

Our Associations

A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE

Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga

October 2, 2011

Good morning. My name is Jeff Briere and I very happy to welcome you to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. I am the minister of this church and to begin our service let's get our blood flowing with Hymn 360, "Here We Have Gathered."

HYMN 360, Here We Have Gathered

Remain standing a moment, if you will, please. Look around you. These are your friends and neighbors, your fellow congregants. You know many of them, but I'll bet you don't know them all. So in the next few minutes, find someone you don't know and make a new friend. OK, everyone, Greet your new friends!

GREETINGS

Frank. Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. And thank you so much for helping to create a reverent atmosphere during *Connections*.

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.

Please check out **the complete listing of announcements** included with the bulletin. The best way to find out what's happening around here is to sign up for a weekly e-mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office.

For service music this morning, Steve chose music by the Unitarian composer, Béla Bartók.

PRELUDE: Study in Chords (69)

BLOWING THE SHOFAR

At sunset last Wednesday, Rosh Hashanah began. This Jewish holiday lasted until nightfall Friday. In Hebrew, Rosh Hashanah means, "head of the year," and so Rosh Hashanah is commonly known as the Jewish New Year. This name is somewhat deceptive, because there is little similarity between Rosh Hashanah, one of the holiest days of the year, and the American midnight drinking bash and daytime football game.

There is, however, one important similarity between the Jewish New Year and the American one: Many Americans use the New Year as a time to plan a better life, making resolutions. Likewise, the Jewish New Year is a time to begin introspection, looking back at the mistakes of the past year and planning the changes to make in the new year.

For observant Jews, much of Rosh Hashanah is spent in synagogue, where the regular liturgy is somewhat expanded. Another popular observance during this holiday is eating apples dipped in honey, in hopes of a sweet new year. We'll do that after service this morning.

Another popular practice of the holiday is *Tashlikh*, meaning "casting off." Jews walk to flowing water, such as a creek or river, and empty their pockets into the river, symbolically casting off their sins. Small pieces of bread are commonly put in the pocket to cast off.

The common greeting at this time is *L'shanah tovah*, "for a good year." Say it now. *L'shanah tovah*. This is a short version of *L'shanah tovah tikatev v'taihatem*, which means "May you be

inscribed and sealed for a good year.”

One of the most important things that Jews do on Rosh Hashanah is to hear the sounding of the *shofar* in the synagogue. The *shofar* is a ram’s horn which is blown sort of like a trumpet. The Bible gives no specific reason for this practice. One that has been suggested is that the shofar’s sound is a call to repentance.

Lee Adler, would you light the chalice, please?

To accompany the lighting of our chalice, we’ll listen to the *shofar*. In the synagogue, you might hear as many as 100 different notes on the *shofar* during Rosh Hashanah. This isn’t a synagogue, but in solidarity with Jews, and to begin again this new year, listen now to the *shofar*.

[blast from shofar]

STORY: *Babies in the River*

Once upon a time, there was a small town on the edge of a river. Life in the town was busy. Very busy. Everyone had something to do. There were farmers, watchmakers, bakers, butchers, cobblers, (shoemakers), tailors, woodsmen, teachers, firefighters, soldiers, cooks, writers, librarians, students, professors, mothers, fathers, grandparents, auto mechanics, shopkeepers, doctors, ministers and computer geeks. Everyone was busy. 100% employment.

One sunny day a farmer was making hay. At suppertime, he took a break and walked into town to buy a shirt and a new pair of overalls. He stopped on the bridge in the center of town and noticed a baby floating down the river. He couldn’t believe his eyes! While he was staring at the spectacle, he heard crying and looked upstream to see two more babies floating his way. He pulled out his smart phone, shot a video, then called 911.

“There’s a baby in the river!” he shouted at the operator. The operator was calm, as she had been trained to be when speaking to possibly delusional people. “Does anyone else see the baby?” she asked.

The security guard at the bank walked over to the bridge to see what the commotion was. “Hey!” he hollered. “There’s babies in the river!”

“Oh, this is terrible!” said a newspaper reporter. “Look, there are even more upstream!” Indeed, there were three more babies coming around the bend.

“How long have these babies been floating by?” asked the 911 operator. No one knew for sure, but some people thought they might have seen something in the river earlier. They were busy at the time, and did not have time to investigate.

