

The St. Louis Unitarian

March 2017 Vol. 47 No. 9

Worship, RE and Nursery 10:00 a.m.

MARCH 2017 WORSHIP INFORMATION

March 5

Youth Sunday

Children begin in sanctuary and then go to Chapel

The title of the service is "One Step Short of Completion." The Youth Group will be exploring what it is like to be old enough to care and still too young to vote. In the service they will be performing *Yertle the Turtle* by Dr. Seuss.

March 12

"Learning to Dance with the Shadows"

Rev. Gary James

Everyone possesses a shadow. When sunlight hits the body, the body turns bright, but it throws a shadow, which is dark. The brighter the light, the darker the shadow. Similarly, psychologically speaking, each of us has some part of our personality that is hidden from us.

March 19

"Atheism"

Rev. Gary James

You have heard of torching strawmen. An atheist torches straw Gods. It is not particularly difficult. In fact, when it comes to many of the more two-dimensional images of God, I too, am an atheist, as are all of my devoutly theistic colleagues.

— Forrest Church

March 26

"Walking the Buddhist Path"

Rev. Gary James

Over the past fifty years, I have had a continuing relationship with the religious wisdom of the East. My sermon will be a reflection on the wisdom discovered in walking the Buddhist path.

**Designated
Collections
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**New Member
Profiles**



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**FAIR
TRADE
COFFEE
SALES**

**MARCH 12
& MARCH 26**

Minister's Muse

MINISTER, REV. GARY JAMES

After only a few weeks into the new presidency of Donald Trump I find myself reading and musing over the lines of W.B. Yeats' famous poem, *The Second Coming*: *Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer; / Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, / The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned; / The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity . . . And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

Virginia Woolf wrote in her journal, "The future is dark, which is on the whole, the best thing the future can be, I think." We often mistake the darkness as something terrible, when it is in fact mysteriously inscrutable. These are dark days and, like many of you, I have become addicted to watching television news late into the night to help me navigate the darkness of my anxious uncertainty following the inauguration of our new president. The thin thread of reassurance that Virginia Woolf offers me is the hope of uncertainty rather than the fulfillment of all my dread and worst nightmares. While I can no longer hope for the fulfillment of my dreams, at least in the near future, I still have faith in the unpredictability of the world. The despair I experienced while watching the Presidential Inauguration was lifted the following day with the Women's March on Washington DC and marches all over the world, including here in St. Louis. The world is wilder than my own dark imagination.

Rebecca Solnit in her book, *Hope In the Dark*, reminds us that history does not march forward like an army in a simple straight line of cause and effect. History is "a crab scuttling sideways, a drip of soft water wearing away the stone, an earthquake breaking centuries of tension. . . sometimes a few passionate people change the world; sometimes they start a mass movement and millions do; sometimes those millions are stirred by the same outrage or the same ideal and change comes upon us like a change of weather." Remember when, unexpectedly, the Berlin wall came down, along with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, or the end of apartheid in South Africa.

What I find hopeful is that anything could happen in the next few weeks, months . . . the next four years. The American people are anxious and restless and whether we act or not has everything to do with it. Everything begins in the imagination, in hope. But to hope is not to simply dream, it is to gamble. It's to bet on the future, on your desires, on the possibility that an open heart and uncertainty are better than gloom and safety. To hope is dangerous, and yet it is the opposite of fear, for to live is to risk. (Rebecca Solnit)

My dangerous hope filled dream is that we, as a prophetic and activist religious community, will become a sanctuary of hope in a time of national despair. Hope does not mean sitting on the sofa or in the pews waiting for the next presidential election, or settled minister for that matter. Hope is better understood as an ax with which to break down the doors of our apathy and despair, and then shove us out the door.

—continued on page 14—

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

TIFFANY SEWELL, POLICY BOARD PRESIDENT

Mid-Winter Meeting Recap

I've just returned home after what I believe was a very successful Mid-Winter meeting and Joy of Cooking Potluck, and boy is my head spinning! We had a great time tonight and covered quite a bit of information, some of which I'd like to recap in my newsletter column this month.

