Fellowship Committee can help you do it!** Contact Emily Wethington for ideas. Email- ewethington@austin.rr.com phone-323-0055 or Church Fellowship mailbox in the volunteer room.



Split the Plate for December

On the first and third Sundays each month we split the non-pledge offering with a nonprofit organization, selected by the First UU congregation, that puts our social justice values into action.

On December 6, our split-the-plate beneficiary will be **North Central Caregivers**. This group has been helping eligible elderly to live independently by driving them to medical appointments and the grocery store. Our church is one of 17 in our neighborhood that started this service to residents over 65 who are living independently. Members of our church are volunteers and board members in this organization, and our church members are eligible for services from NCC. This service program receives no support from government funds.

On December 20, we split the non-pledge offering plate with **ANSWER (American-Nepali Student and Women's Educational Relief)**. Seeking to develop educated leaders from communities long suppressed in Nepal, ANSWER has almost no overhead, using virtually all contributions to fund the education of low-caste, needy children not only in the lower grades but importantly through the two-year college preparation classes (11th and 12th grades) and onward to technical college or university. First UU funds would be used to support a young woman pursuing a three-year post-secondary course of study to become a staff nurse. There is a huge need for more nursing staff, particularly from lower-caste communities, because often higher-caste providers simply will not serve low-caste women or do so grudgingly. If funds raised are insufficient to support one nursing student (\$1,500 required annually), the donation would be used to support youngsters in the lower grades.



Sunday Worship



The times for the Sunday morning Worship Services are 9:45 and 11:30 a.m

December 6: "How the Holidays Sing Their Message" by Rev. Dr. Janet E. Newman and numerous musicians directed by Brent Baldwin. Holiday music will be in the air by the time you receive this newsletter. You will read elsewhere about the wonderful anthems the choir will sing at Brent's direction. In my sermon I want to explore the meaning of some of our favorite holiday hymns, too.

December 13: "What To Say Once They Know You're a UU" by Rev. Dr. Janet Newman. How many times has it happened to you? Someone knows that you are a Unitarian Universalist, and they ask, "So what do you people believe, anyway?" I'll offer some reflections in my sermon. The Children's Choirs will sing.

Be sure to attend the Congregational Meeting at 1:30

December 20: "A Dickens of a Holiday" by Rev. Dr. Janet Newman I am such a fan of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" that I need to include some aspect of the story in sermons every time December rolls around. Does his tale have anything to say to us modern-day religious liberals? Was Ebenezer stingy?

December 27: Sermon title and speaker to be determined.



Sunday Forum



The time for the Sunday Forum is 11:30 a.m.

Sunday, December 6:

Louis Malfaro, President of Education Austin "Public Education 2010"

In the spirit of building a better tomorrow, what is more important than our educational system? Austin's educational system has its fair share of challenges, successes, and opportunities. Louis Malfaro is President of Education Austin, the local teacher's union. Education Austin represents about 4,000 Austin School District employees. Louis has been a leader for teachers and professionals in education, fighting for teacher pay raises and other key issues to support public education. He'll discuss the latest developments in education reform and give us an early look into what to expect in public education in 2010.

Sunday, December 13:

Dr. Theron Stimmel, Author of "Opera and the Psychology of Love"

Dr. Stimmel began his academic career playing clarinet at Southern Methodist University. He founded the Department of Psychology at TX State University and earned his living as a psychology professor but always maintained a strong passion for music. In 2005 he developed a course entitled "Psychology and Opera." The positive response to this class inspired him to write the book "Opera and the Psychology of Love." Bring your open mind and loving heart to this stimulating presentation as Dr. Stimmel shares how music and opera affect our lives.

