



## A God We Can Believe In

BY GALEN GUENGERICH, SENIOR MINISTER OF ALL SOULS  
UNITARIAN CHURCH IN NEW YORK CITY

At home on a bookshelf we have a massive folio-style slipcover book titled *Cabinet of Natural Curiosities* by Albertus Seba, a pharmacist in eighteenth-century Amsterdam. In 1731, after decades of collecting strange and exotic plants, snakes, frogs, crocodiles, shellfish, corals, insects and butterflies, as well as a few fantastic beasts, such as a hydra and a dragon, Seba published an illustrated catalog of these curiosities. It's an amazing display of biodiversity—enough to make anyone curious about why things change and how the same species can vary so much from one specimen to another.

Darwin's theory of evolution, published more than a century later, enabled us to connect the dots. Sometimes biological change happens slowly and incrementally; at other times, change comes swiftly, especially when the pressure is great. In recent years, we have learned that a similar "evolve or perish" principle applies to the economic world we inhabit.

### How does religion respond to the pressure to evolve?

religion can evolve more rapidly, like a finch or an economy.

History suggests the answer is no. It took five hundred years for the church to forgive Nicholas Copernicus for looking into the night sky and reporting what he saw: that the sun, not the Earth, lies at the center of our solar system. Copernicus died of natural causes before the theological backlash against his discovery gained lethal momentum. Two of Copernicus' scientific contemporaries, Giordano Bruno and Galileo, weren't so fortunate. They agreed with Copernicus that the Earth—and therefore humanity—wasn't at the center of God's creation. Bruno even dared to suggest that space is boundless and the universe might be home to many solar systems; he was burned at the stake. Galileo was tortured, forced to recant his endorsement of the Copernican discovery, and spent the rest of his life under house arrest.

In more recent centuries, scientists have come to another conclusion of similar theological magnitude: in our universe, the laws of nature apply everywhere and always. In 1905 Einstein articulated the theory of relativity, which applies to large-scale interactions among and within galaxies. Over the following few decades a group of scientists (including Einstein) developed quantum mechanics, a branch of physics that describes physical interactions at the atomic and subatomic levels. It's too soon to tell whether superstring theory will fully reconcile relativity and quantum mechanics, but one thing is clear: in our universe, the fundamental laws of nature have existed from the very beginning. they apply everywhere, and they do not change.

What does this discovery mean for religion today? The religions of the West—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, along with their various permutations—are based on the belief that God exists above and beyond the realm of nature. In a word, they believe that God is supernatural—able to command and control the forces of nature at will, in order to carry out the divine plan for creation. God can stop the sun, impregnate a virgin, inhabit a human body, walk on water.

These parallels led me to wonder what a cabinet of spiritual curiosities might contain. How does religion respond to the pressure to evolve? Most religions have developed slowly over centuries and changed incrementally over generations. The question today is whether

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God has no religion.  
—Mahatma Gandhi

A monthly for religious liberals

### THINKING ABOUT GOD

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As we've peered into the inner workings of the universe, however, we've come to the inescapable conclusion that our universe isn't set up this way. The laws of nature are not subject to change without notice. The view of God as supernatural, like the view of the universe as Earth-centered, must be left behind. Religion needs to evolve, and the pressure is mounting rapidly.

Some people today, including many leading scientists, argue that religion doesn't need to evolve because it has become extinct. If God isn't supernatural, they insist, then the experience of God and the role of religion are obsolete. This is sloppy logic. Following a similar line of reasoning, Bruno and Galileo would have declared that if the Earth is not the center of the universe, then the universe doesn't exist. We certainly need to rearrange the theological constellations, but this doesn't mean the sky is empty. Our challenge is to integrate what we have learned about God into what we know about religion.

If God isn't supernatural, then religion in fact becomes more important, not less. With a supernatural God, who makes all the rules and hands them down to humanity, religion is merely obedience in fancy clothes. If God is not supernatural, then religion has a serious role to play. Religion is the process of taking everything we know about the universe into account and creating a life of meaning and purpose within it. In order to play this new role, religion must adapt, and the experience of God must adapt as well.