Membership – thanks to the hard work of Dan Livengood, we now have the most accurate count of voting members that we've had in quite some time. Our church is 275 members strong (not counting associate members and friends), with new visitors coming in every week.

Finances – my gratitude goes out to Steve Smidowicz for providing us with a high-level overview of the current state of the church's finances. The key message that I took away from Steve's part of the meeting was that, although we have reduced our spending significantly in the past few years in an attempt to live within our means, our income has not increased. This means that we aren't able to expand our programs the way we might want to, and we'll probably be looking at another "flat" (i.e. same as previous year) budget for the coming fiscal year. What can you do to help? If you haven't sent in your pledge for the year yet, please do so. If you have sent in your pledge, consider whether you are able to give just a little bit extra to help bolster our finances.

Long-Range Planning Goals – the Board and Council have done quite a bit of work on the 2016-2017 goals identified by the Long-Range Planning team. Some accomplishments include a current proposal before the board on how best to fund our Property Maintenance Reserve fund, updating the existing job descriptions for Board members, and the very successful auction held last year.

Social Responsibility – Charlie Kindleberger and the Social Responsibility Cluster will be working this year to develop a coherent vision for our Social Responsibility program, as well as potentially defining a theme for our Social Activism projects. Look for more communication, potentially including a survey to ascertain your thoughts, coming soon.

Canvass – by the time this newsletter article is printed, our Annual Budget Drive (Canvass) will be in full swing. Please remember the importance of our Annual Budget Drive – the majority of our budget comes from your pledges! I'll be increasing my annual pledge by 10% this coming year, and I challenge each of you to do the same. This increase could allow us to move past the aforementioned "flat" budget and better fund our many programs.

Upcoming Leadership Opportunities – as is the case every year, we have a number of positions coming open on our Board and/or Council this year. Joan Kindleberger is the person to speak to if you have an interest in any of the open positions, or if you're interested in what other opportunities are available for you to participate in First UU. It's been an honor and a pleasure to serve as your Policy Board President these past few years, and I'm actively looking for someone willing to accept the torch I'll be passing on this May.

As I said, it was a very informative meeting, and a great opportunity to come together over delicious dishes and share in the fellowship that makes our church so special. Many thanks to all who attended!

Canvass: Connect, Engage and Support

Canvass season is upon us! For our Annual Budget Drive this year, we will have a KickOff Sunday on February 26th, with a “Why WE Love First U” video during service and pledge cards available in Fellowship Hall afterwards.

Following KickOff Sunday, any and all members and friends are welcome to join us at our Canvass Focus Group sessions after service starting March 12th and going through April 9th. More details and signups for these sessions will be available on February 26th after service in Fellowship Hall.

Our Canvass theme this year is to Connect, Engage and Support First U, and our goal is for all of us to feel connected to this community, especially as we progress through this time of transition.

We thank you for all you do as a part of this congregation, and we hope to see you on February 26th!

-Your Canvass Team

The logo for 'The Kickoff' is written in a bold, red, stylized font with a white outline and a black drop shadow. The word 'The' is smaller and positioned to the left of 'Kickoff'. A registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the top right of the word 'Kickoff'.



Church Council Chair Notes

Carole Watson, Church Council Chair

It's a simple act of faith. You plant a seed, or a bulb, or a seedling. You wait days, weeks, sometimes years. And more often than not, (unless you are trying to grow a decent lawn at my house) a flower blossoms, a carrot burrows down through the earth, a spruce tree stretches for the sky. A garden is born. At our church, sincere people of good faith and of all ages have been planting, tending, and harvesting a special garden that supports the Trinity Food Pantry. The late-**Connie Goss** was one of those people; **Karen Siegrist** did this for a long time, until sidelined by health problems – we hope she'll be back in the garden again soon; and **Lisa Ross** currently is holding the hoe alone. As a congregation, we are indebted to these women. **Lynn Hunt and the RE program** are still very much involved, but we need new, committed garden volunteers to carry this ministry on. The raised beds on the Kingshighway side of our church represent much more than a garden. Dozens of pounds of fresh vegetables, from beans to tomatoes, sweet potatoes, okra and more, are harvested throughout the summer and dropped off a few blocks away at the Trinity Episcopal Church. Fresh-from-our-garden-and-our-hearts veggies, free for people who need them. I was hungry and you fed me. This speaks to the heart of our mission and who we are as urban UU's. So who are you out there reading this, you gardeners in waiting? Get in touch with me or with Lisa Ross ASAP; spring is coming soon! And we need **YOU** to keep this tradition strong.