Because of the December holidays and related events, Dec. 6 and 13 are our only Forums for December. We'll have another full month of Forum speakers in January.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS FORUM COMMITTEE MEETING

The semiannual meeting of the Public Affairs Forum Committee to plan the spring forums will take place **Wed. December 2 at 6:45 pm in Rm. 13** of the church. The public is invited to attend. Anyone who would like to be a member of the committee is especially invited. People with suggestions for speakers and topics are allowed five minutes at the beginning of the meeting to present their subjects. It is preferred that a **specific speaker** be suggested with the topic, rather than just a general topic. The forum committee is especially fun to be associated with. It has only 2 meetings a years and lots of camaraderie. Yet another opportunity to join a small group.



Presidents Corner

After eight months without a regular minister, I can honestly say that we sure do better with the steady presence of a trained professional in the pulpit. I'm a big fan of our Interim Minister, Janet Newman, and I'll be very sad when I have to return her suitcase and she moves on to her next church. But she will leave us, and probably leave us better off than she found us. And that is the work of an Interim Minister.

So, when will we start the search for our next settled minister? It's a long process and we are planning on starting it in the middle of next year. This is because we are what is considered a "Special Care Congregation" and the UUA recommends two year interim ministries for such situations. To get a better understanding of why we fall into this category and how this process works, check out this excellent article by Rev. Robert Latham on Special Care Congregations:

HYPERLINK "<http://www.uua.org/documents/lathamrobert/specialcarecongs.pdf>" <http://www.uua.org/documents/lathamrobert/specialcarecongs.pdf>

As it's been explained to me, our first year is best spent in reflection and healing, while our second year will be spent in planning for our future. Next year we will be working to define our church's mission, which will make the new minister search that much easier.

To put this all another way, a ministry is much like a marriage between a minister and a congregation. From this perspective our church went through a painful divorce last winter and we need a bit of time to pull ourselves together before we start dating again. A congregation on the rebound is no more fun than a blind date who can only talk about their ex! And the work we do will make us that much more attractive and discerning when we start looking for a long-term commitment.

So, let's enjoy these couple of years thinking about who we want to be and what we'd like to do when we meet that special ministerial someone. See you in church! - *Nell Newton, President of the Board*

Spiritual Movie Night

On December 18th at 7 p.m. in Howson Hall we will have our December Spiritual Movie Night. We will have three or four short movies related to the holidays. The plan is to discuss each one for a bit after its shown and then go on to the next.

Think of it as us showing and sharing movie "presents" while we live in the present and perhaps share a story or two about our presence and the presence of others during the holidays. As usual we will have popcorn, drinks and snacks available. The movie is \$5 adults and \$2 for children. Yes, there will also be a children's movie.

Meet and Eat for December 2nd: Topic from the Nominating Committee



Meet and Eat has become a very popular event in the life of our church. Folks come together in the middle of the week to enjoy an excellent meal and have meaningful discussions as they do so. The Nominating Committee has agreed to be the presenters for our December 2nd meal and forum. The committee sponsored three leadership development classes, led by Michael Kersey, in October and

November. One goal of the classes was to provide a more open nomination process for church leadership positions.

This will be an opportunity for members of the congregation to talk informally during dinner about our future leadership. We will continue the discussion after dinner. We hope to address your questions and concerns. We also hope you will consider a leadership position for 2010.

Meet and Eat begins at 6:00 p.m. in Howson Hall \$5 per adult.



Summary of 11/17/09 Board Meeting

Was it because I have laryngitis and Eric chaired the meeting? Or was it because we intentionally kept our agenda simple? Whatever the reason, this night one of the best board meetings I've ever attended. Remember, this is only a summary and nowhere near as complete as the excellent minutes we can look forward to from our secretary.

NEW MEMBERS/RESIGNATIONS: We had 18 new members join in the past month and 2 formal resignations. There are also 21 folks who will be removed from our membership list as they have not made any contributions of record in the past 18 months and did not respond to our letters asking them to contact us if they want to remain as members.

STEWARDSHIP: Bill Edwards attended and brought news that our most recent Stewardship campaign figures are showing pledges around \$436,000 for 2010. They also remain optimistic that more will come in through November and December. In light of the response we heard at the November Pre-Congregational Meeting, the board voted to rescind our resolution to present a balanced budget at the December Congregational Meeting.