For my part, I believe that God exists like beauty exists, but not like a person or an apple exists. An apple is a physical object you can pick off a tree, cut into slices, bake in a pie and serve warm with vanilla ice cream. God, in contrast, is like beauty. Beauty itself never appears to us, but we find the description necessary to account for our delight in the symmetry and form of certain objects and experiences:

sunset, symphonies, and sculptures by Degas. Like beauty, God becomes manifest through other forms as a quality of our experience.

In my way of thinking, God is necessary to explain two kinds of experience. One has to do with the past. When we think of the most enduring elements of existence, we usually think of physical things: rocks, mountains, and so on. On the other hand, we usually think of the elements that make up the realm of meaning—thoughts,

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feelings, and emotions—as fleeting and ephemeral. Over time, however, the opposite turns out to be true. The atoms that make up a given body or object eventually disband themselves and go on to constitute something else entirely. Even so, the experiences made possible by those atoms remain. The question is where experiences go when their physical substrate no longer exists.

We have a word for the totality of the physical world; the word is universe. We also need a word for the unification of all the experiences in the universe—that word is God. The renowned 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Alfred North Whitehead calls this the consequent nature of God, suggesting that God is, in part, the consequence of, and thus constituted by, all experiences whatsoever. This experience of God accounts for our sense that experiences matter. They don't matter just to us; they matter, period. Even though no one may remember them or even know about them in the first place, experiences don't vanish into thin air.

Armchair philosophers debate whether a tree falling in the woods makes a

sound if no one hears it. This question raises a deeply religious issue. What happens to experiences no one knows about or remembers? Who hears the lonely cry of an anguished soul in the night's darkest hour? Who suffers with a young boy abused by his father? Who bears witness to the travesty of an infant girl abandoned by her parents on a hillside to die? What if no one knows? What if no one cares?

The experience of God accounts for our sense that, just as atoms are never lost in physical reactions, so no human experience—however sad or tragic—is ever suffered alone or eternally forgotten. As Whitehead puts it, everything that happens in the universe—“its sufferings, its sorrows, its triumphs, its immediacies of joy”—is woven into the harmony of a completed whole. God is the name we give to our sense of a presence that bears witness to everything that happens in life. In Whitehead's words, God is “the binding element in the universe.” Without the experience of God, our experiences have no refuge.

The experience of God also accounts for our sense that the future is possible. At any given moment, the future can unfold in a number of possible ways. These possibilities must come from somewhere. Admittedly, you can't put possibilities under a microscope. But they have to come from somewhere. Simply put, God is the experience that accounts for our sense that the future is possible at all. Whitehead calls this God's primordial nature, which points to God's role as the beginning of the future.

When the ancient Greeks pondered the future, they often spoke of fate, which they understood as the tendency of the future to move toward a



particular goal, like the tendency of a plant to grow toward the sun. The plant can be turned away, of course, but it will always grow back toward the light. In a similar way, the experience of God accounts for our sense that the future can unfold in a purposive and meaningful way, even though it sometimes doesn't. God is the transcendent source of possibility.

Where do consciousness and choice enter the divine picture? They enter through us—through our consciousness and our choices. The only way God plays an active role in history is through us. William Blake was on the right track when he wrote, "Every one, of every clime, that prays in deep distress, prays to the human form divine." For his part, Blake thought the human form divine described only Jesus. My view is that you and I are also human forms of the divine.

To say that we are the presence of God in this world is not a metaphor. We are the face of God in this world, and God's voice and hands. God changes outcomes in this world only as we change them. God is not an independent agent, in other words. God is dependent on us. The active agency of the divine life emerges through our choices and actions.

This understanding of God is hard to accept—but not because it requires us to believe something miraculous about God. Rather, it requires us to believe something astounding about ourselves: that we are the divine in human form. Only we can provide refuge in light of what's past and offer optimism in light of what's possible. If we respond faithfully to this opportunity, the God of history and possibility—the God we can believe in—will be not a curiosity, but a source of comfort and hope.

