



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

312-405-9470 ♦ minister@NewGardenUU.org ♦ www.NewGardenUU.org
meeting at 6pm, UE (United Electrical workers), 37 S. Ashland, Chicago

October 12, 2006

"Love for the Earth, Justice for the People"

Calendar:

- **Sunday, October 15, 6pm – "The Tent of Abraham"** – can having a common spiritual ancestor help Jews, Christians and Muslims live together in peace? Potluck after the service – bring food to share.
- **Sunday, October 22, 6pm – "Confronting Evil"** – Challenged by the question: "Global Warming is a sin! Why aren't the churches trumpeting **this** from every pulpit?!!"
- **Sunday, October 29, 6pm** – Singer songwriter **Susan Urban** brings us her Samhain service, to celebrate harvest time and the thin place between the worlds.

Meditation Class

Sunday, October 15, 4pm – Marilyn Myles begins a four session meditation class to learn **different styles of meditation** and begin practicing. The class meets once a month, **3rd Sunday**. We'll begin holding ½ hour meditation sessions before service, starting the following Sunday, October 22, at 5pm.

BOOK NIGHT meeting (1st Tuesdays)
Tuesday, November 7, 6-8pm
save the date!
– place TBA –

Looking Out For Each Other

This is about our first principle, honoring the "worth and dignity of every person."

Last weekend, to celebrate the ordination of my friend Lynda Smith into community ministry, the Detroit Unitarian Universalist

church hosted a "street retreat" led by Alex, a staffer of the Faithful Fools street ministry (www.FaithfulFools.org) in San Francisco. Fifteen or so of us spent four hours wandering the streets around the church, which nestles between Wayne State University, the Detroit Medical Center, and the Cass Corridor, home to many people living "rough," some who drink or use drugs, some with mental health problems, some left homeless by health or economic misfortune.

Cass, but particularly a couple blocks farther West, is still a wasteland of empty lots (from fires and destruction of the riots of the late 1960s), run-down housing, drug treatment centers and social service agencies, with almost no stores. The one hardware store offers repair materials for local landlords, but not much in housewares, should anyone come looking for a colander, for example. To the East, the city is encouraging more hardy middle-class souls to move into the area, shucking the "Cass Corridor" moniker and renaming it "Midtown."

A retreat like this is a chance for people who have little contact with street people to meet and hang out with them, and find out first hand from them – what? how to manage, where you can get food, services, find a bathroom, yes – but in essence, to find out that they are simply people like ourselves, and not wild-eyed drug abusers out to take our wallets and leave us bleeding in the gutter. The wild-eyed ones, in fact, are often the ones who aren't taking drugs they need, to control psychosis or bi-polar disorder.

Each person who goes on the retreat – rather than meeting the demons of the street – comes face to face with her own demons. Of

feeling vulnerable, or afraid of needing help, or feeling superior – whatever they might be. My own demon – I'm not sure what to name it – was in full force, even before I walked out the door and down Prentiss Avenue. I was in a strange city, sleeping in a strange bed, staying with people I didn't know well... All things conspired to make me anxious so that my guard was fully engaged as I left the church. It wasn't as if I were inexperienced with homeless people – I'd done clinical pastoral education in the Oak Park shelter. I had even been on a street retreat before, in San Francisco.

I remembered how I used to pray, each time before I visited the shelter in Oak Park for my ministry of presence: "Dear God, be present with me – help me to hear with your ears, to see with your eyes, to speak with your tongue" – that is, to be present, to be compassionate, to be non-anxious.

Because it was a job then and I had a role – I steeled myself and made myself be friendly, spoke to people, made connections – my heart still leaps with gladness when I run into some of them around town.

This time I found no way to comfort myself, no place to alight – a safe way to sit with the people I found on the street and make conversation. A park where they were being given lunch seemed too crowded – other situations seemed too private (a few people sitting on a stoop or wall together), or threatening (a big group, laughing together). Perhaps it all seemed too much like "theirs" and I was an outsider, afraid of not being welcomed.

Before we began, Alex taught us this song:
"What keeps me apart? What keeps me separated? While I walk the streets, what still connects me?"

I knew what was keeping me apart – I was afraid. What was I afraid of? Of being led by the nose? Of being used and abused? Of not being able to say "No" and mean it?

All the things I fear in regular life and am generally protected from, I found on the streets of Detroit.

I remember how working in the shelter, being open to the people who stayed there, cracked something open in me. I seemed to connect more easily with other people in my life; my walls were not as high or as thick, the doors to my heart not as rusty and stiff.

I didn't do as much with people on the streets of Detroit as some of the others who went on the retreat. At first I felt that I had let myself down, failed to rise to the challenge, "chickened out." I realized that one of my fears was simply fear of connection.

But... a big part of the challenge is just to accept where you are, now. The value of the work in Oak Park was the time, becoming comfortable myself, getting to know people over time. It was connection. If I know now that I need a sense of safety, and some time, to help me connect with people, then my long stroll through the streets of Detroit, greeting people, but nothing more, was worth it.

peace, Jean

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