



*"I guess we'll all just have to vote
a little harder this time."*

What I Want for America

*A Worship Service by
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*Unitarian Universalist
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CONNECTIONS

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Jeff Briere, I'm the minister of this congregation. We begin each Sunday at this time with Connections. This 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 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 hand of warmth and a smile.

HYMN: Woyaya

GREETINGS

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 a potluck lunch. Everyone is invited—members, visitors and friends. 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.

I have three important announcements. [Pause.] First, the religious education department needs your help, especially if your child is in the program. A sign-up roster for this is posted on the bulletin board out front, so choose a Sunday and volunteer. Second, you must register your children for the RE program, so please check with Jamie to make that right. And last, you must pick up your child from the RE program directly after their program ends. We cannot ask the teachers to supervise your children after they finish their class for the day. So get your child first and that cup of coffee second.

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.

George and Steve have prepared a piece by Robert Schumann for a prelude.

PRELUDE: Fantasy Piece

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

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

VOTE!

I invite the young and the young at heart to come up here and vote.

We will have an election in this country soon. Do you know about that? What's an election?

Why do we have elections? Majority rules, sorta. The person with the most votes wins the election.

Suppose we had an election between ice cream and rutabagas for dinner. Which would you vote for?

Suppose we had an election between X-Box or Play Station. Which would you vote for?

Now in Tennessee, we have the state bird, the mockingbird, we have the state flower, the iris, we have two state bugs, the firefly and the honeybee, the state tree, the tulip poplar and the state animal, the raccoon. But we don't have a state ice cream. So today, I thought we'd elect a state ice cream.

Here are the candidates:

Rocky Top Mudslide—Chocolate ice cream with peanut butter cups

and swirled with caramel and coffee.

Lookout Mountain Black Bear—Red raspberry sauce and chocolate black raspberry cups swirled in vanilla ice cream.

Rocky Top Mudslide promises to be the best tasting ice cream ever made. Lookout Mountain Black Bear promises to taste better than any other ice cream, anywhere.

So which ice cream flavor will we elect the Tennessee state ice cream flavor? Remember now, you are voting for everyone in Tennessee, not only your favorite. Which ice cream will the most people like?

Who votes for Rocky Top Mudslide?

Lookout Mountain Black Bear?

The winner is Lookout Mountain Black Bear!

CHILDREN'S RECEPTIONAL

We hold you in our love as you go, as you go
May your heart be at peace as you go
To nurture the spark of your precious life
We hold you in our love as you go.

OFFERTORY: Remembrances

Once a month, this church gives it all away. Well not exactly. What we do once a month is donate the collection, less pledge payments, to another agency working to make the world a better place. We'll do that today.

At the suggestion of Maddie Kertay, the recipient of our largesse today is the Calvin Donaldson School, an at-risk school in Alton

Park. We learned about this school because the children donate their books from their book club to that school each month.

You know, I came to Chattanooga after living in Chicago and Syracuse for many years. I had lived in Savannah for a few years, so I was not completely unfamiliar with the south. But I still suffered a little culture shock. But not as much as Kate. She landed a job teaching French at Howard High. She came home one day looking shell-shocked and told me a story I had trouble believing.

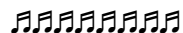
She said she had to buy her own copy paper. The school provided one ream—that's 500 sheets—and after that was exhausted, she was on her own. I believed her, but I also secretly thought, *That's nuts. There's got to be a way to pry copy paper out of the school budget.*

Well, there ain't no way. Making teachers buy copy paper is one way Hamilton County keeps our taxes low.

Teachers are always working to make the world a better place, and I think we can make their world a better place. The teachers at Calvin Donaldson School need copy paper, and that's what we'll buy for them with the collection we take up today. If you have a check for your annual pledge, please mark it that way. Otherwise all donations will be used to buy copy paper for Calvin Donaldson teachers.

As always, the Wood-Wilhoit Memorial Food Bank is happy to accept your donations of non-perishable food and household items for the Community Kitchen. The collection basket for that is by the front door. And thank you very much for your generosity.

If you wish to light a personal candle of 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 today. Would that we recognize our blessings every day and be thankful for them. Steve, please lead us in our *Hymn of Thanksgiving*. The words are in your program.

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day,
For all gathered here, and those far away,
For this time we share, with love and care,
Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day.