*Rev. Dr. Guengerich's book God Revised: How Religion Must Evolve in a Scientific Age will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in May. ■*

## People Ask About God (Excerpt)



BY A. POWELL DAVIES, MINISTER OF ALL SOULS CHURCH, UNITARIAN IN WASHINGTON, D.C. FROM 1943-1957

People go astray in their search for God because they do not take the right starting-point. We should never begin by asking, "Is there a God?"—as though God could be something outside of ordinary experience; or, to put it in the old-fashioned way, something outside of Nature. If that is the question people insist upon asking, there can be only one answer. Nobody knows. For how can we know what lies outside our experience? And how can we imagine anything that is not known to us in the natural world? One may just as well ask an astronomer whether there are any stars outside the universe. He will answer that so far as he knows, nothing can be outside the universe. It is an empty question. And it is just as empty to ask whether there is a God outside of the world of life.

What we must ask then, is not whether there is a God, as though God could be something outside everything else, but what it is of which we have experience when we feel the power of truth, or the claim of justice, or the sense of beauty. It is certainly not the molecules of stone in a range of mountains that move our hearts with a feeling of wonder. And it is certainly nothing physical that makes us know that truth is important. Or that right is better than wrong.

We do have experience of something, whatever it is, that we have to call spiritual or else give it no name at all. And this something is just as real as the earth beneath our feet or the sky

above us. If we believe in the reality of earth and sky, how can we avoid believing in the reality of this other something—because of which we can see the earth as beautiful and marvel at the starry vastness of the sky?...

There is no getting away from it; the spiritual is completely real. We never experience all of it at one time; no, but we never experience the entire physical universe either. Yet we speak of a physical universe....

But there is something further. The spiritual reality is alive. Whatever the mystery of aliveness may be, it is no more mysterious when we think of it as a whole than when we think of it in an individual living being. Truth lives in minds that are formed by it—or broken by betrayal of it. Beauty lives in hearts that respond to it. Justice is alive in generation after generation. The spiritual is a living reality.

And so we come to this: if the spiritual is real, and if we think of it as a total reality that includes all the spiritual qualities derived from it, just as the universe is a total reality, derived from whatever force it is that has produced it; and if we also see that this total spiritual reality is alive, what name shall we give it?

I confess that it seems to me most natural that we should call it God. Whatever there may be of God that is more than this—and I am not supposing for a moment that this of which we have experience is all of God that there is—this is God as we can know God.

This is the God without whom—or which—the scientist would never have in mind the power to search for truth, or the compulsion to be loyal to it. It is the God—the living spiritual reality—without whom the poet would never learn to write a single verse or hear the music of words uttered. It is the God from whom even the atheist cannot escape. But it is also the God of all of us—of everyone whatever. ■

## If I Were Asked



BY VICTORIA SAFFORD,  
SENIOR MINISTER, WHITE  
BEAR UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH,  
MAHTOMEDI, MINNESOTA

If I were asked to confess my faith or my beliefs out loud, and I were scrambling for some place to begin, I would start in the desert, in the lonesome valley, and say that first of all and ultimately we are alone. No god abides with us, caring, watching, mindful of our going out and coming in. The only certainty is chance connections, both chosen and involuntary, that matter most of all and ultimately help and heal and hold us.

## Sun/God

BY PHILLIP DEERE

Your missionary ancestors told Indian people that they were worshipping a false god when we prayed to the sun. The sun is the most powerful physical presence in our lives. Without it we could not live and our world would perish. Yet our reverence for it, our awe, was considered idolatry.

But your missionary ancestors misunderstood even that much, because we never worshipped the sun. We merely saw in it the reflection of the sacred, the creator, and used its image to focus our prayers of thanksgiving for Creator's life-giving power. It is, for us, a constant reminder of the creative power of God, as we greet the sun in the morning when we first arise and again in the evening. In between, as we go about our day, we constantly will see our shadow on the ground and will be reminded again of God's creative goodness. We can stop, look up, and say a short prayer whenever this happens.