The security guard quickly organized everyone to rescue the babies. People were assigned to watch the river 24/7 in one-hour shifts, and swimmers were coordinated into rescue teams. Ziplines with baskets attached were stretched across the river to get the babies to safety quickly.

The number of babies floating down the river only increased with time. Orphanages were constructed as the babies grew into children and then into young adults. Of course, more babies and children meant that everyone had to work even harder to keep them alive, well-fed and housed. Farmers grew more tomatoes, tailors made more jackets, bakers baked more cupcakes, cobblers made more penny loafers, writers wrote more Harry Potter books, doctors treated more patients, ministers preached to larger congregations and carpenters made more McMansions for everyone to live in. Life in the town carried on, although Emeril might say it was kicked up a notch.

Then one day at a town hall meeting, the representative from the 11th ward asked, “Where do you suppose all these babies are coming from?”

There was a deep silence in the room. The baker looked at the butcher, the butcher looked at the auto mechanic, the mechanic looked at the optometrist, who looked at the soldier and on and on it went, everyone looking to everyone else for the answer *until finally*, everyone was looking at the mayor. “Don’t look at me!” he said. “I don’t know. But we can organize a team to go upstream and find how who’s throwing these babies in the river.”

Not everyone was enthusiastic. The security guard said, “But we need people right here to help us pull the babies out of the river. They’re coming at the rate of 36 a day now. And some at night.”

“That’s right!” said the farmer, who stood with the baker, the tailor and the carpenter. “And who will be here to dress them, cook for them and look after them if all o’ y’all go on a wild goose chase upstream?”

They decided to put the issue to a vote.

So if you lived in that town, what would your vote be?

Do you send a team upstream, knowing there may be babies that you cannot save because there won’t be enough people to pull them from the river?

Or do you keep pulling babies from the river, never investigating the cause, because to do so would mean the loss of one baby’s life?

Thanks for listening to my story. I hope you enjoyed it. We’re singing a new song now, as you leave for your classes. We’d like you to sing it one time with us, sing it to each other and really listen to the words. And then you can leave while we sing it once more.

OFFERTORY: *Harmonics* (102)

The theme of our service today is associations, in all their glory and in all their ugliness. Associations are wonderful things in that they allow people to work together to achieve something that individuals could not achieve alone. Their biggest drawback is that associations can become “clubby,” with inbred members and stuffy traditions.

In California, beginning in the early 20th century, the most popular targets of discrimination in clubs were Jews, African–Americans, professional athletes, women and actors. The social clubs were finally opened up in the 80’s.

I want to tell you about three people who worked against that “clubby” atmosphere. Do you know this man? This picture was taken in 1940. It’s Walter Hagen, a golfer. He was the first great golfing professional in the United States.

On his first visit to England to play, he found that, by tradition, only members dined in the clubhouses, while visitors had to sit outside and make do. Accordingly, at his next match, he hired a Rolls–Royce, a chauffeur, and a butler, and, drawing up next to the clubhouse, his butler spread out a magnificent picnic lunch of salmon and champagne while the members, dining inside the clubhouse, seethed over their beer and sausages. Never again was a professional player refused entrance to a clubhouse during a tournament in England.

I’m sure you recognize Groucho Marx. When Groucho wanted to join a certain beach club in Santa Monica, California, he was told by a friend that as the club was anti-Semitic, he might as well not bother to apply. “But my wife isn’t Jewish,” replied Groucho, “So will they let my son go into the water up to his knees?”

An often-repeated quip of Groucho's was actually a telegram he sent to the exclusive Friar's Club in Hollywood, to which he belonged. It read: "Please accept my resignation. I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member."

And here are a couple shots of Victor Mature, an American film actor.

Victor Mature applied for membership in the exclusive Los Angeles Country Club, only to be told "We don't accept actors." "I'm no actor," Mature said, "and I've got sixty-four pictures to prove it."

We'll receive the morning offering now for the support and ministry of this church, and this church is nothing if not egalitarian. We accept donations from anyone, any color, any religion, any gender, any vocation. Please be generous when the plate comes your way. If you have a pledge payment, please mark it as such. 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. If you wish to light a personal candle of joy or sorrow, you may step up here and Mary Hunter 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 remember to be thankful for them.

Jesse & Christina, please lead us in our Hymn of Thanksgiving.

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.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Education programs and fundraisers are being organized to help combat all forms of breast cancer. The paintings hung on the walls today reflect this effort. About one of every eight women in the United States will develop invasive breast cancer in her lifetime. That's about 12% of American women. Even though breast cancer primarily strikes women, men can also develop breast cancer.

