

Nothing Short of Evangelism

BY REV. DR. JUDIT GELLÉRD, PHYSICIAN AND FOUNDER OF THE PARTNER CHURCH



In 1990, a hundred and thirty American and Canadian Unitarian Universalist congregations formed one-to-one covenantal relationships with the same number of Transylvanian Unitarian churches. Later this Partner Church Program widened to involve close to four hundred churches on both sides of the Atlantic.

This has been especially important because Unitarians in Transylvania are a Hungarian minority within an oppressive Romanian state, not unlike the modern situation of Tibetans within China. Decades of communist totalitarian rule in Romania, with its policy of cultural ethnocide, martyred my minister father and demoralized the churches. On Christmas in 1989 a bloody revolution sparked by a Reformed (Calvinist) pastor overthrew the Romanian dictator, whose final plan was to bulldoze eight thousand villages in Transylvania. This plan failed because of his death, but the once prosperous ethnic Hungarian villages had already been economically crippled.

At that precarious time North American UUUs were awakened by a call—my husband and I happened to be those awakening voices—to try to save the Transylvanian Unitarian tradition. In response, the Unitarian Universalist Association launched the Partner Church effort. I volunteered to bring life into a theoretical program, and I have been called an “evangelist” for this cause, which is facilitated and nurtured by our formal organization, the Partner Church Council. Today we witness deeply committed partner relationships between pairs of congregations, sponsoring hundreds of programs for mutual economic and spiritual revitalization.

Perhaps it seems odd that I would wear that description of myself as “evangelist” with pride. Evangelism is a notion and practice that ordinarily would not be part of Unitarian Universalist tradition. The Unitarian church is generally not an evangelical church. And yet, from my years of work with two times two hundred churches in the United States and Transylvania, I can only describe the resulting experience as a phenomenon nothing short of evangelism.

Take the Edict of Torda, a proclamation of religious tolerance issued in 1568 by Transylvania’s King John II Sigismund, a Unitarian. This decree bestowed on ministers a great collective and personal responsibility to evangelize: “Preachers everywhere shall preach the Gospel according to their understanding of it...for faith is a gift of God born from listening, and listening is through God’s word.”

In the traditionally action-oriented Unitarian Universalist church, however, the meaning of evangelism goes beyond pronouncement of the Good News, and beyond mere passive listening by the congregation. Through not only listening but also dreaming boldly, our faith will be awakened, prompting us to translate the Gospel into transformative service. The Good News for the church, therefore, will be about spiritual transformation through the power of meaningful action. Such a church is worth attending.

Many Unitarians practice only an inner evangelism, an inner mission, and don’t reach out. But Unitarians in Transylvania do not stop at preaching the Gospel; they put their words into work. This action orientation, translating the Gospel into service, is a strong Transylvanian characteristic.

Sixteenth century Unitarian leader Francis Dávid brought ethical, values-based Christian thought to light. “God’s word flows as the water and flies as a bird,” he wrote. “Nobody can raise mountains nor any impediments in its way.” The good

Quest for meaning

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**If there is no struggle,
there is no progress.
—Frederick Douglass**

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news Francis Dávid preached is this: as humans, we have the divine potential to follow the example of Jesus, our ultimate ideal and teacher. And because we can, therefore we must. Ours is not a comfortable religion. It has the ultimate challenge of perfection. As another sixteenth century Transylvanian Unitarian leader put it: “The future will ask us not how many we are, but what values we represent.”

Later Unitarianism was dominated by an increasing social awareness and the struggle for freedom. A nineteenth century Transylvanian preacher expressed the spirit of his age: “The true minister is one who not only preaches the Gospel, but one who lives by it; one who not only reads the Bible, but gives it into the hand of ordinary people; one who not only encourages building schools, but himself takes up the shovel. To spread the Evangelium means to serve the process of moral, cultural, spiritual, material uplift of the people.”