*From A Native American Theology, by Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley and George E. "Tink" Tinker, published by Orbis Books in 2001. ■*

We are alone yet intricately bound, inextricably connected to soil and stream and forest, to sun and corn and melting snow. We are alone yet bound by stories we cannot get out of to ancestors and descendants we will never meet. And all these natural conditions, these bonds we did not forge ourselves and yet cannot deny, are the strands of a theology, the seeds of faith, the beginning of *re-ligion*, of binding all things.

When I say *God*—and sometimes I do, because sometimes there is no other metaphor, no other symbol, no other poetry, no other offering—when I say *God* I mean that place of meeting, that place where solitudes join. The space

between my hand and that dogwood, the space where the tiny feet of the ant brush the dry dirt beneath her, the space between Mercury and Venus, between electrons, which we unblinkingly believe in without seeing. *God* is the space in between, the bridge between solitudes, the ground where we meet, you and I, or any two, by grace.

If I were asked I'd say that all of us, together, are alone, and the emptiness between us is waiting to be filled.

*From her meditation manual Walking Toward Morning, published by Skinner House in 2003. This book is available from the UUA Bookstore, [www.uua.org/boostore](http://www.uua.org/boostore) or 800-215-9076. ■*



## A Prayer

BY MARK BELLETINI, SENIOR MINISTER,  
FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF COLUMBUS, OHIO



World that is my home,  
Spirit that matters,  
Speak to me in the voices of Ralph Waldo Emerson,  
yes, and Florence Nightingale,  
But sound as clear in the songs of meadowlark and crickets.  
Show yourself in the rage of Susan B. Anthony or William Lloyd Garrison,  
yes, but reveal yourself as well in geysers and volcanic fissures.  
Shine in the eyes of a Michelangelo or a John Dewey or a Maya Angelou  
yes, but blaze as well in a hive of bees or the glint in a black bear's pupil.  
Let Bach proclaim you, and all the wolves arching on their ridges!  
Let the Dao Dejing laud your namelessness with poetry sublime,  
But let each falling leaf from the maples balance verse for verse.  
Let the neck of a Balinese dancer sign your presence;  
let the richness of sapote fruit broken open in the sun speak of you.  
Let the beaches enrobe you, the cumulus clouds crown you in splendor.  
Dance in the splashes of rain in puddles,  
Spin in the equations on the geometer's desk.  
Hum in the sleeping dreams of Einstein as well as in his writing.  
Bring me down to earth, oh Spirit of Life, my home, my world that matters!  
Let humans once again remember their origin from the cool dark humus.  
Let mortals once again remember...  
we are fragments of a holy whole  
which we neither can see nor control by force of will.  
Return us all to the humility of the seasons,  
of times that flow no matter our mood or prayer or wish,  
And by such humility,  
grant us peace at last. ■



## Reflections on God

*We asked each of our ministerial interns to share a reflection on what God means to them.*

*Here's what they had to say:*

When I was a child, God spoke to me in a dream—his booming voice shaking me to the core. By the time I woke up I had forgotten his words, but I was sure I must be the next prophet.

I thought if I could have the kind of faith that “moves mountains,” my prophet status would be confirmed. I stared into the jagged faces of the Rocky Mountains and bore down with every fiber of my being.

They didn't even tremble.

Many years later, God spoke again. I was in labor—in a stage when it felt impossible. I retreated into the darkest corners of myself, searching for every scrap of strength. Suddenly, a small voice began to speak. It spoke about all the women in my life—all the women since the beginning of time who had done what I was about to do.

As it spoke, the faces of these women appeared, murmuring words of encouragement. It was neither a supernatural vision nor mere thought. It was a silver thread of connection...called God. This God didn't call prophets or demand that I move mountains, but still I felt the need to bear down with every fiber of my being.