Great efforts are made every October to insure that people are informed about this condition, and funds are being raised to help more and more individuals get treated and ultimately cured. Many businesses and organizations are generously donating their time and effort to raise funds to fight breast cancer. I urge you to be informed and support this effort.

Since this is the prayer of the people, in these next few moments, please speak the name of someone or something that needs our prayers and good wishes.

Please join me in the Orison.

Thou, which are everywhere,
Many are your names.
May we always feel your presence,
May love and wisdom guide us,
In our deeds as well as in our dreams.
May we have what sustains our body and soul;
Lead us first to forgive the mistakes of others
Even as we hope our own mistakes will soon 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.

During this time of silence let us hold close to our hearts those who
strive everyday to make the world a better place, but let us never
forget 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

HERE

Here may no one be altogether a stranger,
no honesty of thought ignored,
no depth of feeling dismissed,
no life belittled, and no life shut out.

Here may clarity of mind and heart
be humbly treasured,
brought to bear toward word and person.

Here may fellowship be treasured most of all
and paths to sustain and renew it
be sought and found.

Here may growth of spirit be our purpose;
such understanding as shall lead us

to make the world a better place.

OK, we're gonna mix things up a little bit now and sing "Gather the
Spirit" out of order. No. 347.

HYMN 347, Gather the Spirit

SERMON: Our Associations

Several years ago, the Unitarian Universalist Association began to set
aside certain days in the year to draw attention to an aspect of our
religious lives that needed attention. In 1995, we celebrated Ministry
Sunday, which was a request to support the financial needs of
ministers and seminary students. In 2002, there was Mind the Gap
Sunday, which was focused on supporting Youth and Young Adult
Ministries. These were early examples of what we now call
Association Sunday. Today is Association Sunday, and many
Unitarian Universalist congregations are using this year's theme in
their worship services. This year's theme is Celebrating Excellence
in Ministries.

Unitarian Universalist congregations are self-governing entities
whose connections to one another sometimes seem tenuous. We need
Association Sundays to strengthen the bonds of common purpose
among congregations. Even more importantly, we need to combine
our resources in order to make Unitarian Universalism a stronger
voice of liberal religious values in the world.

We need to bring our congregations together to pursue our common
mission. Association Sundays will strengthen our connection, and
combine our resources, enabling us to have more of an influence on
our country. Now is the time for our congregations to grow stronger
and more effective because our religious values are needed to help
heal a wounded world.

Since 2007, the UUA has asked congregations to participate in annual Association Sundays to recognize and support, both spiritually and materially, the national work of the Association. They envision a day—an Association Sunday—during which thousands of Unitarian Universalists across the nation are simultaneously celebrating our shared commitment to Unitarian Universalism.

The Unitarian Universalist Association encourages us to take up a collection today to strengthen our shared ministries. They intend to use the funds raised for several projects, like

- small group training, support, and coaching for ministers
- scholarships for religious professionals
- a Shared Ministry Workshop Series

We're not taking up that collection today, not that we don't think it's a worthy cause; it is. We share the plate once a month and when this was announced, our recipient was already chosen and plans were made.

There is another issue, and it's a sensitive one. This church is a fair share congregation. That means we pay our dues to the UUA in the amount they suggest, based on our membership. Some churches don't or can't do that. I am glad we can. But it does get tiresome when the UUA comes to us two or three times a year to ask for more support. Something is just not right if an organization has to do that.

Anyway, I commend this Association Sunday to you, and if you wish to contribute to the Unitarian Universalist Association in honor of Association Sunday, see me after the service and I'll give you the information you need.

If you or your congregants have questions regarding Association Sunday, please contact Lindsey Reed, Donor Relations Specialist at (617) 948-4661 or associationsunday@uua.org.

The proper title for the UUA is the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. Not individuals. Not ministers. Not presidents. Congregations. An association of associations, if you will. Each congregation is self-governing, responsible to itself for its existence and support. But in our association of congregations, each congregation is also responsible to every other congregation in our shared mission to promote the values of Unitarian Universalism.

The congregations assemble once a year—well, actually, representatives from each congregation assemble once a year in a national General Assembly. Motions are moved, topics for further study are adopted, workshops are worked, speeches are speeched, and governance of the association happens.