Transylvanian Unitarians rejected a rigid dogmatism four hundred years ago. Our faith and church are not based upon authority and wealth, or powerful organization, but rather on the Gospel and the attraction of the human spirit to truth and justice. This message is just as relevant today, as progressive churches try to be non-dogmatic.

But some American Unitarian Universalists try not to even be religious. Being rooted in two quite different traditions (in spite of similar names: Transylvanian Unitarianism and North American Unitarian Universalism), I have an eye and an insight for both of these related groups.

Present day American churches in general appear as grand-scale businesses to an Eastern European, with their dozens of committees, sometimes involving half of the congregation in some leadership role or another. This large-scale involvement suggests empowerment of members to participate, to run, to own the church. But in many churches this

virtue degenerates into power-games, militancy, flattering pride for the power-hungry, and ultimately pain and alienation for some members.

The good news Francis Dávid preached is this: as humans, we have the divine potential to follow the example of Jesus.... And because we can, therefore we must.

Why is the simple faith of the Transylvanians so compelling for the sophisticated, educated American Unitarian Universalists? Why does the encounter seem to fill a spiritual void on a large scale? A visiting Transylvanian minister intuitively answered this inquiry: “You Americans hold your faith far from your core.” Religious identity, cultural identity, is our core value in Transylvania. And though we are born into our faith, it never came cheap to practice our religion. Each generation had to fight for this basic right throughout four centuries. Ours is an active faith, an active existence against odds, against persecutions of all kinds—the cruelest being the communist oppression.

Transylvanian Unitarians take pride in having a coherent theological position which is positively formulated. Though we deny certain precepts, our theology is not denial but affirmation, clear cut and simply postulated. It is not abstract theory, but the very fabric of our living. My faith is an active faith. My religion is service to others through the transformative power of the Gospel.

We have always been aware that our faith will keep us. It did. Mine is not a narrow Unitarian apologetic. I am not talking about a Unitarian denominational membership. I am talking about faith, proclaiming the Good News, living the Gospel, and surviving by its power, by its empowerment. We have

survived as Protestants under the persecutions of the Counter-Reformation, survived as Unitarians when we had been considered too radical, survived as Christians under the anti-religious reign of terror of communism.

Under oppression, denominational identity is somewhat less defined. The ultimate, shared goal—bringing forth the Kingdom of God—is not different for a Unitarian or a Calvinist or an Evangelical Lutheran, the three main minority churches of Transylvania. Each, both collectively and individually, has been an equally important link in a chain of Christian minority churches. We were able to survive only through a united spirit and sense of community. The weakest links had to be strengthened by others.

Today, this small Transylvanian Unitarian church of 80,000 members has become the clear spring where spiritually thirsty Americans make group pilgrimages seeking to recharge their souls and renew their hope. The late Peter Raible, a Unitarian Universalist minister, confessed:

I was not prepared for how holy the trip [to Transylvania] would prove to be. What is so transforming I found in no detached examination of our Transylvania movement, but in direct experience. To hear parishioners sing their long-banned national anthem as tears stream down their faces is before long to feel wetness on one's own cheeks. To sit in a worship service, not a word of which one can understand, is to feel the depth of the spirit flowing.

My pilgrimage, as I suspect for most Unitarians, did not strive to create a religious experience, but I found it again and again. The experience, simply put, was transformative. Whatever North Americans may have done on behalf of their peers in Transylvania is more than repaid by the religious experiences that have come to us by visiting there. We return, I think, more deeply grounded in our

own faith, more consecrated to seeing our Unitarian Universalist cause continue on this continent, and more assured that our religion has much to give in the hard times of life.

American UUs might well value a focus that is grounded in deeper theological understanding, to better bring a heterogeneous group together. Perhaps the Unitarians of Transylvania can serve as one wellspring that might serve a thirsty faith. Transylvania's virtues include deep rootedness, stability, and continuity, as compared with the familiar American experience of uprootedness, moving on, constant change and lost tradition. The stubborn stability of the Transylvanian church has been one of its main strengths during the past centuries.

