



# 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

August 8, 2007

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

## Calendar:

- **Morning Meditation on the Lake – Sun., August 26, 8am**, on the grass by the harbor just South of where Randolph goes under Lake Shore Drive. Bring a blanket or pillow to sit on. We'll go get coffee/tea after.

**Spirituality Book Discussion Group**  
**Tuesday, September 4, 6:30-8pm** – Read Paul Rusesabagina's *An Ordinary Man*, the gripping autobiography of the hotel manager who protected some 1500 lives in Rwanda's genocide. Meeting at The Billy Goat Tavern, on Madison at Ashland & Ogden.

- **Sunday, September 23, 6pm** – Celebrate the **Fall Equinox**, with a special program by singer songwriter **Susan Urban** and **SASS**. Service followed by potluck supper and conversation.

## Chickenfeed

My friend Sharon and I went out into the wilds of Illinois on the hunt for peaches to pick. Turns out there aren't many, for several reasons: the warm weather meant the peaches had ripened early, and most are already done – picked or fallen. And back in April the extra warm weather had brought out the blossoms early, and then three days of 20 degree weather had frozen and killed those tender buds.

"George," the old farmer who meets us at the U-pick parking lot, is fuller of gripes than a farm dog has burrs. "Can't get anyone to pick the fruit –" he says, "rains a little, and they'd rather sit at home with their feet up. Can't pay 'em enough to make it worth their while."

In a grassy pen next to a white painted shed, some handsome russet-colored hens cluck and peck the ground and chase one another. "How much are eggs?" Sharon asks the old man.

"Three dollar a dozen," he replies, and seeing her face screw up in a frown, adds, "With corn being sold for ethanol, the price of chickenfeed has gone through the roof. We used to buy it for \$60 a ton and now it's close to a thousand dollars.

"Farming has become industrial, like everything else. I know a guy who has 100,000 chickens laying eggs, and ships a trailer-truck-full out of there every day."

I joke, "They probably lay their eggs on a conveyor belt, and they roll down and go through a machine that washes them automatically..."

"Yep," he agrees, "and the ones that are cracked or damaged or too big, are broken and go right into a tank car and are shipped to McDonald's."

Wow, prescrambled!

In Mexico, residents take to the street because of the rising cost of corn tortillas, a staple in their diet. In Germany, the cost of beer rises because farmers are switching from barley to rapeseed. In one Malaysian state alone, more than 30 poultry companies shut down because of rising corn prices, the main ingredient in chickenfeed. All because of the rush to produce ethanol from corn, to supplement petroleum.

We walk past rows of Brussels sprouts, and red cabbages, and thick collard greens, green bush beans and giant onions and beets, past apple trees and pear trees; a sign stands at the end of each row to identify their variety: Kosui, Jazz, Crab...

Way at the back (beyond the new yellow mini-mansion to our left, alongside the development's retaining pond) – a hot trek with our wagons and boxes under the steaming sun – we finally find peaches. We've imagined large, old, gnarled trunks, tall grass, blessed shade! limbs heavy

with fruit, propped up with heavy stakes to keep them from breaking. But these are 8-10 year old trees, hardly taller than our heads, with just a few leaves we can duck under for relief from the sun.

I carefully pick only those peaches that come off in my hand – the truly ripe, the ones that feel soft, like flesh (as I wisely explain to Sharon), not hard like baseballs. Hail has pockmarked many of them; birds have tasted not a few. Some are so beat up we just put them out of their misery, cut off the bad spots and eat them on the spot, juice dripping, wiping our hands on our pants. Mmm!

What I find, hours later, is that these lovely, soft, flesh-like peaches at the bottom of my box have become square – squashed by the press of the peaches around them. Peaches that feel like flesh indeed! There's nothing like experience.

Good thing Sharon didn't pay any attention to my wise advice. Next time I'm picking the ones that feel more like baseballs.

If there is a next time. As the weather gets more erratic, and more farms become like factories, and chickenfeed continues to fill our gas tanks, the jewels of little family truck farms like this one will become artifacts of the past.

I hope that small farmers are banding together to help create farm policy that encourages farming on a human scale, that helps young people see farming as a viable life choice, so that the Georges of America – however curmudgeonly – do not die out.

peace, Jean

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