



# New Garden Community Church (Unitarian Universalist) - a labor-peace church

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meeting at 6pm, UE (United Electrical workers), 37 S. Ashland, Chicago

February 8, 2007

*"Love for the Earth, Justice for the People"*

## Calendar:

- **Sunday, February 11, 6pm** – The **First Person** series continues with **Owen Wagner** talking about "Pegboards and Pegs" – his story of looking for how to fit in a sometimes too-conventional world. Potluck follows all services – bring a dish to share.
- **Tuesday, Feb 13 & 27, 7pm** - Nonviolent Communication (**NVC**) practice continues, for anyone who would like to join us. If you want to cool your hot temper or stiffen your spine, phone Jean for info: 312-405-9470.
- **Sunday, February 18, 6pm** – a special program for the **Season for Nonviolence**: Matt Van Slyke talks about the bill to create a **Department of Peace** – what it can do for us, and how we can help move it forward.
- **Sunday, February 25, 6pm** – for Film Night, we continue the **peace/nonviolence** series with "**Biko**" – the story of a young activist against Apartheid in South Africa. Bring food, we'll eat and watch together.

### Spirituality Book Discussion Group

**Tuesday, March 6, 6-8pm** – Come discuss the *Life of Pi*, by Yann Martel, winner of the Mann Booker Prize, 2002. Meet at the back table, Westgate Coffeehouse, 924 W. Madison. Y'all come!

## Cheap Grace

In Christian thinking, clergy caution about "cheap grace" – the mistaken idea that God will forgive you easily, before you have really atoned for your transgressions. I suppose they're thinking of those people (we all know some) who hurt others or commit crimes, and seem not to feel remorse, or even understand the damage they've done.

I think it's natural to want such people to be punished, especially if the world rewards them – then in our sense of powerlessness, we may want "God" or the Universe, karma, some large external force to deal out justice for us.

A friend of mine was complaining about the UU version of "cheap grace" – the idea of finding God on a mountain top, in nature, in Sufi poetry – when there is so much misery and injustice in the world. He said something like, "Somehow the pain of the world needs to be taken into account." God can't only be in the smiling sun, the blue sky, the feelings of delight and well-being that sometimes come over us.

My first response to this idea is that God always forgives, immediately; God doesn't hold out, give you the cold shoulder, the silent treatment – if you are in contact. God is like a mirror – as you reach out, so does God to you. God is in forgiveness itself; God is forgiveness.

Our very desire for retribution gets in the way of our reaching out – or in – for that divine peace. As long as we hold onto the idea that someone "deserves" punishment, as long as we hold onto the idea that something "should not" happen, we are preventing ourselves from grieving the loss, the change, the injustice of the situation.

I'm not a Quietist, one who believes that justice is meted out in the next world. I'm not an adherent of reincarnation, believing that the bad guys will come back as cockroaches (tempting though that is!). I do believe that we need to act here, now, on Earth, to deal with the injustices that humans wreak on one another. But I also believe that we can live without burdening ourselves with resentment and outrage. Anger can energize us, if we can transform it into action, and don't carry

it with us instead as thoughts of helplessness and retribution.

We just were reading and discussing the *Tao of Pooh*, which urges us to practice “Wu Wei” – the way of no way – that action should somehow be obvious and natural, a spontaneous compassionate response to the situation in front of us. The work of heroes? I think of people who’ve done amazing feats, throwing themselves under trains, into burning buildings, to save people, and when questioned, say, “I didn’t think, I just did it.”

But those impulses can be played out in smaller ways. Helping someone in a wheelchair up a steep curb ramp, or holding a door for someone. You may think those are trivial examples. But I’m a believer in *means* being *ends*: in living out the kind of world you want to see, to live in.

But how will those kind of actions end racism, or stop the U.S. from waging war or supporting dictatorships which benefit the U.S. economically? What is a natural and obvious step to take there?

It would help us to become more aware of the ways in which we may be supporting actions or policies we don’t like. For instance, our silence? Tell someone who tells racist jokes that you find such jokes offensive. Write letters to your representatives in Congress – it does make a difference. How we spend our money? Buy local, if you want to support community. Take a look at

[transfairusa.org](http://transfairusa.org), [globalexchange.org](http://globalexchange.org), or [unionlabel.org](http://unionlabel.org) for companies you would like to support or not support with the money you spend on their products. Or taxes – our income tax, our telephone tax dollars – do we have the courage to stop paying? Contact the War Resisters League ([www.warresisters.org](http://www.warresisters.org)) for strategies.

I want to act out of love, not anger. I am much more willing to work on positive change – to use political jiu-jitsu, so to speak, and redirect the energy toward strategies we believe will help, rather than trying to stop those we believe are harmful. At the same time, I believe we need to get training in nonviolent direct action, for those times to come in which we may need to put our bodies on the line.

The wisdom of the great spiritual traditions advises abandoning an “enemy” mentality. If we have been hurt, if our hearts go out to those who are hurting still, how can we do this? It’s hard. It means letting go of ideas we have cherished for a long time, ideas about how things should be, or should have been. It means getting in touch with the part of us that wants to cry about what has happened, what is happening.

God is with us in our disasters, our grief, and in our joy. We gotta feel both! It’s the key. Grace isn’t cheap – it’s free.

peace, Jean

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