



*“How many bad habits do I need to equal one good vice?”*

moved to speak. Please allow a breath of silence after each person speaks, so that we may focus our attention on what has been said.

Let us pause to dwell inward. Spirit of Life, please meet us where we are, in the struggles we choose for ourselves; in the ways we move forward in our lives, and bring our world forward with us. It is right that we pause to remember those who need love and support; who are ill or in pain, either in body or in spirit; who are lonely or have been wronged. Let us open our minds and hearts to a place of quiet, to a silent prayer for the healing of pain, and the soft, gentle coming of love. In this time of silence let our thoughts be with those who have spoken or been spoken about this morning.

Amen and Blessed Be.

I ask you now to rise and greet your neighbors at the door. Please welcome them into the sanctuary with a warm hand and a warm smile.

*HYMN 353, Golden Breaks the Dawn*

*ANNOUNCEMENTS & GREETINGS*

**Daidee.** Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. Please note the emergency exit over here to my right, now is the time to put your cell phone in “Worship Mode,” childcare for the young and the restless is available downstairs in the nursery, after the service today, please join us for coffee and conversation in the fellowship area right back there. If you have a particular joy or sorrow or something you’d like added to the prayer of the people, please clearly write it on an index card and drop it in the basket back there. You may sign it or not, as you wish.

Next Sunday is **Children’s Recognition Sunday**, with special music by bamboo flute player Greg Hunt White, the adult choir singing with

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## *The 7 Habits of Highly Ineffective Churches*

*A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE*

*Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga*

*May 11, 2008*

### *CONNECTIONS*

Connections is a time of community and contemplation, where we share the joys and the sorrows going on in our lives. This is not a time for announcements, political statements or expressions of personal anger, but a time of deep sharing, where we are reminded that we are all human beings and we’re all in this together.

Enjoy the experience of sitting in restorative silence until you are

the children's choir and floating candles on the tables. Following the service, we'll enjoy a **potluck brunch** and at the appropriate time, we'll begin the **Annual Meeting** of this congregation. We hope you will attend to help the board and officers conduct the business of the congregation. An inspiring service, tasty food and exciting door prizes put to shame any other annual meeting anywhere. It will be special and we hope you will attend.

**A complete listing of announcements** is included with the bulletin and is available on our web site. The best way to find out what's going on around here is to sign up for a weekly e-mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office. For music, Marcia begins with a composition of Claude Debussy, *Reverie*, or *Daydream*.

*PRELUDE: Reverie*

*LIGHTING THE CHALICE*

In the light of truth and the warmth of love,  
we gather to seek, to sustain, and to share.

*Pictures of Mother*

**Minister.** Today is Mother's Day, you know that? So what happens on Mother's Day?

What do you know about Mothers?



I have some pictures of mothers to show you.

So what can you say about mothers after seeing these pictures?

Mothers have children. And most of them are pretty



happy about that.

Some women would like to be mothers, but for one reason or another, they can't and that's sad.

Some women are *ambivalent* about being a mother. Fred used to say I used too many big words, but I say you should hear big words. Do you know what ambivalent means?



It means they're not too sure they want to be a mother. And if they already have a child, that's sad.

Most mothers care for their children. Some mothers cannot care for their children or they are afraid or don't know how to care for their children, and that's sad.

Most mothers love their children. Some mothers cannot love their children, or they are afraid or don't know how to love their children, and that's sad.

I've been talkin' a lot about the sadness that comes with motherhood, because there's a lot of it. And mother and children have to deal with it. On the other hand, there's about a thousand times more joy than sadness, and that's the good news.



Sometimes as mothers we have to learn how to love our children and sometimes, as children, we have to learn to love our mothers. And here is a story about one boy who learned to love his mother and one mother who learned to love her son.



The boy's name is Alex Waterhouse. This is Alex, right here. He was born in Argentina and he's about 11 years old in this picture. He's standing next to his mother. This is what Alex Waterhouse has to say about his mother.