OK, but after the General Assembly, then what? If a congregation is lucky, and if it exists in a large metropolitan area, then after the general assembly, members from different congregations may actually interact with one another in common causes. This interaction, this association with other congregations, is common in Atlanta and Chicago, California and New England, where the distance to the nearest congregations is not great.

We don't associate much with other congregations, nor they with us. And there's a reason for that. The nearest congregation is about a hundred miles away. There are congregations in Nashville, Birmingham, Huntsville, Atlanta, Oak Ridge and Knoxville. We're right in the middle, about 2 hours from any one of them.

We're about 90 minutes from Tullahoma, where there is a little tiny congregation of about 35 members. There's also small congregations in Cookeville, Murfreesboro, Ellijay, Dahlonega and Rome. Each of these congregations has fewer than 30 members and none have a settled minister. They are what we call lay-led fellowships.

The congregation in Asheville, NC is in the same boat. As the crow flies, it's not too far from other North Carolina congregations, but it's

a real slog to drive up the mountains to get there. So the Asheville congregation doesn't associate too much with the rest of the SE District. Same for Franklin, which is right here. It's kinda hard to get together with your associates for a potluck when you have to spend four hours getting there and back.

We are part of the Southeast District of the UUA, and that district extends from northern Virginia to Brunswick, Georgia, and west to Chattanooga. It includes every congregation in the Carolinas, and all in Virginia, except those near Washington. Four congregations in Georgia: Savannah, Brunswick, Statesboro and Augusta. So from Harrisonburg and Fredericksburg, Virginia to Brunswick, south of Savannah. And west to Chattanooga. That's the SE District. 63 congregations, all but eleven of them in the Carolinas and Virginia.

Now if you drew a north-south line just west of Chattanooga, where the time changes from Eastern to Central Time, you'd have the eastern boundary of the Mid-South District. Here's the Mid-South District, from the gulf coast of Florida to Clarksville, north of Nashville, from Jackson, Mississippi to Canon, Georgia, which is almost in South Carolina.

Geography conspires against us. When sites are chosen for seminars, workshops and the annual meeting of the SE District, Chattanooga is not often considered, because we are so far removed from the Carolinas and Virginia, where the bulk of our population resides. So we don't associate much with other congregations.

I wish we did. Or could. Because that is the basis for our association with Unitarian Universalism. I am pleased that the youth and children of this congregation have begun to associate with others in youth cons and at the Mountain. It's good for them to meet other Unitarian Universalist children. I believe that Kay McCurdy has attended a couple conferences for religious education directors. Some years ago, we held a small conference here for the district and more recently, two workshops, one for singing meditations and

another for small group ministry. Perhaps in the future, with enough interest and support, we can do it again.

What I would like to see is more participation from you. Yes, you. I want you to meet Roger Davis, if you don't already know him. Roger, stand up, please. Roger is our new Denominational Affairs go-to guy. So when you have questions, concerns, ideas or thoughts about something in the larger Unitarian Universalist world, see Roger about it. I know that you might be interested in meeting people in other congregations. I know that you might be interested in attending meetings or workshops or presentations. I know that you might want to attend the annual meeting of the SE District, which is in late April next year. I urge you to sit down with Roger and search for ways to overcome the distance between us and other congregations.

Until then, I want to focus on another aspect of association. I mean our local association, this church. Not only do we associate with other congregations when we can, the basis for our association begins within these walls.

Association comes to us from the Latin, *socius*, meaning an ally or companion. The word is related to social and society. We are a group of allies, a group of companions united in our desire to make sense of life and our journey through it. We associate because we know that the journey is less arduous when we travel together, when we walk with our companions.

We're not all going to the same place; at least in our minds, we aren't. Who knows, we may all end up in the same place, but right now, we're just traveling together. We are an association of liberal religious people, a congregation.

Now associations have symbols don't they? They have logos and badges. Here are some examples.

Here's our symbol, the flaming chalice. It was conceived and first

drawn by Hans Deutsche for the Unitarian Service Committee during World War II. They wanted something that looked official and was impressive enough that border guards would let people pass who had ID cards from the Service Committee. This is the original drawing by Deutsche. This is the one used today by the UUA.

But it has been rendered differently by many people.

This is our chalice, designed by Inga Johannesen.

All these chalices are wide and deep; wide enough to accommodate many people and deep enough to contain differing beliefs.

We must be careful to preserve our internal associations. We can't just go off and do church as we see fit, because, like all the congregations, which are responsible to one another. Every member and friend of this church is responsible to one another.