This time, something trembled.

—**Cassandra Hartley**,  
ministerial intern



During the time I served as a hospital chaplain I saw very few, if any, Unitarian Universalists on my floors, so every encounter was an interfaith encounter. It would be easy to say that we were of different religions, because we were. But I believe the Sacred, or the Holy, is the same for all of us. UU minister Forrest Church wrote that he

imagined the world as a cathedral in which, over time, different religions have erected windows: some stained glass, other frosted, and still others clear. It is, however, the same light that shines through each. Our windows simply look different.

Because I view God as the Divine in everyone, in and around everything, each interaction with a patient is in some way Divine. I suppose God is actually in the tension of that relationship. God is in everyone, God is in the community, and God is in the relationships that form in community.

—**Aaron Stockwell**, intern for  
young adult ministry



I am drawn to process theology as a way of understanding God. Process theology describes each person as an “event,” rather than an object. Each event has an effect on other events, making us both individuals and part of a larger whole. The idea of a continually developing process that persuades us toward what is good resonates with me. It seems an extension of Theodore Parker's assertion that the arc of the moral universe is long, but though he doesn't understand it, he knows it bends toward justice.

—**Joanna Fontaine Crawford**,  
ministerial intern



God is in the image of people, of humans in an ever-changing process of adaptation. God is visible in our never-ending struggle to readapt and reinvent ourselves. We cannot fully know the process of God any more than we can fully understand ourselves. However, in the process of unfolding we can sense the currents that we are swept up in, and the particulars of how god moves in our lives. We cannot know what a divine being would want of us on the large scale, but we can see how a failure to recognize the oneness of human experience and life harms us. To see each other and ourselves as

separate from God and each other creates disunity and strife that leads to violence, oppression, sin and evil in the world.

God, therefore, is not a static being. God is, and at the same time is more than, the sum total of all creation and the events that unfold in it. God is involved in the ongoing process of the universe, while also being more than the universe. The creative process of the universe shows us how we can live creatively together. We can use our experience of community, the holy moving through us, and the good seen in our communities as reminders of power that god has in our lives.

—**Jerrod Oltmann**, intern for  
military ministry



Since early adolescence I have believed there was some sort of force that existed that others called God. Having been raised in a Unitarian Universalist congregation, I was allowed to wonder, question, and challenge understandings of God, both my own and those of others. What I have come to see now is God as a puzzle—with as many pieces as there are people. We each hold a piece of this puzzle, and it is only through our dialogue with one another that we can begin to gain a fuller understanding of who and what God is. In this process of sharing what our puzzle piece looks like, our own piece can be reshaped and reformed. The puzzle is never finished; it is a constant work in progress. The beauty of this image is that it presumes that the process of coming together to share our views is more important than the actual outcome. There are many different facets to my puzzle piece, including the size and shape, the colors and textures, and location in the puzzle. The piece is the vehicle for our dialogue, our insights, and our ultimate growth.

—**Lara Campbell**,  
ministerial intern





## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
SENIOR MINISTER,  
CHURCH OF THE  
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Are you there, God? It's me, Meg.

*Yes, and if you don't mind, I'll keep calling you Margaret. It confuses me when you young people are always taking nicknames. It's hard enough learning one name for each of you!*



Actually, I'm not that kid in Judy Blume's teen novel, *Are You There, God? It's me, Margaret*. My name never was Margaret. I'm Meg, the senior minister at the Church of the Larger Fellowship. I thought if we hung out for a while I could name drop in our newsletter!

*Meg, huh? Sounds like a nickname to me.*

Well, you're a great one to talk. Isn't "God" a nickname? I mean, YAHWEH is the initials of "I Am What I Am." Talk about the ultimate confusing name!

*Boy, I'll say. Folks confuse me all the time! They confuse me with a judge. They confuse me with either or both of their parents. They're always confusing me with Santa Claus. And what makes me saddest of all is when they confuse me with The Biggest Bully.*

Yeah, I think I've met some of those people. And maybe I've confused your name a few times myself. So will you help me to get it right?