Another Team that needs reinventing is the **Feasts and Festivals Team**. This needs to be an inter-generational group of men and women who know/are willing to learn our kitchen and our year-round traditional feasts. I'm hoping to hear from and/or identify **a dozen folks** who will divide and conquer our major gatherings: Hanging of the Greens, Midwinter Meeting, Spring Fellowship Dinner, etc. We need more hands on deck to share this important work! Call me or tap me on the shoulder at church.

Finally, we are halfway through a challenging year. Thanks are due to everyone who has contributed to our success so far, from the delightful auction through the Midwinter Meeting. Our new minister, Rev. Gary James, is steering us through the sometimes choppy waters of transition to a settled minister. Our church staff, Policy Board, Church Council, committee chairs and team members, plus all of you volunteers out there, deserve a Standing O(vation). Keep on believing in our shared dreams.



FAIR TRADE COFFEE SALES

March 12 & 26

Remember that we now accept *credit and debit cards* as payment through PayPal, in addition to cash and checks. All Fair Trade products sold at First Church support small-scale farmers and their local cooperatives in the authentic Fair Trade model. Thank you for being a part of this. It matters.

WOMEN'S ALLIANCE



On Tuesday, March 14 the Women's Alliance will hold the monthly business meeting at 11:00 am. At noon, bring your sandwich or other lunch and join us for a meal.

Dessert and coffee or tea will be provided. After lunch, we'll hear Dr. Stan Birge talk about some new medical news. All women of the church are invited.

On Tuesday, March 28, join the Women's Alliance at noon. Bring your own meal and dessert and coffee or tea provided. Afterward Dr. Tony and Melanie Fathman will present "East Meets West in Iran and Spain". All women of the church are invited.

—Deborah Richie

Op Shop

Be sure to stop by the Op Shop in Fellowship Hall to check out their bargains. We also have two beautiful solid oak, "pressback" chairs \$30/each.



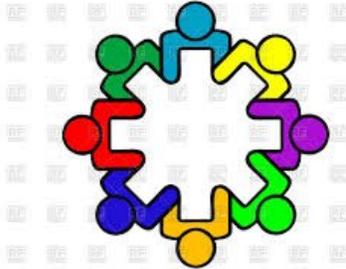
The Auction Continues!

Sign up today for "Cellarbration in May" Broaden your pallet. Come taste different wine varietals that retail for less than \$20 per bottle with appetizer pairings. Donors: Wilke and Fathman Families. Where: Fathman home in the Central West End. Date: Sunday, May 21, 2017 at 3:00 pm. Suggested donation: \$35

Toward Justice Book Discussion Group

March 30th 7pm-8:30pm. 'White Rage' by Carol Anderson, Ph. D. The Toward Justice Anti-Racism group sponsors book discussions that look at racism, the African-American experience and White privilege. The upcoming discussion will be of Carol Anderson's 2016 'White Rage'. This book chronicles the history of the relative lack of Black progress in the United States. From the jacket cover: 'As Ferguson, Missouri, erupted in August 2014 with media commentators referring to the angry response of African Americans yet again as "black rage," historian Carol Anderson wrote a remarkable op-ed in the *Washington Post* showing that this was, instead, "white rage" at work. With so much attention on the flames," she writes, "Everyone had ignored the kindling."

Please join us to lend your voice to the issues presented in this book. Sign-up in Fellowship Hall and let Cathy Rauch know if you need help finding a copy.



Board Notes – Policy Board meeting February 14

Minister’s Report. Rev Gary James provided an update on his activities over the past couple of months, including his rollout of his regular monthly scheduled “Fireside Chat” sessions and the activities of the Minister’s Transition Team. Around 30 people attended his first Fireside Chat session in February and was considered a success. The Transition Team continues to interview various groups and leadership in the church to assist in the clarification of our vision.