BUDGET: With a larger pledge projection, and no longer bound to presenting only a balanced budget, we set to work on what would go back into the budget, allowing for a modest deficit, which will be funded from savings. Some of the items that made it back in or were further modified:

- Keeping the church open all year, no closures during the summer
- Returning \$12K to the RE budget, part of which will come from RE restricted funds
- Reduction of the minister's package for 2010-2011 by \$5K
- Returning \$20K for building repairs to the Operating Budget
- Pension for Victor Gonzales was restored at a reduced level, and will be funded through the Caring Fund, not the Operating Budget

Not everything made it back onto the budget, including Split-the-Plate which will remain suspended for 2010. However, we hope to work with the Social Action Committee to find other ways we can reach out to the larger community and facilitate individual giving.

COVENANT: With our budget work done, we got busy on starting the work of developing a Board Covenant. Janet facilitated the lively and playful discussion and in a short time we had a good long list of actions and behaviors we think make for a good meeting. Janet and I will work at consolidating the list down to some key ideas and bring them back to the next meeting for more work and hopefully, adoption as our Covenant.

Hopefully our committees are also working on covenants, which will help us as we begin work on a Covenant of Membership that is being proposed by our Membership Committee.

These are exciting days. See you in church! Nell Newton, *President of the Board of Trustees*

SOCIAL ACTION: Reaching Out to the World Our church will be a homeless

shelter this winter - how can you help? From November to March each year, our church plays an important role in our community: we shelter the homeless during freezing weather. We are one part of a network of churches that serves the ARCH homeless shelter downtown as "overflow" sites. Our commitment to this network means that no one needs to be outside when the temperature falls below 32 degrees. This year, our designated night is **Tuesday**. Whenever it is going to be freezing on a Tuesday night this winter, we need to be ready to shelter and feed fifty homeless men who will be transported to our church from downtown by bus.

As you can imagine, this is a big undertaking and commitment for our congregation, but it is also one of the most rewarding. While we are expecting a fairly cold winter this year, we certainly won't need to shelter the homeless every week. We generally average about 3-5 times per season. **This year, we need to fully staff each Tuesday as if it were going to freeze.** When you sign up to volunteer on a "Freeze Night" you need to be prepared to help out, but not until you get word from our Freeze Night Coordinator, Mary Ann Stafford. She will receive a call from the ARCH by midday Tuesday letting her know if the shelter will be sending us homeless or not. She will then email you. Depending on which Tuesdays you sign up for, you may never be called into action at all! Each Freeze Night follows a simple format:

Set up/dinner delivery	Evening host shift	Clean up dinner
Prepare dinner	Overnight host shift	Prepare bag breakfast
Serve dinner	Morning check-out	Clean up

If you can help with some of these tasks, once or a couple of times this winter, our church can truly be a safe shelter for these homeless men. Many church members **prepare food at home** and then bring it up to church that evening. Others **bring their children to help** serve dinner. Others **hang out with our guests** and watch tv, etc, until lights out. And then **three men stay overnight** with our guests. The next morning a few folks come in to clean up. Always on hand is an experienced team member who has volunteered at a Freeze Night before. Please go to volunteerspot.com today to sign up – the homeless need your help! We will have sign-up sheets at the Social Action table in the gallery. Thank you!



Notes from the Interim Minister to **Brighten Your Holidays**

Dear Friends,

I hope you'll drink a special toast to yourselves sometime during the holidays.

We have it on good authority that the First UU Church of Austin is doing very well indeed, even during these trying times.

The recently completed stewardship campaign revealed that the congregation has become smaller in membership, so the dollar results of the campaign were lower than budgeted. However, (drum roll, please) those members who continued to pledge did so on a scale that no one could have predicted – many pledged at least 10% over last year's pledge. This means that the deficit is much smaller than was feared.