The Partner Church structure, with the richness of its programs and interactions, offers a healthy cross-fertilization of ideas and models that have helped us experience a shared global awareness. Notice how this popular hymn that Protestants and Catholics sing expresses the most desired goal of today's evangelism:

*In Christ there is no East and West,
in him no South or North,*

*But one great family bound by love
throughout the whole wide earth .*

This sentiment beautifully harmonizes with the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

Today's world requires us to accept the oneness of humanity. In the past, isolated communities could afford to think of one another as fundamentally separate. Some could even exist in total isolation. But nowadays, whatever happens in one region of the world will eventually affect, through a chain reaction, peoples and places far away. Therefore, it is essential to treat each major problem, right from its inception, as a global concern. It is no longer possible to emphasize, without destructive persecution, the national, racial, or ideological barriers

which differentiate us. Within the context of our new interdependence, self-interest clearly lies in considering the interest of others.... For the future of [humankind], for a happier, more stable and civilized world, we must all develop a sincere, warm-hearted feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood.

I see a natural symbol of evangelism in the banyan tree. Religions and congregations everywhere are its far-reaching branches, which drop new roots around, to anchor, protect and feed the tree: the shared Good News. The stronger the new roots are, the stronger the tree will be, from which we all draw nurturing energy. And we are all connected by it.

Proselytizing, mere preaching and passive witnessing, might not be good news any more. But there is good news lived in a values-based Unitarian Christianity that is evangelical, though not in the tired old understandings of evangelism. Transformation, touching each person's core with the true spirit of the Gospel, brings about fruits in action. ■

Your Gifts

What is the best gift you will give this year?

YOUR gift to the Church of the Larger Fellowship! Because of you, a powerful global conversation has roots right here, as we build a cyber-home where people can find their spiritual inquiry supported within a global community. Your gifts help shape a healing place for a hurting world. Support the CLF now.



Please use the enclosed envelope or go online to www.questformeaning.org and give as generously as you can. ■

Feeding Faith

BY JOHN SANGER, CLF MEMBER
INCARCERATED IN OKLAHOMA

Some of my most intense experiences of faith have come at the small window that overlooks a field and a ridge, which I've dubbed Freedom Ridge. It is at this prison cell window that I have come face-to-face and, quite literally, nose-to-nose



with spiritual teachers that have given me glimpses no human teacher could.

This aspect of my spiritual enlightenment has come with curious sniffs, wet-nosed nudges and a few loving licks. You see, I encourage skunks to come to my window—and I have a selfish reason for doing so: They feed me spiritually. Therefore, it's the least I can do to feed them physically.

When one of their sleek, black faces appears in my window, my heart fills with love, and I simultaneously know that it is this feeling that I am supposed to have for all beings (including humans), all the time. If my black-and-white friend thinks I have done well in realizing this need, then he graciously allows me to pat his head before waddling off to preach elsewhere. ■



The Marker's Meaning

Some years back I read a story in the *Indianapolis Star*. It was a Sunday paper kind of an article about finding happiness. "The truth is," says the column, "the real secret to happiness isn't a secret at all. It's just not that pleasant a truth. Nor does it rhyme. Which is why it is never cross-stitched, hung over the fireplace or emblazoned on tote bags. The secret to happiness is realizing that life is often hard."

A local colleague, Wendy Bell, used to talk about riding the bus on her commute through a suburb called Arlington Heights. You have to remember that even suburbs are very old in the Boston area, by American standards at least, and Wendy would sit there on the bus and watch out the window until she saw it. She would sit there on the bus and sooner or later there it would be, the monument—the stone marker—the one that tells the account of one day in the life of Samuel Whittemore.

"On April 19th, 1775," the marker reads, "Samuel Whittemore was shot, bayoneted, beaten, and left for dead." He was eighty years old. Dr. Tufts, of Medford, declared that it was useless to dress Mr. Whittemore's wounds.