Mid-Winter Meeting. A reported 100 persons attended the Mid-Winter Meeting helping make the celebration of the 100 years in our building and Irma Rombauer’s classic cookbook, *The Joy of Cooking* an overwhelming success.

Settled Minister Process. The Policy Board is reviewing the feedback that was obtained at the Mid-Winter Meeting in response to an update on the Board’s progress.

Canvass Update. Dan Livengood, Canvass Chair for this year, provided an update on current planning. The Canvass will formally kick off Sunday, February 26 and run through April with a series of focus sessions to be held after the Sunday services. A theme, “***Connect, Engage, and Support***” was selected.

Budget Changes. The Board approved the finance committee’s recommendations to adjust the Minister’s Sabbatical Fund, currently at \$44,000, by using \$15,000 to fund the Capital Maintenance Reserve and placing \$25,000 in the General Fund for further review of possible uses. The sabbatical fund will be rebuilt as part of the FY17/18 budget planning.

Job Description – Peace Building Team. The board is currently reviewing and updating all Policy Board Job Descriptions. The Peace Building Team Committee (chaired by Katy Wire) description was reviewed and approved with minor changes

Upcoming Congregational Events. Dates announced for:
Fellowship Dinner, Saturday, April 8 and Annual Meeting, Sunday, May 21.

The Young Adult Group, led by Victoria Bonvento attended our meeting to experience and learn more about our governing process.

Larry Dusenbery on behalf of the Policy Board

LIFESPAN FAITH DEVELOPMENT

ANDREA BERIN
ACTING RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR

HELLO!! Last month, Lynn began a three month sabbatical which is generously offered by this congregation to the Religious Educator position every seven years. During this time she will not be involved in the day-to-day operations of the Religious Education program or general church functions. Rather, she will be concentrating in several areas of study: rewriting and updating our history of religion curriculum, reviewing anti-racism materials for children and youth, and Sunday School models/faith development structure.

I want to thank everyone in the RE program, for working with me while I work out the kinks in “how to be Lynn.” I am excited for our upcoming events such as the Unfish Fry which I’ve participated in since its inception, from the mind of our brilliant and fearless leader Sue Herzberg (See below for more details). Some who are not related to the RE programs may have seen me read/tell a story for all ages by now. I am open to suggestions for stories based on the sermon themes. For those of you who do not know me, let me share a bit about myself. I am a mother of two daughters, 11 and almost 9. I was raised Jewish until 4th grade. At that point my mom (Mimi Hubert) started attending First UU and my brother and I tagged along for Christmas eve services. I began attending the RE program at 12 and was a member of the Boston Trip group. I went through the coming of age program and had my affirmation at the end of 8th grade. I was a member of the youth group

and my mom, along with Mike Nolan, were the advisors. My daughters have attended since they were nursery aged and I’ve volunteered with the RE program as a teacher and helped with various events. Currently, I am the “banner hanger,” part of the Unfish Crew, and now short term RE Director. Thank you for letting me served this church community.

This month we will have a chapel service on **March 5th** but, children will **START** in the sanctuary and go directly to chapel after the story for all ages.

As always, **Augustine Underwood** and **Rhonda Buerger**, will continue their excellent support of religious education.

Covenant Groups

In Covenant Groups people come together in a circle of trust, in covenant, to be in right relation with one another with respect and care. We cultivate deep listening as each person takes a turn in a kind of sacred space to express what stirs in them about the topic of the session. The careful listening enriches the lively back and forth interchange that follows. If you would like more information about joining a group, sign up in Fellowship Hall, call the Faith Development Office (314-361-0595 ext 25) or send a message through the website (<http://www.firstuustlouis.org/engaging/covenant-groups>).

Unfish Fry is Coming!

Friday, March 10, 2017 from 5-7pm

Adult tickets are \$8 and children's tickets are \$5

The Unfish Fry is still looking for volunteers! The Unfish Fry Crew will be serving our annual all vegetarian meal that will be open to the public and we need your help.