Want some additional factoids?

- Pledge income, year to date, is comparable to this time last year -- thanks in large part to the spring campaign.
- Eighteen people joined as new members in late October and early November. There were nine people who joined in September through mid-October.
- And the average plate contribution for September and October, 2009, was \$4,615. The average plate contribution for January through August, 2009, was \$3,292.

These quantifiable facts, plus the improved ambiance in the church throughout the week and on Sundays, makes it clear that positive changes are underway. The church is not the same as it was two years ago or even last year. It is firmly on a new and better path. The congregation's leadership is showing careful stewardship of this positive change. In addition, they demonstrate civility and courage in the face of challenges

So let's all drink a toast to healthy progress -- in the church's programs, its oversight, its morale, its leadership, and its finances. Great things are in store!

Grounds and Sanctuary Garden Renewal

When there's a prolonged drought, native plants look terrible--like they've died. But then the rain comes, and they return to green, blooming life. Maybe you've noticed this around the church: areas that looked abandoned surprise us now with the vigor of growth and lushness. Taking advantage of the cooler weather, we continue to add natives to previously barren areas. Several individuals helped along in that endeavor during a recent workday: Betty Parent, Brandon LaBash and Kirsten Clay (along with their children Max and Violet), David Matthis, Rosy Graham, Mary Ann Stafford, Pat and Dale Bulla, Elizabeth Gray, and Chris Kadas. And led by landscape designer extraordinaire Paige Hill, this group also made significant progress on the Sanctuary Garden renovation.

If you would like to participate in the work or funding for the Sanctuary Garden renovation, please contact Paige at paige@urbanpatchwork.com or David Matthis at davidmatthis@wholefoods.com. **Landscape Wish List** If you are downsizing, we can use garden implements in good condition, especially a garden cart, loppers, hand trimmers, and shovels. We have a shed to keep them locked up when not in use. Please contact Grounds Chair Elizabeth Gray at egray88@Hotmail.com, or 476-1861



Seniors' Luncheon

Tuesday,
December 8th

Howson Hall at Noon

**Soup, Salad & Dessert
\$5**

RSVP to Alice Cashman 837-0988

Program: The Dirgibles eclectic folk band:
Mary Jane Ford, Edward Sledge, Jim
Barry, and Jane Sledge Stoub.

Christmas music, traditional and original,
various instruments to enjoy.



You are all invited to:

The Christmas Pageant Reception

Wednesday, December 16th

The Annual Christmas Pageant will be held Wednesday, December 16th. Dinner will be served at 6 p.m. in Howson Hall and the performance will start at 6:45 p.m. in the Sanctuary. As is our usual custom, the story of Jesus' birth will be performed by church youth. We will also have a musical offering from the children's choirs. All the details have not been worked out at the time of this writing, but check in the Gallery on Sundays and upcoming announcements and bulletins. Another opportunity to enjoy the church community.



The Christmas Eve Tea

Thursday, December 24th

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, December 24th, there are traditionally two services where the stories of Christmas are told and carols are sung. This is a candle light service and is a peaceful place to be on this evening. Following the first service a tea will be served in Howson Hall. Please join us. The services will be held at 5 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Calling All Dessert Makers!!

Since you've been eating more healthily, and cutting back on sweets, have your baking implements started to feel forgotten? Has your sifter almost rusted? Holiday Baking Book not been cracked open in a while? Well-let's start crackin'!

The Fellowship Committee is calling all UU Sugar Artists to get ready for Christmas Pageant and Christmas Teas!

The entire UU Community is invited to both events.

It is our tradition to show appreciation to the volunteers, performers and staff by bringing treats to share. (12-24 small servings, please).