Each of us has some pretty tough days. And it's not always the big-time tough stuff like literally being left for dead that gets us—it's the lost sock that can just as easily put us over the edge, or running out of cat food, or remembering to save that all-important computer file just as the screen goes blank. But whatever it is, whether your child won't sleep through the night or your feelings for your partner are clearly waning, whatever it is...at least you are not Samuel Whittemore on his "no good, very bad day." Thus far, no matter how bad it feels, you have not actually been shot, bayoneted, beaten and left for dead.

For some of us, salvation comes, historically at least, in "salvation by character." We believe there is something wonderful inside us—you could call it inherent dignity and worth—that allows us to work toward good character, wholeness, healing, and all that is good. We have within us a little core of natural hope—some bit of life that lies waiting to spring into action. And

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even better, we don't have to just sit and wait: we can act to realize that hope, that life, that wholeness. In spite of the difficulties in both our own experience and of life in the larger world, we do what we can. Therein lies our salvation.

Rabbi Harold Schulweis writes in "Playing with Three Strings," a poem about Yitzhak Perlman,

On one occasion one of his violin strings broke.

*The audience grew silent,
the violinist did not leave the stage.*

*Signaling the maestro,
The violinist played with power
and intensity*

*on only three strings.
With three strings, he modulated,
changed, and*

Recomposed the piece in his head...

*The audience screamed delight,
Applauded their appreciation.
Asked how he had accomplished
this feat,*

The violinist answered

*It is my task to make music with
what remains....*

That hope, that strength, that "salvation by character," is what many

of us have been looking for. We have found that people have a light inside. We have a spirit. We bounce back. Maybe politically, maybe spiritually or psychologically, or medically, or morally. Sometimes in small ways—you got up and wrote a pretty decent letter to your local newspaper this morning, even though your coffeemaker let you down, or you ran an extra mile along the river. You can feel some hope inside, a little glow inside, hope for the world and for us all. Your power and your zest come back—you can feel it in your fingers and toes, you can imagine a time when lessons will have been learned—a few lessons anyway—a time when your efforts and our efforts together will pay off and no one—no one—is ever left for dead.

Which reminds me. Samuel Whittemore's marker. Eighty years old in 1775—shot, bayoneted, beaten, and left for dead in Arlington. Samuel Whittemore survived that day. More than survived. He recovered and lived to be ninety-eight years old.

Life, the world, it can all get pretty desperate—shot, bayoneted, beaten, and left for dead. But we believe in the light of life, in that something inside that can awaken and shine and sing all songs of hope.



by **Jane Rzepka**,
minister emerita of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, from her book *From Zip Lines to Hosaphones: Dispatches from the*

Search for Truth and Meaning, published by Skinner House in 2011.

This book is available through the UUA Bookstore (www.uua.org/bookstore or 800-215-9076) or the CLF library (www.clfuu.org/library). ■

We Are All About Saving Souls

(EXCERPT) BY REV. SUZANNE MEYER, (1953-2010)



What are we doing here? What is our business? The answer is simple: we are in the business of saving souls. You heard me right: what we are about is saving souls.

Those of us who have had any brush with evangelical religion in our lives are apt to have an instantaneous negative reaction to that assertion. Soul-saving? Our business? Not us!

But make no mistake about it, I make no claim that we are in the business of rescuing men and women from some afterlife spent in a literal place of torment called hell. I don't believe in such a literal place of torment, populated for all eternity by devils, demons, and the tortured souls of the dead. In fact, I don't make any claim to know what happens to us after the death of the body, or whether there is or is not something beyond this life.

But I do know that there are many kinds of private hells in which living men and women dwell every day. These are small personal hells of meaninglessness, banality, and loneliness. Hells of shame, hells of guilt, hells of loss, hells of failure. There are as many kinds of these small hells as there are people who live in them. And from some of those hells, we, as a church, can and do provide a kind of salvation, a release, or, at the very least, a respite. We are in the business of saving souls from those kinds of small, individual hells of despair and disappointment that drive people into exile and isolation, separated from community as well as from their own essential goodness.