Fun, good times and good food are promised for all. If you are interested in helping in any way, from cooking or baking to selling tickets or helping wash dishes and cleaning up, please join us! Being part of the Unfish Fry crew is a great way for new or long-term members to have fun getting to know people. Please sign up in Fellowship Hall; the Unfish Fry Crew needs you!

Tickets will be on sale Sundays in Fellowship hall after the service, at the church office, or at the door. **Adult tickets are \$8 and children's tickets are \$5.** This event is sponsored by the Religious Education Committee. Everyone is highly encouraged to attend and invite friends, relatives, or co-workers! This is a great opportunity to enjoy good food, music and fellowship and introduce people to Unitarian Universalism. The Unfish Fry Crew will see you there!

ERDE

Saturday, March 18, 2017 from 2-4 PM

La Vista Ecological Learning center in Godfrey IL

This spring ERDE is joining La Vista Ecological Learning center in Godfrey IL for their Spring Equinox celebration on **Saturday March 18 from 2-4 PM.** Come join us in welcoming spring, and learn more about this organization, whose mission is to "foster an ecological consciousness of the integrity of creation." All are welcome, but please **RSVP to Lisa Ross, lisros54@gmail.com**, so we can

coordinate and let La Vista know how many are coming. Feel free to visit their website: <http://www.lavistaclc.org/>.

Toward Justice Book Discussion

March 30, 2017

'White Rage'

by Carol Anderson, Ph.D.

The Toward Justice Anti-Racism group sponsors book discussions that look at racism, the African-American experience and White privilege. The upcoming discussion will be of Carol Anderson's 2016 'White Rage'. This book chronicles the history of the relative lack of Black progress in the United States. From the jacket cover 'As Ferguson, Missouri, erupted in August 2014 with media commentators referring to the angry response of African Americans yet again as "black rage," historian Carol Anderson wrote a remarkable op-ed in the Washington Post showing that this was, instead, "white rage" at work. With so much attention on the flames," she writes, "everyone had ignored the kindling." Please join us to lend your voice to the issues presented in this book. Sign-up in Fellowship Hall and let Cathy Rauch (crauch1949@gmail.com) know if you need help finding a copy.

MEET CHRIS KOCHER AND LAUREL HEDDENS



Chris Kocher and Laurel Heddens may be new(er) members, but they are not new to First Unitarian. They began coming here about ten years ago when Suzanne Meyer was our minister. Their older daughter, Kathryn (15), was enrolled in Kindergarten RE and their younger daughter, Claire (12), spent time with Miss Augie. In 2011, they moved to Vancouver, WA, and attended the Unitarian church there. In 2013, they moved back to St. Louis and are very happy to be back (though they miss the Pacific Northwest). The Heddens-Kocher family resides in Webster Groves.

Chris and Laurel are both Illinois-born. Chris – a farm boy from Oblong, and Laurel – a suburban girl from Mt. Prospect. Chris is an R&D engineering manager at bioMérieux in Hazelwood. Laurel spent 18+ years teaching high school Social Studies in Belleville before devoting her considerable energies to raising their two children.

For a number of years, Chris has sung in the choir and Laurel has taught various RE classes in our church. – *shared by Chris and Laurel with the Spotlight Team*

MEET ALICIA CLAIRE LLOYD

It's difficult to profile new member Alicia Claire Lloyd in the space allotted, so this will be a partial profile, but hopefully enough that you will want to get to know her. Alicia is a long-time U.U. but has been attending our church for somewhat over two years after moving to St. Louis. I got to know her while working together on the Long Range Planning Committee, and realized our congregation has a new, young leader waiting in the wings. Her favorite church activities include Hanging of the Greens, ERDE rituals, Partner Church, and the Young Adults Group, especially camping and hiking. Alicia has a BA and MA in Political Science and International Relations and is finishing a PhD in Environmental Resources and Policy at SIUC. She is the current head of the water and agriculture policy program at the Missouri Coalition for the Environment. Some of her other interests include: volunteering at Covering House, an organization that supports girls who are victims of sex trafficking; serving on the Pride 5K Run organizing committee as well as being a member of St. Louis Frontrunners LGBT running group. Get to know this smart, talented, energetic new member, you will like her instantly.