Cakes, bars, tarts, brownies, breads, muffins, profiteroles, cannoli, pudding, custards, trifles, fudges, toffees, fruitcakes, compotes, jelly rolls and buche noels. Don't forget cookies! Decorated, plain, themed, special plates, in muffin cups, on doilies, wrapped, drenched, rolled in nuts or chocolate dipp'd. (But not flambe'd) Sugar free treats are fine too! How about cheese, crackers, sausages, nut butters, pates, breads, and fruit and crudites? Why not! Bring them to Howson Hall when you arrive and we'll get everything set out. No complications, no lists to sign. Reminders will follow in the Bulletin.



The Yew Grove Pagan Interfaith Winter Solstice/ Yule Celebration

The Christian holiday of Christmas is based on the Germanic-Nordic festival of Yule. The familiar tree and holly are symbols of the hope of green renewal in the spring. Feasting and gift-giving were the order of the day, and oaths were sworn of doughty deeds to be performed in the coming year in honor of the god Freyr, which became the modern "New Year's Resolutions".

The Yew Grove Pagan Interfaith Winter Solstice/ Yule Celebration will be held in Howson Hall beginning at 6 p.m. on December 20th. If you need more information you may call Heather at 363-0163.



Freyr was the god of sun & rain and the patron of a bountiful harvest.

I am Bill Edwards, Chair of the Stewardship Committee. Why did I take this job?



Bill and Ann Edwards

In January Elizabeth Gray, Chair of the Nominating Committee, called me up and asked if I would accept Chair of the Stewardship Committee. The Committee whose focus now centers on the 2010 canvass. I was rather taken aback. A dozen years ago this church was very important to me and within these walls I found definition of who I am, and who I have become. This was my home, and here were my roots. But that was long ago:

“Why,” I asked Elizabeth, “would anybody volunteer to be the Chair of the Stewardship Committee?”

Don’t you realize, Elizabeth, that this church was beachfront property when Hurricane Katrina hit, and close to half our community may feel homeless and un-rooted?

Don’t you realize, Elizabeth, that we started out the 2009 church year with a deficit of more than \$30,000 already built in, and that many people are leaving the church and taking their pledges with them – or are staying here and cutting their pledge down to a dollar? All this in a time when the nation and our membership are sinking deeper and deeper into economic decline?

Why would I, Elizabeth, volunteer to take on a task that might well be impossible, a task that would take all my time for the next year, a task that the Board and Congregation might plan to dump upon me to take care of, and thank you, Bill, very much?

Elizabeth said she would put my initial response down as lukewarm. And she called back a day or two later. “Elizabeth,” I said, “I don’t have the passion. I’d like to find it, but nobody could do this job without the passion.” And she called me back again. And again, and again.

Finally I just laughed. “Elizabeth,” I said, “Okay. But I still don’t have the passion. Yet.” And here I am. And here you are. And here we are. The last day of the 2010 Canvass.

I was right about some things: You can’t do this job without the passion. And this job has taken all of my time – all of it – for the past 10 months. And I was right that we have hit the Perfect Storm of disaffected members and economic hard times.

I was wrong about some things. This job has not been impossible. I have not done this job alone – the Stewardship committee and others have had my back, the Board has done everything I have asked, and the Team Leaders and the Canvassers have done magnificent work.

The real key is the Congregation – you, us, we – who have rallied to our church’s cause as far as we are able. In quick overall summary, the 2010 canvass is the first canvass in living memory where the amount pledged is less than the year before. Our goal was \$650,000 – we now think we will raise \$450,000 and we are today 90% of the way to that figure. Those of us who have pledged have increased our contributions by more than \$70,000 over what we pledged in 2009. There are just fewer of us.

We will take this base and build the future.

So why did I take this job? I found the passion. It is you. It is us

At the time of this writing, more than 250 “pledging units” – individual people or couples – in our Congregation have pledged more than \$435,000 to the 2010 Church year.