There are many people who come to us every day who are not here because they are looking for Unitarian Universalism, who are not here because they are looking for another place to give their time or their money, who are not here because they are rejecting any other brand of religion. They are here because they feel lost, lonely and hurting inside, even though they might appear to all the world to be just fine. They have no particular interest in God or religion—our brand or any other brand of religion, for that matter. They just know that they've already tried everything else: alcoholism, workaholism, drugs, therapy, self-help books, self-help groups. There's nothing left for them to try and besides that, we don't charge admission.

What saves us in the end might be called the extraordinary power and grace of ordinary people.

People come here not even knowing what it is that they are seeking. You don't even have to know what it is you are looking for to feel the need to set off in search of something, something more to life. It is not the fear of dying that compels people to go looking for something more in their lives: it is the fear that they may not really be fully alive. You can have everything you want and need, and yet find little meaning in life. You need salvation.

Oh, that word "salvation." If that word makes us flinch, it is because we've allowed other people to steal the original meaning away from us. We have forgotten what salvation originally meant. "Salvation is really a state of wholeness, of health. It occurs in this lifetime when we are at peace with ourselves, united with one another, and in harmony with nature."

(F. Forrester Church)

I believe two things passionately.

First, the soul is not a spirit or ghost or ephemeral thing. Whatever it is, pulse or psyche, it is what makes us fully alive, fully animated, and fully human. And, second, salvation is not about life after death, but about life itself, full throttle, in all of its joy and agony. There is much in the world that has the potential to deaden us, to anesthetize our spirits; so many things can make us feel emotionally and spiritually dead, dull, and brittle. Too many things can create for each one of us a private, personal hell.

And the thing about those personal hells is that they are very small—tiny, really—only big enough for one person. And when we dwell all by ourselves in our own private little hells, our concerns, our sympathies, our awareness of the needs of others are squeezed out, until all that matters is the self. There is no room in these small hells for anyone else, or for any concerns other than selfish ones. The Hebrew word for salvation means to make wide or make sufficient—it is our role as a church to help widen and deepen the lives of those who live for themselves alone.

It is easy for me to forget that in this business of soul-saving, it is you, the congregation, that makes all the difference, not the minister. What saves us in the end might be called the extraordinary power and grace of ordinary people. That is love from heaven to earth come down. The holy incarnate, made flesh in the form of men and women, old and young, caring and cantankerous, imperfect, easily wounded, full of all the faults and gifts that this poor flesh is heir to. There's a miracle for you. We are saved, at last, by the fellowship of people no better or worse off than we are. What liberates us from those tiny hells in which we dwell all alone is as common as a handshake, as ordinary as hearing your name spoken by another, as simple as being asked to share your thoughts.

We are one another's salvation. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

I often think of humankind as a long procession whose beginning and end are out of sight. We, the living, are an evolutionary link between all life that has gone before and all that is yet to be. We have no control over when or where we enter the procession, or even how long we're part of it, but we do get to choose our marching companions. And we can all exercise some control over what direction the procession takes, what part we play and how we play it.

—Marty Wilson

Those words are from my mom, an active member of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Akron, Ohio, from a sermon she delivered in 2001, when she knew she was dying from ovarian cancer. I have turned to them many times for comfort and inspiration, because she is my evolutionary link to all of life that went before, but more because I use them to measure myself against the marching orders she left me about how to live my life after she was gone.

Exercise some control over your life, girl! She is saying from the grave. *Choose what part you want to play, and how you want to play it. This is your moment!* If it's a day when I whine in resistance to the idea that I truly have the power to create my own life, and protest that she can't imagine how hard it is, she turns the same deaf ear from the grave that she turned to my whining when she was alive. Oh, evolve! she seems to say over her shoulder, as she looks away.

