

Congregational Connections Compiled Readings

*Presented by the Worship Committee
Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church
January 22, 2012*

Welcoming Web - by Rick Kimball

Voice: I am just one. I stand alone, and in my solitude, I turn to you.

Group: *Be one with us. We each are one, but when we merge, we form new whole.*

Voice: I feel your force. I sense your love. But I must still be who I am.

Group: *Be one with us and yet be who you are. Be one with us and with us weave new web.*

Voice: Can one and one and more be one? What is this web which you would weave?

Group: *It is a web of life and growth, a welcoming web of love's community.*

Voice: But does this web have finite edge, the edge of exclusivity?

Group: *Our web has strands that reach beyond, like you, like us, in quest for truth, in hope to touch and nurture all.*

Voice: Web can trap and web can hold. Web can ensnare what would be free.

Group: *Web can hold, and web can release. Web can be home, and home can make free.*

Voice: How can this web be all things?

Group: *Our web has the nature of those who weave.*

Voice: I feel your force. I sense your love. I join with you now, and I will weave.

Group: *We welcome you. Now let us grow, and let us build, and let us all together weave.*

All: We all will grow, and we will build, and we will weave the web of love's community.

Reflection – by Emma Pierce

Hi, I'm Emma Pierce. You may have seen me up here lighting the chalice sometimes. I also raise my hand a lot because I have a lot to say during *Lesson For All Ages*. I usually disappear after we have been sung out with *Go Now In Peace*. That's when I head back to the RE wing with my teachers and friends.

I want to talk about how it all began. It was about four years ago. I was a lot shorter then. I kept hearing my god moms, Kathy and Lenora, talking about all the fun they were having at their UU church. I decided I wanted to go with them. I didn't really know what to expect. I figured my god moms would take care of me. I knew I didn't have to stay unless I wanted to.

I am making lots of friends with my teachers and other RE kids and also with some of the other grown up UU's. I have a very affectionate family and I love to get and give hugs. I love connecting with the grown ups here at church that way too. I like it when I get to help with projects like the holiday fair and getting up and talking to the whole congregation like this.

I have been to Ferry Beach many times and it is always lots of fun. One time I went to a memorial service for Lenora's parents. Rev. Myke and Lenora went into the water and spread the ashes while Michael Crosby played his bagpipes. Even though it was kind of sad that Lenora's parents had died, I remember the fun part like stories about their lives.

I went to a Salvation Army Camp this past summer and learned a lot about Christianity. I learned about the Bible there. I am interested in learning more about that religion. In RE we are learning a lot about God being inside of each of us and about having souls.

My favorite principle of the seven principles is the one that talks about helping other people like in the web of life. And I also like the last affirmation we say with Rev. Myke. You know the one that talks about when you die you grow into harmony with the divine. I think that would be a lot like everybody helping each other. I like that idea.

Reconnecting – by Erica Bartlett

When my mom died about twelve years ago, I felt very isolated and adrift. I had been living in Boston for the previous five years, and while I had grown up in Maine, it was my first time living in Portland. I didn't know many people, but I desperately wanted some sense of community to ease the pain of my loss.

And then I thought of this church. It was my religious home while growing up, and I remembered how much my mom enjoyed it. She was very involved when we first started coming, and both of us were delighted to have the chance to take the program "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven" together. That was how I ended up coming back, knowing I could find some familiar faces. It was wonderful and supportive to be back around so many people who had known me when I was younger, and who had known my mom.

Later, when I was on the Ministerial Search Committee before calling Rev. Myke, I learned that the desire for such connection was not unique to me. One of our first tasks on the committee was to survey the congregation to find out what was most important to them. Overwhelmingly the result was not Sunday morning services or spiritual exploration, but community. People came here to connect with others.

It is no wonder, then, that the Spiritual Enrichment Groups (or SEGs) have become so popular, since their very purpose is to create deeper connections with one another. I know from my own SEG experience that it can be such a luxury to simply enjoy one another's company for a couple of hours, with nothing required of me but to be present and my true self.

Even more wonderful, in a way, is when this type of connection happens simply as a result of working together towards a common goal. This happened for me in 2002, when my brother and our friend Clara realized that we were about the only young people here. Along with a senior youth group member, we decided to start holding evening worship services to see if we could attract others closer to our age.

As we got to know each other, our meetings took on a secondary purpose – having fun! We met at each other's houses, sharing meals and dark chocolate, playing with cats and puppets as we brainstormed. Eventually new people joined us, and we started holding other young adult activities as well. Our afternoon of watching *Firefly* episodes and eating 13 varieties of pie. Going bowling. Camping. Playing music together. We became our own social group, associated with the church but not confined to it. It's no surprise that some of those people remain my closest friends.

It doesn't always work that way, but to me, that's the ideal. To find not just a general sense of community, but those deeper connections that extend to all areas of life. And I am very grateful that this congregation has provided me, and so many others, the starting place to form those ties. May it continue to do so.

Congregational Sharing prompt

What were you doing when this became home for you? Recall when you first felt really connected. What activity or event caused that?

Lifblood – by Rick Kimball

I found myself in Terminal E of Logan Airport last month, waiting for my sister and her partner to arrive from France. I watched passengers emerging from the confines of customs to the open terminal, and a pattern developed. Each arrival in turn stepped away from the door and paused, head turning and eyes seeking, searching the waiting crowds for the comfort and smile of a familiar face. Then came the sighting, the answering smile, the quickened pace, and the hurling of self into welcoming hug of outstretched arms.

The travelers reminded me of people stepping through the door of Allen Avenue. I first came here in September of 1973. I was climbing out of some low points I had known the previous summer. My wife Tirrell and I were looking for something new, something more. We had met the minister and his wife at gatherings of Falmouth Democrats, and we liked them. Why not give their church a try? We did. We came through the door. We paused to look around. And here we still are, decades later.

Like the international passengers, we came not just to sit and be, but to connect and do, to relate and act, to create and build. And soon enough, we – yes, even I – sometimes came through the door into the hug of outstretched arms. Jack Berman was already here. (And if you haven't met Jack, stick around and you will. He's a long-time member of this church, and holds its all-time hugging record.)

The more often we came, the more often we returned. The more we did, the more we wished to do. That is the nature of Allen Avenue. You can overdo it, of course. You can let the church define you. You can become more UU than you. I realized this not long ago at dawn, after I woke to the thought that this was a clam and calf's liver day. Others would have called it the second Wednesday of the month, the day when Allen Avenue's social action committee has its meetings. But Tirrell attends those meetings, with their potluck dinners, so I get to stay home and eat clams and liver or anything else I want that Tirrell dislikes – or at least knows better than to eat. It's at predawns like that I wonder how my diet came to be controlled by church meetings I do not even attend.

You could, I suppose, join so many committees and become so committed that you would feel a need to be committed, to a sanatorium for rest. But the danger is not great. Quite the opposite. The more you contribute to the lifeblood of this congregation, the more that lifeblood surges through you. The more you give, the more you receive. Platitudeous? Perhaps. But also real.

Our church makes great use of committees. But it is not about committees. It is about connection, congregational connection. We reach out beyond self to each other in acquaintance and friendship. We reach into self and find what lies beyond, we touch the universal spirituality that dwells without and within. We reach from heart to justice. We reach with helping hand to make our world a better, safer place. We reach with outstretched arms and hurl ourselves forward into the all-embracing hug of friend and church, of cosmos and world, of other, and even self.

That's what congregational connection is all about. Welcome to Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church, and to the many webs of which it is a wondrous part.