The Austin Eckhart Tolle Presence Group is open to all. It meets every Thursday at the church, from 7:30-9 p.m. We are presently discussing the book, “Practicing the Power of Now.” According to Tolle, “You are here to enable the divine purpose of the universe to unfold. That is how important you are.” Come and join other like-minded individuals as we delve into the writings of this deeply inspirational spiritual teacher. Everyone is welcome to attend, even if you are not up-to-date with the reading. In January, we plan to begin discussing, “A New Earth,” so please make plans to attend! For more information, please contact Suzanne Kahn at kahnsuzanne@att.net, 512-947-7588.



music matters

Ring in Advent with the First UU Adult Choir on Sunday, December 6th (both morning services)

The First UU Adult Choir will ring in the season with Baroque holiday selections by Buxtehude and Vivaldi. They will be joined by instrumentalists from the Austin Symphony Orchestra, singers from the Texas Choral Consort, and keyboardist Michelle Schumann of the Austin Chamber Music Center (First UU's Artists-in-Residence).

The First UU Adult Choir will also join 12 other area church choirs for the North Central Caregivers Christmas Concert on December 4th at St. Louis Catholic Church (601 Burnet Rd @ 7:30pm). This NCC fundraising event – the organization's largest one of the year -- will include a mass-choir performance of the Hallelujah Chorus by Handel.



Children's Choir Holiday Sing, December 13th



The First UU Children's Choirs will sing a selection of holiday classics for services on December 13th. They will also lend their lovely voices to the Religious Education Christmas Pageant on Wednesday December 16th (following the Meet-and-Eat). Children's Choir will then go on a short holiday break, recommencing rehearsals on Sunday, January 17th.



Remembering Janet McGaughey, part 2

We ran an article last month in honor of our beloved long-time Director of Music, Janet McGaughey, but unfortunately ran the wrong picture. Here is the picture we meant to include.



Sing-a-Long

Saturday, December 26

Sing-a-long will be held from 7:30 to 10:30 at the Friend's Meeting House on 3701 E. MLK Blvd. Please bring snacks and finger foods, musical instruments, and copies of songs you want to sing with the group. Copies of "Rise Up Singing" will be available. Please do not bring alcohol, since this is not a custom of the Quakers.

For more information contact Larry Vaughn 469-0029 or email lavest@sbcglobal.net. To be added to the email list, contact Mary Jane Ford at mjaneford@grandecom.net.



Celebrating Our 10th Anniversary!



The story of Paradox Player's origin is rooted in this church. The story began in 1999 when minister Bill Zelazny issued a call for "dramatically inclined" church members to assist with Sunday morning services. Calling ourselves "mUUses," the group presented dramatic readings and short scenes at worship services. Led by Paulette MacDougal and Ann Edwards, we met monthly to work on material, practice improvisation, and read plays aloud just for the fun of it.



In 2000 we were invited to conduct an entire Sunday worship service. Selecting material from Robert Fulghum's *Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, Paulette directed a large cast of church members in a one hour dramatic presentation, including a meditation, offertory, and singing by the choir. Encouraged by the response, we presented the full two-hour version of the same play in May, 2000. And that was the start!

A significant early decision that shaped the theater's development was advice from the church board president in 2000 to cast actors according to quality, not church affiliation. Thus we evolved into a true community theater, attracting actors city-wide. Another early decision was reaching out to the community, offering non-profits one performance each production that is exclusive to their membership, which they can use for fundraising and fellowship. These are our Benefit performances, which several agencies have subscribed to numerous times.

Today we call ourselves Paradox Players, and our original charge has spawned three distinct programs – occasional Sunday Shorts, monthly Readers' Theater, and three main stage productions annually. The last two Novembers a Cabaret was added as a fund raiser. For about eight years we've been guided by a Steering Committee of church and non-church members. We emphasize fellowship, quality of performance, and material that provokes thought and nourishes the spirit.

Always open to newcomers, we welcome anyone seeking fun with drama! Check out our website for the latest on what's going on, and how to get involved,

at www.paradoxplayers.org. Also check the December issue of *Austin Woman*. Paulette and Paradox will be featured!