We are associates, companions, allies; we stand together, not apart. No one in this congregation is responsible only to himself or herself. I am responsible to the congregation as a whole, as is the board of trustees. Every committee chair is responsible to a council vice president. No one does church alone.

This should not be news, but it bears repeating, because we often lose sight of our associations. I know, because I recently did just that. I forgot my association with a member, I forgot our Agreement for Fellowship, and I acted, shall we say, imprudently. I won't go into the gory details; I, and those around me, have suffered enough. Just let me commend to you our Agreement for Fellowship. Go home, dig it out and read it. Or re-read it. If you have lost your copy, like Kate did, you can find it on our web site or take one of these copies right here.

Our Agreement for Fellowship doesn't address something that needs to be said right now. Another aspect of associating with one another

is being a fair-share associate. Remember, this congregation is a fair-share congregation; we pay our dues in the amount requested by the UUA. A fair-share associate is an associate—a member or friend—who does his or her fair share of unpaid work that needs to be done in order that everyone have a good time here.

I am talking about volunteering. Specifically, I am talking about volunteering to do those jobs that are not the first ones chosen by people. These jobs aren't glamorous. They're not scut work, either, as volunteer jobs go. The two I have in mind right now are Kitchen Witch and RE Teacher. Those two jobs are like burrs under the saddle of this congregation.

Kay McCurdy had to scrounge so much for so long to find RE Teachers a couple years ago that the RE Committee finally gave up and cancelled RE classes once a month. They could not find enough people to teach the curriculum. And they are continuing the practice this year.

And you know what happens now? The law of unintended consequences comes into play. On those Sundays when there are no RE classes, Kay is not here and attendance falls through the basement floor. Parents know there'll be no RE classes, so the whole family stays home. The collection is down, attendance is down and that makes me down. It makes me want to take that Sunday off, too.

Hey! Whuddya think about that? The RE Director, the Music Director and the minister all stay home on the same Sunday every month!

Kitchen service has always been a problem. We have toyed with various solutions, like hiring someone or closing the kitchen when no one volunteers, but we haven't yet found the solution. Well, we know the solution—it's called volunteers. Thank God for Dale Elmblade. Here is a man who is not even a member and yet he gets it. He volunteers once or twice a month to be the kitchen witch and

he bakes goodies, too!

You can't just come to church. Well, actually, you can, but in my opinion, that's not enough. You have to be a fair-share associate. You can sign up for kitchen duty on the closet door. You can sign up to teach in the RE Department with Kay McCurdy.

I hesitate to give you an out, but if you can't be a kitchen witch or a RE teacher, there are plenty of things you can do. Sing in the choir. Be a chalice lighter. Serve on the music committee. Organize a book review session. Chris could use some help. Maintain the bulletin boards. Help out with Art on the Walls.

In order to be a fair-share member, you have to contribute. And I don't mean only money. Money is important, so don't shirk your duty there. Make a generous pledge next spring when you are asked. But contribute of yourself as well. Be a fair-share member.

I don't wish to scold you or spank you. Although it may sound that way. I just cannot write delicate little phrases and pretty little suggestions about this issue. I like to put the pedal all the way down when I am convinced of something.

I speak about our associations within these walls to enlighten you. You just can't come to church and pay your pledge. It's not enough. We need you. We need your time and talents just as much as your treasure. There is more to be done and there is more in you than I have yet seen.

POSTLUDE: "Dance in Bulgarian Rhythm No. 3" (150)

And now everyone, please stand up and make a giant circle all the way around this sanctuary. Lock arms, hold hands, whatever, to make a giant circle. All right. Now Kate is gonna teach you a new song.

Draw the circle wide,
Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song,
No one stands alone.
Standing side by side,
Draw the circle wide.

EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE

Lee Adler, please extinguish our 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.

BENEDICTION

I do not pray for your safety,
for safety is the way of no risk and no growth,
the way of slow stagnation.

I pray you rather courage
that is poise before all realities.

I pray you humor born of humility,
and the grace to be honest with your own foibles.

I pray you confidence in your own worth,
a worthiness not betrayed by failings or by success.

I pray you gratitude for life's great blessing.

And most of all I pray you a passionate yearning:
for justice,
for love,
for joy.

Thank you very much for your participation in our service this morning. Parents, please rejoin your children now and we'll enjoy a time of fellowship with the best fair-trade coffee in southeastern Tennessee.