-- *penned by Tony Fathman, Spotlight Team*

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

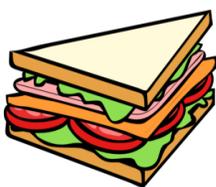
DESIGNATED COLLECTIONS: As a way of putting our faith into action, we as a church periodically dedicate one of our collections to a worthy non-profit or church program. March's Designated Collections are Youth Group (March 5th) and Sandwich Making (March 19th)



The Youth Group has chosen **Provident** to be the recipient of March 5th's Designated Collection.

Provident is a St. Louis organization that helps "individuals and families to a *brighter future* through counseling, suicide prevention and intervention, and community support programs" with a focus on underserved and economically disadvantaged areas of St. Louis. (Quote taken from their website <http://www.providentstl.org/AboutUs.aspx>)

UU Sandwich Making is a multigenerational



social justice activity that informs and promotes the issue of hunger in St. Louis. Project volunteers (our adults, teens, and children) gather twice monthly in Fellowship Hall before and during services to prepare bag lunches for the homeless in downtown St. Louis. The lunches are distributed through Gateway 180, the largest Missouri shelter serving women and children, and the Biddle House Opportunity Center Food Program. All First Church members and newcomers are invited to join in the Sandwich Project which springs into action

each second and fourth Sunday of the month year-round. This recipient was nominated by church member Rosemary Lawton.

April

Gateway Greening
Prison Performing Arts

May

Payback, Inc.
Pathways to Independence

June

Project Mathematics Education for Gifted
Secondary School Students
Hootie's Rescue Haven

July

Lighting the Path
Sandwich Making if needed

August

St. Martha's Hall.



Save the Date of Saturday May 6th.

The Community Action Endowment Fund fundraising dinner originally scheduled for January 19th has been re-scheduled for May 6th. More details will follow.

RECYCLING



Don't forget....the church belongs to a recycling

program with **Quill**, our office supply company. The church receives rebates for recycling inkjet cartridges. Recycle bins are found in the copy area of the church office.



**DON'T FORGET
TO LIKE US,
FOLLOW US
AND CHECK-IN
ON
FACEBOOK**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FITNESS: BODY, MIND AND SOUL....

QIGONG OFFERED AT FIRST UU

- **Qigong** combines mindful, gentle, physical postures and movements with meditation, breath-work, sounds (mantras) and self-massage techniques to revitalize your Vital Life Force energies and to enhance physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual healing.
- **Qigong** techniques help to dissolve accumulated stress and fatigue, increase energy, and strengthen the immune system.
- Accumulated daily practice of **Qigong** movements and meditation build up a storehouse of Qi energy and also lead to enhanced concentration, improved mental focus, and greater intuitive functioning.



*Hour long Qigong classes on Tuesdays
at 2pm in Hope Chapel.*

These are pay-as-you-can classes.



TOASTMASTERS CLUB

Join us each first and third Sunday at 7 p.m. in the Clark Room. For information contact Stan Veyhl at (314) 863-3229 or sveyhl@earthlink.net.

DO YOU SHOP ON-LINE?



When making your on-line purchases be sure to log on to GoodSearch.com. Search for your items through Good Search, each search earns money for First Unitarian Church. The potential is SO MUCH higher...cost to you...ZERO!

Simply go to the GoodSearch website, log-on and input "First Unitarian Church of St. Louis" into the field that asks for what group you want to support. It's that easy.

It's a free and easy way to raise money for our church and get some of your shopping finished.

Each month, GoodSearch sends the church a check!



Don't forget to use your eScrip card when shopping at Schnucks. The church receives a percentage each time you shop. Don't have an eScrip Card? Stop by the sign-up table in Fellowship Hall and pick up one this Sunday. Simply register on-line and you are ready to earn money for First Unitarian Church.

ROAD TO MEMBERSHIP



Anyone who wishes to join our church as members should email Dan Livengood, our Membership and Involvement Coordinator, at dlivengood@firstuustlouis.org.

We will periodically set up a membership book signing session based on the schedules of those interested.

We warmly welcome you to our religious community.