My mother often told me, "You will never understand because you will never be a mother."

I was a boy, of course, and I never felt like I was a girl. But with those words, my mother made me curious as to what I may have been missing.

She told me that love was doing and giving more than kisses and hugs. She sacrificed most of her life to send me to good schools and satisfy my expensive tastes for Erector sets. Even when we could not afford it we had lots of the best food at the table.

But she did mention to me a few times that I was *arisco*. This is a Spanish word that came from the Portuguese and really has no proper translation. The word is used to describe animals—especially horses—of unpredictable nature which you would not pet, or in the case of a horse, not ride. My cat *Plata* is *arisco*. I can only hold her for about 20 seconds. Then she will scratch me.

My mother was never able to understand why I showered my father with kisses and hugs but kept my distance from her. I regret to admit that I may have told her that, "Love could not be forced."

In 1954 my mother, my grandmother and I moved to Mexico. My grandmother had previously told me that I had to choose between my father and my mother. I was quick to answer that I wanted to stay in Buenos Aires. But my mother took legal steps to take me out of the country without my father's permission and we arrived in Mexico City in July, 1954.

I returned to Argentina in 1965 to serve in the Argentine armed

forces, because that was what every young Argentinian man must do. We never talked about it, but my mother and I both knew that when I returned, I would search for my father. Shortly after I left she wrote me a poem, *Ruegos*, which loosely translates as pleas.

**Mary.** Maybe you will return,  
Maybe you won't  
But I want you to know  
I will be here waiting  
For some news from you  
Once in a while.

I wish you the best.  
May life provide you  
A brilliant career,  
Someone to love you  
Whom you love.  
For all this, I pray.

My son, may God bless you,  
May the Virgin protect you,  
May you always live  
Kind, balanced, and honest.  
All this I wish for you.

**Minister.** And Alex's mother signed the poem, *F.G. Filomena Goyena*. Alex said, in the poem my mother doubts that I would return. But I did return a year later while I was a sailor in the Argentine Navy. I managed to get passage to Panama and from there I found a flight to Mexico City.



In the picture here with my mother I am wearing an Argentine custom-tailored three piece flannel suit and I have my short military haircut. My mother may have been surprised to see me. But it was

then that she told me something that I have treasured ever since with mixed emotion.

She said, “As a mother I have always loved you because a mother has no choice. But sometimes, I didn’t like you. Somehow you have changed and I like you now.”

I think that is when we became friends.

So as you grow up, think about how you can become friends with your mother.

*CHILDREN’S RECEPTIONAL*  
*“As You Go”*

*HYMN 191, Now I Recall My Childhood*

*OFFERTORY: The Little Shepherd*

The reports from Myanmar indicate that the devastation from Cyclone Nargis is monumental. It is entirely possible that the cyclone and the aftermath of disease will kill more than 100,000 people. Hindering relief efforts is the general isolation of Myanmar and its backwards-looking leadership. The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and the Unitarian Universalist Association have joined to launch a humanitarian relief fund to help cyclone survivors in Myanmar, which was formerly known as Burma. Both organizations strive to coordinate a response to humanitarian crises. Aid will be channeled to relief work that helps survivors regain their homes, their families and their livelihoods. It will be specially targeted to those neglected by traditional relief strategies.

If you wish to donate online or via snail mail, contact information appears in your bulletin.

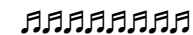
Anyone here remember Bob Feller? He was a farm boy, from Van Meter, Iowa. An excellent pitcher, he played 18 years with the Cleveland Indians, his only team. He was the first major league ballplayer to enlist after Pearl Harbor. Feller threw hard, real hard. They called him the heater from Van Meter.