*I Am What I Am.*

Well, Descartes said, "I think therefore I am." Does that mean you are thought?

*Oh, you think too much. Don't blame that on me! Hey, that reminds me of a good joke that Steven Colbert told: God is love. Love is blind. Stevie Won-*

*der is blind. Therefore God is Stevie Wonder. Pretty good, huh?*

Well, some of Stevie Wonder's music would make me believe that. You watch the Colbert show, huh? What else do you like to watch?

*It's all a big show to me! Onstage, off-stage, behind the stage... I watch it all.*

You mean like, you see me when I'm sleeping? You know when I'm awake? You know when I've been good or bad so be good, for goodness sake?

*No, no, that's Santa Claus. I told you sometimes folks mix us up. Maybe that's why they keep thinking I'm an old man with a beard!*

Well, the old-man-with-a-beard thing is bigger than Santa. It's from the stories in the Hebrew Bible, I think. And then Michelangelo did those gorgeous paintings and we all kind of imprinted on them.

*Back in the day, people mostly listened to old men with beards. So that was how people visualized ultimate authority. These days, I'd be more likely to appear as a cellular network or something. That's where people put all of their respect now!*

What? Wait a minute! You're a cellular network? You mean 3G and 4G—the G stands for God?

*Nah. I told you, you think too much—of course it doesn't! But, listen to the language used to describe one network: "Living, breathing intelligence." That kind of sounds like my name.*

If you are saying that "living, breathing intelligence" sounds like your name, how come you keep telling me I think too much?

*Don't confuse thinking with intelligence. At least the way you use the words. Do plants think? Do stars? Do rocks?*

Do they have intelligence?

*Of course they do! Intelligence means understanding. When you've longed for complete understanding, haven't you*

*ever stared at a star, or walked among trees, or held a rock?*

Sure.

*So you may have been bumping into me about then. But humans can have understanding too. Mostly it doesn't happen in your heads, though. It happens between you, when suddenly your bodies don't hold you in separate containers, but you're kind of merged with others. That's what Jesus was trying to say when he said, "The kingdom of God is among you." I am between you, in the love you show each other.*

You mean, we create you by loving each other?

*Well, we all co-create each other, right? I mean, where did we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?*

Mystery, mystery. Life is a riddle and a mystery!



*Now you're showing a little more understanding. Your energy shifted there!*

That's because those are words from a song I love to sing with other people. It's in the UU hymnal [#1003].

*There you have it. Singing is a great way to touch into the energy between you and other people, to create a little more intelligence. Look, Margaret, I've gotta go. I hear the network is down in Washington DC again...*

Thanks, God! And, um, you can call me Margaret. I guess the names don't really matter as much as the understanding!■

## REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



If you were going to look for God, where would you look? Would you go up on top of a mountain? Would you look in the crashing ocean waves? Would you be more likely to find God in a giant sequoia redwood tree, or in a tiny plant growing in the pinch of soil between mountain rocks? Would you look up towards the stars or down toward the earth that supports us?

Maybe you would look for God in your favorite piece of music, when it swells to heart-stopping force, or stretches out into something mysterious and lovely, or when the beat makes you want to move, or the singer shares something that rings true in the bottom of your soul. You might want to look for God in a painting that is full of light or a dance in which people connect and separate and re-connect again.

You might very well look for God in a soup kitchen where people who have very different lives connect, or in a vigil where people come together and light candles to show their common concern. God might be in a hospital, where people are facing the end of their lives and families welcome newborns.

Maybe you would find different gods in different places, one spirit in a shining mountain lake and another spirit in a great rock that rises from the desert. Of course, you might look for God in a church or synagogue or mosque, in the sound of people singing or praying together.

Wherever you looked, how would you know if you had found God? I was going to say that no one knows what God looks like, but really, we all know that God doesn't look like any particular thing. No one is ever going to take a picture of God and have that

picture labeled "God" by facial recognition software.