HOME STAY IN CSOKFALVA-- Our Partner Church Village



This past September nine members of this congregation and one very dear Quaker lady had the most wonderful opportunity to travel to Budapest, Hungary, and to Transylvania, Romania, for two weeks.

Despite the fact that these are not the most frequented European tourist destinations—or perhaps because of it—the trip far surpassed our expectations and was culminated by the four-night home stay in our partner church village of Csokfalva—for me, the high point of the trip.

But first let me explain a little of the history and geography of the region. Transylvania was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1920 (after World War I), when it became the western portion of Romania. Since they had been part of Hungary prior to 1920, most of the populace at that time spoke Hungarian; in fact, the Unitarians of Transylvania continue to use Hungarian to this day. In the intervening years, however, the Romanian government has made a concerted effort to populate Transylvania with

ethnic Romanians, with the end result that the ethnic Hungarians are now in the minority and must continually fight for their rights. This is particularly evident in religious matters: although freedom of religion is nominally tolerated, the Romanian Orthodox Church is the official state religion and is supported financially by the Romanian government—to such an extent that every city, town, and village must have at least one Romanian Orthodox church...even if there are no members! This is the case in Csokfalva, where, ironically, the small Romanian Orthodox church stands right next to the Unitarian minister's house. It is with this Unitarian minister--Lóránt Tökés and his wife, Csilla -- that my husband, Joel, and I had the honor of staying.

Lóránt (in his 30's) and Csilla (29) came to Csokfalva six years ago and have brought a wave of new ideas to the village: new ideas about improving and new ideas from other parts of the world. And because of their continual fight to be recognized as an entity by the Romanian government, Lóránt and Csilla put a great importance on Hungarian folklore and traditions, to the extent that they were even married in Hungarian traditional dress. They also lead a folk dance group of teenagers: he choreographs the dances and works with the boys, she works with the girls. This group performed for us at a wine-tasting soirée held in the manor house/"castle" which had been the residence of an ancestor of Queen Elizabeth II! These

young people dance as if they were professionals and have even toured Europe, including a recent trip to compete in Finland. Lóránt told us a humorous story of a honeymoon trip offered them by the members of this folk dance group: first, he and his wife were accompanied by some of these members (a honeymoon with teenagers?!) Secondly, there was supposed to be a world folk dance competition in the Orkney Islands (north of mainland Scotland), but when they arrived (after an all-night bus ride from London) there was absolutely nothing, not even a place to stay. What a honeymoon!

Despite this inauspicious start, Lóránt and Csilla have two small boys, Elöd and Apór. Unfortunately, we never met them, however, for they had been sent to grandma's house in another village to make room for Joel and me. It turned out that Lóránt and Csilla gave up their own bedroom so that we could use it. Not only was this generous of them, but also on the wall was a charming Hungarian folk tale illustration which had been hand-painted by Csilla. Just an example of the lengths to which our hosts went to make our stay a special one.

And it was indeed special: we were very comfortably accommodated, as well as being nourished by Csilla's wonderful cooking. By living in the parsonage with Lóránt and Csilla, we were able to ascertain for ourselves what was adequate and what needed improvement. For exam-

ple, the front porch, which our church had provided the funds to enlarge, was put right to use: on the evening of our arrival, our welcome get-together was held there. And on our last day during the outdoor Thanksgiving feast held at a long community table, it rained, of course, and the tables were summarily lifted—silverware and dishes and all—and placed on the newly-widened porch as the celebration continued without missing a beat. Our church had also supplied a dehumidifier, which had helped somewhat, but there was still mold inside the parsonage, a situation for which we have recently sent funds to try to rectify.

Csokfalva's beautiful Unitarian church is a historical jewel built in 1798 and has the distinction of always having been Unitarian, in contrast to many other Unitarian churches which were converted from Catholicism during the Reformation. Because of its age, it is always in need of repair and renovation. Lóránt gave us a tour to show us areas currently in need of repair: the bell tower, which is too dangerous to go up in now; the plastering on the exterior walls; and the small worship table, which needs refinishing. The love that the congregation feels for their church is evident in its interior decoration: the soft green paint of the pews and woodwork, and the lovingly hand-done red embroidery which adorns the church.