Yep, I come from tough stock. Appalachian survivors. My granny lived to 106 and wanted her tombstone to read, "The good die young." But whoever our people are, wherever we claim our lineage, or for those of us who weren't given the gift of knowing our DNA's history because of adoption or other early life disruptions—we are the folks in the parade now!

Theodore Parker, Gandhi, Olympia Brown, Martin Luther King—they all may have been a lot more gifted and wise than I will ever be. It doesn't matter. From the grave they say: *Stop looking back at us all the time! You're it! It's your turn now!*

What does it mean to be the torch-bearers of our faith now, in this moment? This is the time when we know in our very cells that faith is about aligning our values with our actions. Aligning values with actions is a two-step process. First, we claim our values, and stay grounded in them. This grounding comes from daily spiritual practice and involvement with spiritual community—however we describe those two things. (Shorthand: We need to do whatever it takes to keep us centered, connected, and out of major trouble.)

What does it mean to be the torch-bearers of our faith now, in this moment?

Second, aligning values and actions means we move—we jump out of the plane, plunge off the cliff into the water, ski down the mountain, stroll or roll our chair down the sidewalk, clean out our clutter, etc. It means moving energy along as it is given to us to move it.

I used to be more cautious. I used to want more of a plan. But I think the time for sitting back and taking a year to make a five year plan is over. Sure, we need to be strategic—we need to plan as much as we're able—but not at the expense of living. The illusion that if we think hard enough we will know just what to do, that we will have enough information to know what it means to be faithful, is seductive. But these are times when systems as we know them are transforming radically, at increasing speed. That's why we need diverse, grounded, wise people in our spiritual community, so that we get multiple perspectives on choices we make.

We have been given a great spiritual legacy. People have fought and died for our

religious freedom, have devoted their lives to keeping the flaming chalice lit. It is our task to give that light away. Our generosity in doing so affirms the abundance of the light. In contrast, when we are stingy with it we denigrate our legacy.

My favorite part of the new online worship services that the CLF is holding is the chalice lighting. Each week, people around the globe watch a chalice being lit on a video and then, wherever we are, light the chalice or candle we have put beside our computer as we connect. As we do, we type, "The chalice is lit in [our location]." I never fail to get goose bumps as I read the places where our flaming chalice is kindled.

The chalice is lit in Puerto Rico. The chalice is lit in rural Georgia. The chalice is lit in Switzerland. The chalice is lit in New York City.

At the close of our services, after we extinguish the chalice, people type again. *I carry the flame in British Columbia. I carry the flame in Denmark. I carry the flame in Idaho. I carry the flame in Wisconsin.*

This ritual reaffirms for me the strength I gather from being part of this community, and it makes real for me that we are carrying on the legacy of liberal faith that has been handed down to us.

Whether or not you are able to, or choose to, join us for online worship, I hope

that you will consider yourself one of those who carries the flame with us. I love knowing that the chalice—albeit sometimes a virtual chalice—is lit behind prison walls, on college campuses, in military barracks, in nursing homes. Our lights can guide us home, even if we never see each other's faces. We've chosen each other as marching companions, and that choice makes all the difference! ■



REsources for Living

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

What do you most wish that you could get for your birthday? An iPad? A horse? A motorcycle? World peace? A group of people got together and imagined what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would have most liked for his birthday, January 15th. Of course, I rather doubt Dr. King would have wanted a pony or a motorcycle even when he was among the living, and even the coolest electronic toys aren't any good after you've died. But we know what Dr. King really cared about from his actions and his words while he was living. And so they decided to honor his words: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?" by creating a day of service.

Mostly we think of holidays as a day off, a break from work or school and a chance to relax. But, these organizers thought, what if we had a day on rather than a day off? What if our break from school or work was a chance to give back to our communities, to join with others in making the world a little bit better? Wouldn't that be a fitting way to honor a man who devoted his life to working for justice and peace? And so the 16th of this month, the 25th Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, is a day to honor the great man's memory by doing something that he might have appreciated getting done.