ORISON

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

Daidee Springer is not with us today. She's in North Carolina helping the candidate of her choice win that state. She wrote me a note and she says, "You may not recall Kristen Weddle. She attended our church for several months and we got to know when we taught UU 101. She decided to teach in New Orleans not long after completing UU 101 and left for there late June or early July.

Kristen writes, Hello Daidee and Steve!

Thank you so much for your kind emails following Gustav. The evacuation was a crazy time, especially the uncertainty of which students would be returning to our school who were relying on government transportation, but it only took about a week for things to return to normal at Langston Hughes Academy.

Moving down here to teach has certainly been a challenge. The families have their share of struggles, and my hours are long. School days—even for kindergartners are nine hours long and I am at the school about 70 hours a week. But our books, supplies, and

donations are slowly trickling in. I will let you know the next time I will be in Chattanooga so that I can visit the church I still consider to be my home.

Today, I am deeply saddened at the news from Congo. Rape is epidemic in Congo. Tens of thousands of women, possibly hundreds of thousands, have been raped in the past few years in that country. Many of these rapes were marked by a level of brutality that is shocking even by the twisted standards of a place riven by civil war and haunted by warlords and drug-crazed child soldiers.

After years of denial, the silence is broken. Because of stepped-up efforts in the past nine months by international organizations and the Congolese government, rapists can no longer count on a culture of impunity. The number of those arrested is still tiny compared with that of the perpetrators on the loose, and often the worst offenders are not caught because they attack villages in the night, victimize women and then melt back into the forest.

This is all happening in a society where women tend to be beaten down anyway. Women in Congo do most of the work—at home, in the fields and in the market, and yet they are often powerless. Many women who are raped are told to keep quiet. Often, it is a shame for the entire family, and many rape victims have been kicked out of their villages and turned into beggars.

Poverty, chaos, disease and war. These are the constants of eastern Congo. Many people believe that the rape problem will not be solved until the area tastes peace. But that might not be anytime soon. Congo is a land of contrasts. The soil is rich, but the people are starving. The minerals are limitless, but the government is broke.

So let us remember the women of Congo in our thoughts and prayers. Let it begin with each step we take, and let it begin with each change we make, and let it begin with each chain we break, and let it begin each time we awake.

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.

In these moments of silence, let us hold close to our hearts the women of Congo who live in fear and especially, let us pray for 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
When our heart is in a holy place
We are blessed with love and amazing grace
When our heart is in a holy place

SERMON: What I Want for America

Our next president was on TV last Wednesday night. I hope everyone had a chance to see at least one of the debates, because that's about all we'll see of the candidates, except in news programs and commercials. That's because we live in a state which neither

candidate believes is important enough to visit. And that's a shame.

Although his title is President of the United States, he is actually the president of the people, just elected by the states. Hard to fathom sometimes. His mandate, if any, comes from the people, who punch chads or pull levers or mark ballots. The people's choice, however, is constrained by the population in each state, which can result in the loser getting more votes than the winner. That happened in 1824, 1876, 1888 and 2000. And that's why, in recent memory, no candidate bothers with California, North Dakota, Rhode Island, or Tennessee. Everyone knows who will win those states months before the election.

Incredibly, with our electoral college, it is possible for a candidate to win 77% of the popular vote and lose the election. Now I realize the likelihood of that is so small as to be nonsense, but in such a polarized society as ours, it *is* realistic that a candidate could win the popular vote by 5% or even 10% and still lose the election.

Which brings me to the things I want for America.

Used to be—many years ago—that congregations would actually listen to their ministers and do what they were exhorted to do. Hard to believe, I know. And some of the ministers actually gave their congregations directions on voting. And those directions were followed.

Nowadays, I am forbidden to give you directions about voting. The thought is that if ministers were to exercise political influence over their parishioners, that is, preach about the correct way to vote, they should not be using public money—the tax-free status of the church—to do that.

So today, I am enjoined from telling you how to vote. I can, however discuss the issues with no fear of losing our tax-free status. And so I now address myself to the candidates, Senator Barack Obama, of

Illinois, and Senator John McCain, of Arizona.

Guys—can I call you Barack?

Barack. That's fine, Jeff. Just leave my middle name out of it.

Jeff. John?

John. My friend, of course you can.

Jeff. Great.