There is a story from the Hindu tradition of a man who takes his

son down by a river. The man brings with him a pan and a lump of salt. When they get to the river the man invites his son to fill the pan with water, and to place the lump of salt in that water. The father and son talk for a while, and then the man asks his son to look at the pan of water and show him the lump of salt.

"I can't," says the boy. "It isn't there any more."

"Really?" responds the father. "It isn't there, or you can't see it?"

"I can't see it. It must be there, because who would have taken it out?"

"If you can't see it, how will you know the salt is there in the water?" In answer, the boy dips his finger into the water and tastes it.

"Yes," the boy says, "the water is definitely salty."

"Taste the other end of the pan," his father tells him. So the boy dips his finger in the far end of the pan.

"Yes, it's salty there, too."

"And how about the middle?"

"Yes," the boy responds after tasting each section of the pan, "Yes, it's all salty."

"That," says the father, "is how it is with God. You can't see God, and can't find the one lump of God, like a lump of salt. But, like the salt, you can taste God in everything—in the earth, the sky, in me and in you."



But what does God taste like? Does God taste like chocolate, or bacon, or a fresh peach milk shake? How do we know when we are tasting God? Some

people would say that looking for God, or tasting for God, is just plain silly. Why bother trying to connect with something that nobody can quite describe? Looking for God, after all, is just a bit like going to a train station and trying to meet up with someone else's imaginary friend.

But those of us who would say we've found God and those of us who are looking for God and those of us who think that looking is just a waste of time—we all confirm that the water tastes salty. We all have moments of awe and wonder, and times of deep gratitude. We know that all life is somehow connected, that each of us

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### If you were going to look for God, where would you look?

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belongs to something much bigger than our own individual selves. We know that our lives and our choices matter, that we are accountable to something beyond the desires of the moment.

Now, you certainly don't have to say that God is what we all belong to, what we are all accountable to, the source of wonder and the recipient of our thanks. God is just a word, and not a very impressive word at that. On the other hand, it's not a bad thing to have a little word-package to stuff those ideas of connection and wonder and broader life into.

Sure, at times people use the word "God" to talk about something as off-putting as a man on high who judges people according to an arbitrary set of rules set down in an old book. On the other hand, when you say the word "fence," some people imagine white pickets and some people imagine barbed wire, but that doesn't make the word useless or inaccurate.

Sometimes you need a word to start a conversation. And really, it's the conversation about what most deeply connects us, what most deeply moves us, that interests me the most. ■





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Unitarian Universalist

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**CLF Staff:** Meg Riley, senior minister; Lorraine Dennis, executive director; Lynn Ungar, minister for lifespan learning and *Quest* editor; Patty Franz, prison ministry director; Linda Berez, minister of technology; Joanna Crawford, ministerial intern; Lara Campbell, ministerial intern; Cassandra Hartley, ministerial intern; Jerrod Oltmann, military ministerial intern; Aaron Stockwell, ministerial intern; Beth Murray, PR & program administrator; Cindy Salloway, fiscal administrator; Lisa Kielt, development director; Sue Conley, membership assistant

**Web Site** [www.clfuu.org](http://www.clfuu.org) — **E-mail** [clf@clfu.org](mailto:clf@clfu.org) — **Jewelry** 617-948-6150 — **Toll-Free Line** 800-231-3027  
**CLF Unitarian Universalist, 25 Beacon St., Boston MA 02108 USA** — **Telephone** 617-948-6166 — **Fax** 617-523-4123

## Touching our Strength

We touch this strength, our power, who we are in the world, when we are most fully in touch with one another and with the world. There is no doubt in my mind that, in so doing, we are participants in ongoing incarnation, bringing god to life in the world. For god is nothing other than the eternally creative source of our relational power, our common strength, a god whose movement is to empower, bringing us into our own together, a god whose name in history is love.

by **Carter Heyward**, from her book *Touching Our Strength*, published by Harper and Row in 1989