What would he want us to get done? Well, here's how I think about it. Dr. King was a man of faith, a Christian minister who took his beliefs about a God of love and justice out into the world and worked to embody Jesus' message of love for your neighbor, and concern for the poor, and turning the other cheek rather than striking back in revenge. I, of course, am not a Baptist minister, and I'm guessing you aren't either. It isn't necessarily my job to live out Dr. King's faith, but it is my job to live out my own faith,



and a day of service is a good time to focus on how I might do that.

We Unitarian Universalists are often challenged to create "elevator speeches" in which we say what we believe in the time it takes to ride an elevator from the bottom floor of a building to the top. So it's not surprising that my first instinct is to suggest that you describe your faith, and then find a way to act out that faith, living it in the world. But, actually, I'd like to suggest something else.

Take a few minutes to write down your best ideas of what you would really actually do for a day of service, and some things that you have actually done to make the world a better place. It doesn't have to be huge stuff—reusable shopping bags and speaking up when someone tells a racist joke count, as well as letters to the editor or calls to your senator, helping out at your school, going to a rally or march, helping someone with their homework, walking or biking instead of taking a car, choosing not to cross a picket line, buying fair trade or organic products, collecting food for people in need, helping kids work out an argument without hitting, planting trees, sharing your skills through teaching or coaching, listening to someone who needs support, etc., etc., etc. You might want to start with everything you can think of that you did in a day or a week that made the world a bit better, and then fill in some bigger stuff from other parts of your life.

One way or another, actually write down a list. This is your data, the information you have to work with. Take a look. What do you see about your faith? What do your actions tell you about what is important to you? Have you been living out a conviction that all people have worth and dignity? That all beings are connected in a web of life? That everyone should be treated with justice, equity and compassion? Have you been living out of a deep belief that God is inside

each person you meet, or that the measure of what we have is in what we give away to others? Have you been determined to learn and to grow, and to provide opportunities for others to do the same? What does your list tell you that you believe about what is highest and deepest and finest in this life we lead together?

Go ahead. Write down some notes on what you learned about your living faith. Don't worry, it doesn't have to be eloquent, and you don't have to share it with a stranger on an elevator. But maybe this January 16th you can have a look at what you jotted down and ask yourself: What can I do today to live out this faith a little more? And then go out and do it. You could even put a bow on your head and call yourself a birthday present for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ■

The CLF Invites GA Delegates

Would you like to represent the Church of the Larger Fellowship at General Assembly in Phoenix, Arizona, from June 20 to 24, 2012? This will be a justice-themed GA, in which participants will have the opportunity to learn from and work with communities doing justice work in Phoenix. And, of course, as a delegate you will be able to vote during plenary sessions.

Our delegates are asked to attend the CLF Worship Service and to work a minimum of three hours in the CLF booth. CLF delegates vote their conscience in plenary sessions. If you'd like to participate in GA 2012, call the CLF at 617-948-6166 and speak to Lorraine Dennis, or e-mail us at LDennis@clfuu.org to indicate your interest. Visit the UUA's General Assembly website at www.uua.org/ga for details. ■





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Web Site www.clfuu.org — E-mail clf@clfu.org — Jewelry 617-948-6150 — Minister's Toll-Free Line 800-231-3027
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Birdfoot's Grampa

The old man
must have stopped our car
two dozen times to climb out
and gather into his hands
the small toads blinded
by our lights and leaping,
live drops of rain.

The rain was falling,
a mist about his white hair
and I kept saying
you can't save them all,
accept it, get back in
we've got places to go.

But, leathery hands full
of wet brown life,
knee deep in the summer
roadside grass,
he just smiled and said
they have places to go to
too.



by **Joseph Bruchac**, published in *Unsettling America: An Anthology of Contemporary Multicultural Poetry*, edited by Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Jennifer Gillan, and published by Penguin Books in 1994. Bruchac is a writer and storyteller whose work often reflects his Abenaki Indian ancestry and the Native worldview. ■

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