I know the election apparatus is not the most important thing you'll be working on, but it needs attention. It needs an overhaul, so that the states with low populations are still represented, but the election gives the people their choice. I am not a student of political science so I don't have a suggestion, but I know when a car has a flat tire, and the Electoral College has a flat and the other three tires are bald. And there is a rough road ahead.

So lead us in fixing it—and don't be partisan about it, like those Texas state legislators who gerrymandered their districts. Fix it fairly or someday, it will bite you in the you-know-what.

John. That's my line, Jeff.

Jeff. It's public domain, John.

Oh—one more thing about elections—bring back the Fairness Doctrine and make broadcasters to open the people's airwaves to campaign information.

I realize that the first thing you gotta do is work on the economy. Warren Buffett wrote in the New York Times Friday that he's buying American stocks. What I want is you to do something that will encourage the rest of us. You can lead the vast majority of us to a

place where we feel we, too can “buy American.” And I’m not just talking about the stock market. I’m talking about all of America. Please consider these projects in your economic plan:

- Repair and rebuild neglected bridges, railroads, schools, and other infrastructure.
- Design for climate change and a post-petroleum world.
- Extend unemployment insurance benefits.
- Provide tax relief to middle–and low–income families.

No one likes to have taxes raised on them, but I think that those with the most ought to pay the most. God knows, they can’t take it with them; they ought to spread their wealth around, to quote both of you.

Lately, the trend has been to lower taxes across–the–board. While this has the appearance of fairness, in truth it’s not fair to the American people. Oh, it might be fair to each American person, but it’s not fair to all of them collectively because it has the unpleasant effect of decreasing tax revenue and that hurts everyone with deferred bridge maintenance, potholes, crumbling schools, low wages and lowered expectations.

I especially urge you to squeeze more taxes from corporations that have profited when the rest of us suffered. I don’t mean Joe the Plumber’s company. I mean the profits made on Wall Street and in the oil fields. Mark Twain said “Too much of anything is bad, but too much whiskey is just enough.” He didn’t say too much money is just enough. So let’s break open a bottle of Tennessee Sippin’ Whiskey and toast a future where the divide between the rich and the poor is not so great it cannot be bridged.

OK, enough about that. I want y’all to consider family values. And I don’t mean those values espoused by ultra–conservative religious fanatics. I mean some other values.

Like the value of the minimum wage.

Barack. We raised that just last year.

Jeff. Thank you very much. But more is needed, in my opinion. What I want is some leadership from you so that the minimum wage is more of a “living wage.”

Along with that, I’d like more people to be eligible for vacation and family leave. You guys have great vacation plans. Sweden and France are way out in front on this, so maybe you could take a working vacation and consult with them to see how they are making it work.

Here’s a really important family value, guys: Provide gay and lesbian couples with the legal protections afforded to straight couples. I don’t care how this is achieved, but I care that nothing has been done by the federal government in this area.

Real family values, guys. Got it?

John. Yeah, OK.

Jeff. Now, Barack, you used to teach Constitutional Law, so this is right up your alley. John, you listen up. I want you to fully restore habeas corpus for all people in federal custody. What I’m saying is let’s play by the rule book we wrote, OK?

I want more protection for our right to privacy and more protection against warrantless search and seizure. Again, let’s use our own rule book. And while you’re at it, let’s restore the balance of power between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. There’s a good reason the framers built a tricycle, and not a unicycle.

If you can squeeze it into your priorities, I’d like you to keep an eye on the Internet as it develops. Make the internet free of corporate and government censorship and obstruction. I don’t mind that bandwidth

hogs might pay more, but I do mind that internet service providers are considering ways to tax the medium. To me that is analogous to taxing broadcast radio and TV. We don't do that around here.

Enough about the Constitution. You both realize that we need to develop a comprehensive energy policy that alleviates our thirst for oil. That is so abundantly clear to everyone that any opposition will be minimal and no a threat to you. Even T. Boone Pickens would have your back. So get out in front and lead us in developing alternative fuels; wind, solar; geo-thermal and the like.

I suggest you develop a Manhattan Project for alternative fuels and you can start by funding ambitious research & development programs, offering tax credits, investing in public works projects, and government procurement to jump-start renewable energy development.

This will take some serious R&D money and a long time. It might not bear fruit until your successor is in office. But we gotta start now. In the meantime, please maximize the conservation and efficient use of existing energy supplies; invest in public transit and intercity rail and tax carbon. Kick Detroit's butt so that they start a serious development program for electric or fuel cell powered automobiles.