In 1937, Feller’s parents traveled to Chicago to see their son pitch in a game played on Mother’s Day. The first three innings went well; then, in the fourth, Feller pitched to Marv Owen, who fouled the ball into the stands. The ball hit Feller’s mother, breaking her glasses and necessitating stitches around her eyes. After a medic was summoned and her injuries were treated, Feller returned to the mound and immediately struck Owen out.

And wouldn’t any of us do the same? If anyone hurt my mother, I’d throw something real hard.

We’ll collect the morning offering now, for the support and ministry of this church. In honor of Bob Feller, think of the collection basket as a catcher’s glove and throw hard, real hard. Throw some heat. If you have a check for your annual pledge, please mark it that way. As always, the Dolores Wood–Louis Wilhoit Memorial Food Bank is happy to accept your donations of non-perishable food and household items, and the collection basket for that is by the front door. And thank you very much for your generosity.

If you wish to light a candle of personal joy or sorrow, you may step up here and Mary will assist you.



Eternal Spirit of life and love, we are profoundly thankful for the blessings we experience everyday. Would that we recognize what is truly valuable to us every day and be thankful for it. Marcia, please lead us in our *Hymn of Thanksgiving*. The words are in your program.

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

ORISON

*Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.*

Bill Berry is improving. He is now free of the little oxygen tank that he was carrying around last week. And he is glad of it. He said it was like being tied up like a goat. Martha gives many thanks to all for thinking of him and sending all the cards. It has helped to know that they have good friends and family.

Thou, who art everywhere,  
Many are your names.  
May thy presence be with us,  
May thy wisdom guide us,  
In our deeds as well as in our dreams.  
May we have what sustains our body and soul;  
Lead us to forgive the mistakes of others  
As we hope our own mistakes will be forgiven.  
May we resist the temptation of the quick and easy,  
And be delivered from that which demeans and destroys life.

May we live purposefully and joyfully  
in every moment,  
in every encounter,  
now, and in the time to come;  
Amen.

In these few moments of silence, let us hold near to our heart all those who are suffering in this world, especially those who suffer the fallout of war.

*Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.*

RESPONSE

*When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place*

*SERMON: 7 Habits of Highly Ineffective Churches*

Way back in 1990, Stephen Covey published a book titled, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. I haven't read it, but from all accounts, it is a worthwhile book. As far as self-help books are concerned, Covey's book is eclipsed by only one other: Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which was published in 1931.

When Covey's book took off, he realized he had not only written a popular book, but had founded a small industry as well. He has written or co-written several sequels with his wife, Sandra. His son, Sean, joined the family business when he wrote *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*.

At Amazon.com and other bookstores, you can now find *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families*, *Living the Seven Habits*, *First Things First*, *Principle-Centered Leadership*, *Daily Reflections for Highly Effective Teens*, *Beyond the Seven Habits* and *The Eighth Habit*. Personal journals and workbooks for each title are available plus audio book editions, miniature editions, hardcover editions, paperback editions, leather-bound editions with gold leaf and ribbon page markers.

But wait! There's more! You can also have a calendar and a deck of fifty flash cards.

Covey's success in writing motivational books has spawned some imitators, too. You can find *The Seven Habits of Highly Comfortable People*, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Text Editing*, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful E-Commerce* and *The Seven Habits of the Highly Defective CEO*.

Such success was bound to spread to the world of religious publishing. So we have *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Christians* and *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Churches*. And that brings us to Anthony B. Robinson. Tony Robinson might be the Stephen Covey of religious publishing. He travels throughout the nation teaching, preaching and working with congregations and church leaders on renewal and transformation. He has written nine books so far, so he might catch up with Stephen Covey someday. Robinson jumped on the seven habits bandwagon recently with a newspaper article published in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. He writes,

On the theory that laughing at ourselves and our foibles is good for the soul, I recently wrote a piece for use in my own denomination, the United Church of Christ, called “The Seven Habits of Highly Ineffective Churches.” I suspect it can be generalized, with some mental editing, to temples, synagogues and other religious congregations.