Religious Education

Middle School and High School classes Study Other Religions



The middle school and high school religious education classes are doing the Neighboring Faiths curriculum where we study other religions and visit other places of worship. Our first month was focused on Judaism and on Oct. 30 students, parents and teachers went to the synagogue at Congregation Agudas Achim, sat in a service and had a great conversation afterwards with the rabbi. We later sent a note to the rabbi sharing our favorite memories: memory being an important part of the Jewish faith.

This month the focus has shifted to Hinduism and learning about relaxation exercises, meditation and yoga in preparation for a visit to a Hindu temple. The middle school class did a fantastic job creating the infamous "Haunted Hallway" at the very successful Halloween Dia de los Muertos event at the church. They scared a lot of little ones just enough but not too much!



YRUU After much planning and coordination of behalf of our youth and advisors, ten members of YRUU attended the fall Waco, Austin, Corpus Christie, San Antonio rally at First Unitarian Universalist Church in San Antonio. At the rally, the youth participated in a social action to add on to the First UU of San Antonio garden, and decorated linens for soldiers across the seas. We gained new friends, new memories, shared an excellent worship together and had a really good time.



Ruth Marie was an inspirational woman and one of our committed high school advisors. Over the past year she fought a hard and brave fight against cancer. At the suggestion of one of the group's student leaders, about eight of us were going to go visit with Ruth Marie at her home where she was under hospice care. We talked about her and prepared ourselves for what to expect only to learn that she had died. We asked Rev. Janet if she'd mind coming and talking to the high schoolers about topics that were on the students' minds - death, grief, shock - She really helped the students with their feelings and was able to minister to our youth in a deeply meaningful way during a time of need. The group has decided to invite Janet back to visit again in December.

Library Update

The books have been entered into an online database, which will - in time - allow library patrons to check and see what books are available online from home. Now we will be returning the books to the shelves, but ask that you please continue to consider the library closed as we will be sorting them, putting on new labels, and new catalog numbers.

Since December is a hectic month, we ask your patience. The end result will be a much more accessible library. Many thanks to Paul Fisher, Andi Windham, and Corrina Whiteaker-Lewis for all their hard work. I feel blessed to have people like y'all working with me! *Namaste, Stephanie (Canada) Gill*

First Unitarian Universalist

Church of Austin

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One Church. Many Beliefs.

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Bits and Pieces!

The November 13-15 semi-annual Men's Fellowship Retreat at U-Bar-U was enjoyed by 22 men, with representation from Austin Live Oak, Wildflower and Kerrville UU churches as well as the core group from First UU. It's a special spring and fall time of relaxation, reflection and service that participants find both enjoyable and meaningful. It's a really worthwhile event. The next retreat will be held in April 2010. *Ed Nichols, for the Men's Fellowship Group.*

The highlight is a walk through the labyrinth, guided by Mark Skrabacz. The labyrinth is made of rocks and was created over the past 2-3 years. Walking it with 20 other men (from four UU churches and synagogue) is like peeling away layers of stress, anxiety and fear and getting to the core of our lives. Another highlight is working together side-by-side on volunteer projects around the ranch and meeting house. *Brian Miller*

This was my first retreat and visit to U-Bar-U. It was the first time I'd completely walked any labyrinth and I found it to be a completely different experience with a group. It was very calming and centering. We also cut down and burned some cedar trees to open up a part of the trail. That was hotter and harder work than expected. Sandy, (resident caretaker and cook), made us feel welcome and I greatly enjoyed the lasagna. *Anonymous*

Sean had a conversation with Mia Burton (a member for two years with two children in Religious Education). She has a request. She'd like to volunteer more at the church, and get her kids involved in volunteering (especially social action programs). Unfortunately, she can't tell from the bulletin/announcements/newsletter if kids are welcome (or at what age, like "kids 12 and up are encouraged to participate"). She suspects, and Sean agrees, that our turnout could improve if we were more explicit about activities that are (or aren't) kid friendly. Seems like a good idea so we pass it along.