Related to energy issues are climate change issues. I want you to take a leadership role in reducing our own greenhouse gas emissions. And don't argue about the cause. It's enough not to contribute any more to the cause than necessary.

Health Care. Now I know you are up-to-date on this. John, now you think that...

John. Jeff, it's everyone's responsibility to provide health care for themselves.

Jeff. Barack?

Barack. I think everyone has a right to health care.

Jeff. John, it feels wrong to me that everyone should shoulder the entire burden of their own health care. People should contribute something, I agree, and they should be induced to practice healthy habits, but you can do all the right things and still develop cancer. And the costs of operations and procedures are more than many can bear.

Barack, it's easy to say health care is a right, but a right implies a responsibility. And the right to health care implies the responsibility to pay for it. And I don't see how we can do that right now.

But the lack of affordable health care is beginning to hurt business. Sick employees are not profitable; they do not make money, either for themselves or the company. Our largest employer, Wal-Mart, is ready to work with you on doing something about it. So let's convene all the pointy-head types from all sectors—business, religion, social services, government, medicine, insurance and medical education—let's get them together and set them the task of designing a decent system for everyone.

In the meantime, please lean on the drug companies so that drug prices are lowered. Or let Americans buy prescription drugs abroad. Get the patent lawyers involved to figure out a way to assure that decent profits flow to the company responsible for discovering and manufacturing drugs. That way they won't be gouging us for the initial 17 years that a drug is protected by patent.

At the same time, you might want to tell Americans that the Canadian government underwrites the cost of drugs in that country. So those Americans who buy drugs cheaply in Canada are ripping off Canadians. Actually, maybe you should tell the Canadian Prime Minister, too. You do know who that is. Don't you?

John. Uuhh...

Jeff. John, that's understandable. He was elected only five days ago. His name is Stephen Harper, by the way.

Barack. Jeff, he was RE-elected five days ago.

Jeff. Sorry about that, Barack.

In the area of international relations, I think you ought to drop the cowboy routine, adopted by your predecessor for a profile that is more accommodating and—I don't know another word for it—a more friendly approach to our international neighbors. Although this country's leading philosophy has been rugged individualism for all its life, we can't go it alone any more. The next time we unilaterally try some whiz-bang trick it will explode in our back pocket for sure. We just might have to re-examine that myth of America as the strongest, baddest, most advanced and enlightened country in the world.

John. You're not patriotic. You hate America.

Jeff. Don't get me wrong, John—I like this country. I'm just not so blind that I can't see all the other countries in the world and all the people in them who think their country is just as important as mine. It's time we acknowledge them.

The recent unpleasantness in worldwide financial markets should convince all but the most provincial and back-woods person that we already live in an international village. We already *are* connected. The butterfly that burps in Shanghai really does cause a hailstorm in Nebraska.

Lead us in a global effort to abolish nuclear weapons. Rule out unilateral attacks and don't even think about deploying weapons in space. As for torture, if torture is necessary to defend this country,

then do it right in the town square, right in the middle of Main Street where everyone can see it. Don't keep it in a dirty little back room like you're ashamed of it.

Let's retire as global cops. Instead, let's work through the United Nations and other international agencies to develop and enforce international law. And let's subject our own soldiers to the judgement of others.

While we're on the subject of military actions, I am pretty damn tired of the wars and threats of wars in Iraq and Iran. So please develop a responsible timetable for a withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. Don't build any long-term military bases there and leave control of Iraq's oil in the hands of Iraqis.

Let's not throw more soldiers at Iraq; let's throw money instead. Fund an international effort to help restore the economy and infrastructure of Iraq. Abolish future uses of mercenaries; if our soldiers can't do the job, we need more soldiers or another job. We don't have to hire truck drivers at seven times the pay rate of soldiers.

By the way, guys, I'm in a minority on this I know, but I'd like to see the draft come back—for military service in time of war and for national service otherwise.

Barack. You gotta be kidding.

Jeff. No, Barack, I am not. And enter into negotiations with Iran about nuclear issues and regional stability. End threats of attack and attempts to destabilize the Iranian government.

In the area of criminal justice, I want you to drop punitive sentences for drug possession and other nonviolent offenses in favor of substance-abuse treatment, fines, community service, and restitution. Mandatory sentences don't work; judges ought to have some latitude in sentencing. Offer more training and counseling to prepare inmates

for a crime-free life after release. And find some way to channel youth into schools and jobs, not jail.