Well, yes it can. With his tongue in cheek, here are Robinson’s “Seven Habits of Highly Ineffective Churches.”

**1. Elevate Mediocrity to a Spiritual Discipline.** Figure out where average falls and aim below that. God doesn’t really expect much anyhow. Doing things with excellence, joy and flair could make someone uncomfortable. *[Everyone feel OK?]*

**2. Take No Risks.** A successful practice of risk avoidance is often best achieved by sending any and all new ideas to a minimum of three committees who understand it’s their role to say no to any new ideas. This process may need to be reinforced by remarks noting how a particular idea might make the church liable, cost money or ruffle feathers.

**3. Stay Hidden; You’ll Present a Smaller Target.** Practice the

following evangelism strategy: “If they want us, they know where to find us.” Assume that everyone knows where you are and what you are. It also can be helpful if your building looks like a medieval fortress. If you don’t have that going for you, encourage ushers and greeters to look like palace guards as they perform their role.

**4. Blame Early and Often.** Maintaining dysfunction in a congregation is easier if scapegoats are regularly identified. Ministers make wonderful scapegoats. And their wives! You may also blame new members, visitors, or “those people who don’t understand how we do things around here.” If all else fails, blame the Thomas Jefferson District or the Unitarian Universalist Association. Or the children. They’re downstairs and cannot defend themselves.

**5. Always Be Prepared to Make an Account of the Excuses That Are Within You.** Have ready an all-purpose excuse such as, “I’ve just been so busy.” Go on to elaborate just how busy you are, implying that no one else is busy. Occasionally try out a creative new excuse, such as, “Our dog ate the printer-ink cartridge and required an emergency appendectomy. He is now very busy, too.”

**6. Make it Clear that the Job of the Minister and Staff Is to Keep Everyone Happy.** Think of your church as the “Love Boat” and the minister as the cruise director and the Board of Trustees as the social director. The Director of Religious Education, the Music Director and the Church Administrator are the crew. The job of clergy and staff is to keep everyone on board happy. If someone is unhappy, it’s a sure sign the minister is not doing his job.

**7. Spend as Little Money as Possible.** Even though you may enjoy spending money on personal things like a car or a Caribbean vacation, you can demonstrate your commitment to modesty and simplicity at church. The very best programs cost nothing. And why would your church building need renovation? If it was good enough for your parents, it’ll be good enough for your children.

This church has a high calling—to deepen the spiritual life of the congregation. And yet this church is a very human institution, beset by human foibles and human limitations. In this, it's not unlike other voluntary groups, companies and other institutions. Sometimes it's good to laugh at these things.

What's even better than laughing at our foibles are the people in this congregation who, despite frustrations and challenges, continue to work and serve with flair, courage and good humor. Such wonderful people remind us all of the grace and love that often go unseen or are taken for granted in our lives.

It's no great thing to be active and engaged when everything is going swimmingly. It is a great thing that people persist when frustration is real and a change of ineffective habits is slow in coming. Hats off to those who persist!

The slightly edited words of Tony Robinson. The flip side of these seven habits are "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Churches." Robinson proposes to write these sometime in the future, but I dashed these off the other day. I'd like to go first.

**1. Instead of accepting mediocrity, Strive for Excellence.** Not perfection. Forget Perfect. Excellence. I believe that every member of this church—and every visitor, too—is responsible to make the experience of going to church a worthwhile event. Sometimes, pleasant, sometimes challenging. But worthwhile.

"Close enough for jazz"—you ever hear that expression? It's uttered by people who believe that more effort to improve something will not make a difference. It was coined by an unknown piano player trying to find the right harmonies. "Close enough for church" cannot be the motto of an effective church. Why would anyone worship at a mediocre church?

