



Reflections

by Rev. John Howard Farmer
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Our Unitarian Universalist neighbors.

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Rev. John
Howard Farmer

On the main, most Protestant and/or Evangelical denominations depend solely upon the Holy Bible, with Divine inspiration, for instruction. Locally, we have a new congregation whose base of authority is widely more varied.

My first introduction to the Unitarian Universalist movement was while in Boston as pastor of the largest interdenominational Christian congregation in New England and as a field education supervisor for Harvard Divinity School. Let me quote from the denominational publication of The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass.: "Our history has carried us from liberal Christian views about Jesus and human nature to a rich pluralism that includes theist and atheist, agnostic and humanist, pagan, Christian, Jew, and Buddhist," (Mark W. Harris).

"There are seven principles which Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote: The inherent worth and dignity of every person; Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations; A free and responsible search for truth and meaning; The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large; The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Unitarian Universalism (UU) draws from many sources: Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life; Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love; Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life; Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves; Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit; Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature."

Thea Marshall, noted and respected local author and media personality, writes that The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Rappahannock (UUFR) in White Stone, of which she is a member, "has a replica of a lantern room sitting atop its red roof. A screw pile lighthouse inspired the architecture of the church itself. Shirley and Tom Kinney, two of the founding members of UUFR, built the lantern room atop the roof of the only home for Unitarian Universalists in all of the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula. The land it's on was bought by a handful of founding families and donated to the fledgling fellowship.

Why a 'lighthouse-inspired' home for the Unitarians? Robert Weekley, president of the UUFR, says, 'It fits in with the enlightenment ideas of the Unitarian Universalist principles which include a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.'

The official ground-breaking ceremony took place June 3, 2007, with the first Sunday service in the uncompleted new building held August 17, 2008. On November 16, 2008, it was officially dedicated. The genesis of the UUFR began ten years earlier, when a group of like-minded folks began meeting on their back porches and living rooms, and for a short time used the meeting room of the Lancaster Community Library. They then moved on to use the facilities of the White Stone Women's Club. In

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1999, the Unitarian Universalist Association as a new and growing congregation recognized the UUFR. June of 2001 marked the beginnings of a serious search for a permanent home.

Now, in its 'home of its own,' the mission to inspire spiritual and intellectual growth is reinforced by the informed and provocative sermons and programs led by its lay members and visiting ministers.

UUFR continues the community involvement that began in its earliest back-porch days as regular contributors and supporters of many groups that include The Northern Neck Food Bank, The Haven, The Free Health Clinic and Interfaith. Last year's free and unique 'English as a second language' program for the immigrant community of the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula was a huge success story.

The grounds of the Fellowship are a work in steady and loving progress with a butterfly garden, a labyrinth, and a memorial grove taking shape.

Though the UUFR home is new, there's nothing new about Unitarian Universalists. They were among our country's founders, from John and Abigail Adams' son John Quincy and Ethan Allen to Paul Revere and Benjamin Franklin. Thomas Jefferson was quoted as declaring that if there were a Unitarian church near Monticello, he would have attended it.

The story of Unitarian Universalists goes back further, to 16th-century Transylvania, where Unitarian congregations were established for the first time in history. Members across the centuries have included 'just folks' to the world's most admired people including writers, scientists, philosophers, presidents, politicians, humanitarians, educators and more.

On the cover of every Sunday program is a sketch of the octagon-shaped, lighthouse-inspired building. Beneath the sketch are the words 'Our home provides a beacon of reason guiding us in a responsible search for the truth, where together each of us is free to explore our spirituality and our place in the interdependent web of existence that is our universe.'

UUFR is proud to be a welcoming congregation, committed to the inclusion of every person. All are welcome without regard to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or economic status.

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Rappahannock meets at 366 James Wharf Road, White Stone. Fellowship services on Sunday begin at 10:30 a.m.; following the service, all are invited to "stay for coffee and conversation."



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