A related issue that's bugging me is gun control. I want you to find some way of breaking the power of gun lobbies and I want the cities to have more power to rid their streets of guns.

John. That would take enormous political will, Jeff.

Jeff. At this point, John, I don't care what it takes. I was disappointed that Chicago and New York were defeated in their attempt to sue gun makers for the havoc their products cause. Perhaps it's time to make gun sellers more responsible.

Barack. What do you mean?

Jeff. Bartenders and restaurants can be sued when they serve a patron too much booze and he goes out and enters the interstate on the off ramp and kills people in an accident. Why can't that argument be used with guns?

I used to think that the economy of gun violence will eventually turn the people against guns. That is, when it begins to cost more money to patch everyone up and police the area after a shoot-out than it does to confiscate the guns, then some level of government will act. When the costs get too high. When the costs get too high. But now I think that treating gun violence like a disease shows some promise.

The point is, I don't feel safe where I live. I feel like I could be shot going to the grocery store. You gotta do something about that.

Immigration is an issue that needs attention.

John. I'm all over it.

Jeff. I know you are, John. But look at it this way: Please do

something to ease people's fears of other people. I mean other people who speak a different language, eat different food and go to a different church. Or mosque. Please do something to show people that we don't live on the set of "Ozzie and Harriet" or "Father Knows Best."

Do something to show that we live in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-colored country; and that it is in our best economic interest and will contribute to our better social health if we accommodate ourselves to others in our midst.

Regardless of what it used to be, this country's social fabric is more like a madras plaid than a bolt of denim. English-only laws are a joke, just ask all the business owners who put up signs in two languages. You might want to look at the North American Free Trade Act to see if it can be made more responsive to people's needs. And I don't mean the people who need fresh tomatoes year-round.

Provide a pathway to legal status and citizenship for immigrants already here. You know, I have a good idea about this.

Barack. Let's hear it.

Jeff. Alright, Barack. I thought we could immediately grant citizenship to the—what is it?—eleven million illegal immigrants? Grant them citizenship and when they apply for a social security card, make them pay a one-time entry fee of \$200 if they are over 20 and \$100 for those younger. You'd generate almost 2 billion dollars that could be used to ease their entry into American society with English classes and other social services.

And lastly on immigration, Mr. President, tear down that wall.

John. One of our greatest Presidents, Ronald Reagan, said that.

Jeff. I know he did, John. I'm talking about that ugly wall along the

Mexican border that we are building. Regardless of how well it will do its job, it's an ugly expression of xenophobia and not worthy of us. Only three countries in the world have built walls. Two were built to keep people out and one was built to keep people in. Rome, China and East Germany. In each case, the wall was breached and the country failed. We don't have to be the fourth.

You know what I really, really want, guys? I want a purple America! Not a blue one, nor a red one. David Korten told me about purple America. This is what he said:

The story of purple America is part of a yet larger human story. For all the cultural differences reflected in our customs, languages, religions, and political ideologies, human beings share a number of core values and aspirations. Although we may differ about the "how," we all want healthy, happy children, loving families, and a caring community with a healthy natural environment. We want a world of cooperation, justice, and peace, and a say in the decisions that affect our lives.

For the past 5,000 years, we have worked at perfecting our capacity for greed and violence—a practice that has been costly for our children, families, communities, and nature. Now we must bring the world of our dreams into being by cultivating our long-suppressed, capacity for sharing and compassion.

Our experiences and a growing body of scientific evidence show that we are born to connect, to learn, and to serve and that it is indeed within our means to:

- create family-friendly communities in which we get our satisfaction from caring relationships rather than material consumption;
- achieve a more democratic middle-class society without extremes of wealth and poverty;
- and form a global community of nations committed to

restoring the health of the planet.

Listen up, you guys. There is an alternative to our current human course. We are not hopelessly divided and doomed to self-destruct by a genetic predisposition toward greed and violence.

Culture, the system of customary beliefs, values, and perceptions that encodes our shared learning, gives us an extraordinary capacity to choose our destiny. It does not assure that we will use this capacity wisely, but it does give us the means to change course by conscious collective choice.

I want to thank John and Barack for listening to me and I hope they understand, as I have often said before that, "We're all in this together."

HYMN 121: We'll Build a Land

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: Three Pieces for Clarinet