**2. Instead of playing it safe, Be Brave.** You ever hear the seven last

words of the church? The seven last words of the church are, *We never did it that way before.* I think this congregation has shown exceptional bravery in financial issues. Dana Reynolds, Daidee Springer and Buck O'Rear cleaned up the books and re-established some financial accountability. The auction was returning less revenue each year, so we let it go until it could return with excellence. We were a little skittish about the loss of funds, but that didn't happen and we survived.

The way we conducted the stewardship campaign this year was new and we were a little apprehensive about it, but the latest figures put us at about 97% of our goal. We still have a few people to contact, but we'll get there.

Share the plate was a dicey thing to institute. Many people thought giving away the entire collection once a month was sure to reduce our plate income. But exactly the reverse happened. Plate income went up.

The future can seem scary, I know. But I think we are braver than we think we are. If we pull together, we won't pull apart.

**3. Instead of hiding, Be Open.** We have nothing to fear. Just because we have 165 members and metro Chattanooga is home to nearly half a million people doesn't mean we are overwhelmed. It's good enough to know that we appeal to one half of one tenth of one tenth of one percent of the people around here. All we can do is keep on being ourselves, right? Right. Let's be open about our faith, our life, our church and our dreams.

**4. Instead of looking for a scapegoat, Just Do It.** When we were young, we could always blame our brothers or sisters or friends. I don't know about your mother, but mine always knew when I was trying to cover my little hiney by pointing my finger at someone else.

These days, we're all grown up and we can take the blame or better

yet, we can get by blame and get on with the project at hand. For instance, Uncle Paul. I must give Uncle Paul a compliment for providing me with a sermon illustration. Last week he found this ugly carpet stain right up here and decided that he'd have to arrange for more frequent carpet cleaning. He didn't holler about the folks who bring open containers into the sanctuary. He just took care of his business. He's not the only one. Many people are like that. He's just the one I saw last week. So let's just do it.

**5. The Only Acceptable Excuse**—and it's not even an excuse—the only acceptable excuse is “I'm sorry. I'll do better next time.” The disgrace bird will not poop on you when you own up to your own behavior. Actually, when you dodge your responsibility, you draw a big target on your head that the disgrace bird can't miss. I speak from experience, here.

**6. Somewhere, Sometime, Someone Won't Be Happy.** I didn't learn everything in seminary. I learned a whole lot more about being a minister—and being a person—since I've been here. But one thing I learned in seminary that has been borne out in my experience as a minister, is that if everyone is happy, then I'm doing something wrong.

No one has the right to be happy all the time. However, everyone has the justified expectation of being happy sometime. It's like there's this big happiness pie, and we can all have a slice, but not all at once. We have to take turns eating our slice of happy pie. So instead of obsessing about what the church can provide for our happiness, obsess about what we might provide to the church for the happiness of someone else. And I don't mean money. Although money is nice.

Annie Dillard says church is dangerous. Not physically dangerous. She means dangerous emotionally and psychologically. In her book, *Teaching A Stone to Talk*, she writes, “Churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear straw hats and velvet

capas to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews.”

We all come here with such different expectations. Might it not be a good idea to come with no expectations and be happy with what we receive? Of course, that would require us to come with something to give.

**7. You Can't Take it with You**, so let's spend a little money on our church life now and then. It was a gift, but do you remember how cool it was to get this new carpet? Remember the decorations and the spread we put on for the reception Saturday night and Celebration Sunday? The food was good, the music was good, the ambiance was good and that made everyone feel good.

I'm not saying that we can buy good feelings, but an incessantly penny-pinching ethos will break our spirits and convince us that we deserve a second class church. Well, I suppose that's about as much fun as we can have laughing at our foibles. Let's bring that same fun to our signing Hymn Number 40, “The Morning Hangs a Signal.”

*Hymn 40, The Morning Hangs a Signal*

*EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE*

We extinguish this flame,  
but not the light of its truth  
the warmth of this community  
nor the fire of our commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts  
and share with all the world.

*POSTLUDE: Softly, William, Softly*