—continued on page 16—

—continued from page 15 (Home Stay)—

This love was also evident in the attitude of the villagers. During the entire trip I kept trying to study a few words of the indecipherable (to me) Hungarian language. I finally managed to do pretty well with “*köszönöm*” (pr: kuh suh num; “thank you”) and “*szívesen*” (pr: see va shan; “you’re welcome”) but as we started our home stay I thought, “Oh, boy, here goes nothing.” However, much to my relief both Lóránt and Csilla spoke English and we were able to have some wonderful, in-depth conversations. We even laughed together...many times. Other home stay families usually had a son or daughter who was studying English in school and was able to translate. And there was an official translator, Emeshe Osvath, who translated for group events. It turned out that language wasn’t much of a problem: it was overcome by love, laughter, and good will.

—Gwenne Hickman



Thank you for your patience during the church office transition to the domain hosting by Charter. Please continue to send emails to office@firstuustlouis.org, the church administrator, Yvette Clemons is aware of the issues and she receives the bounces on each email. If you feel more comfortable until this matter is resolved, please send your emails to Yvette Clemons at diva4lifeyc@gmail.com.

News from the Transition Team



Your transition team, appointed by the Policy Board, is composed of Brian Blosser, Jeff Cary, Chuck Eby, Judy Myer, Todd O'Boyle, and Margaret Weck. We are now meeting on a roughly monthly basis with Rev. Gary James to discuss his interim ministry and how to prepare the church community to be ready for a search for a new settled minister.

As a first major undertaking the transition team is engaged in interviewing groups of people representing various groups within the congregation. This is NOT the same thing as the formal congregational survey of all Members and Friends which will be done as part of preparing our Congregational Record for the formal search process. The current goal of the current transition team is to use one common set of questions to develop a "snap-shot" view of who we are now as a congregation from a broad range of individuals. If you have not been contacted as part of a "representational group," but would like to be interviewed, please feel free to contact any member of

the transition team. All members and friends of the congregation will be asked to participate in the formal congregational survey after a search committee has been formed.

The team has committed to an approach consistent with the tenets of appreciative inquiry. The process is designed to emphasize what we as a congregation view as our current strengths and where we collectively would like to see the live and programs of the church. Appreciative inquiry seeks to make plans for development that build on our strengths and indicate areas for future development if we are to attain our common vision for the future of the church based on a realistic appraisal of where we are now.

—Margaret Weck

JOYS AND CONCERNS FROM MARCH 2016

Let us keep in our minds all who live with grief or joy this day, those who are healing from illness or surgery and those who have family members who are ill.

—**Sue Ashwell** is home recovering from foot surgery and still not walking much. Cards and visits would be welcome. Even a meal might relieve Jim a bit.

—**Reena Chesla:** Congratulations to Reena who passed her thesis defense to receive masters degrees in public health and social work from Brown School. She will walk in the graduation ceremony in May.

—**James Groenier** who is 16 years old, attends Eliot Chapel and goes to Webster Groves High School was in a terrible accident. Our thoughts and prayers go out to him and his family. A fundraiser is being held on his behalf. Anyone wish to donate should contact, Eliot Chapel.

First Church Food Project

Your donation of canned meats, fish and stews as well as jars of peanut butter and boxes of powdered milk can help individuals in need feed themselves and their loved ones. Donations of personal care products: soaps, body washes, toothpaste and toothbrushes, as well as deodorant and shampoos, are also welcome.

Baskets for these donations are located on the shelves outside Fellowship Hall.

—*continued from page 2: Minister's Muse*—

The church canvass begins next week and there has been much discussion about the needs of the church, the budget, and how to secure the financial support of the church by the generous contributions of church members. For the moment, I want to forego all the many marketing schemes that are oftentimes entertained and suggest we proclaim our commitment to making our hopes real! The work of hope, in contrast to a vague optimism, will require us to throw ourselves actively into what is becoming, to make a commitment to that to which we wish to belong. To commit oneself to the future is to make real our dreams for the future. This, like love, is always a risk and a gamble. Where is the joy in this commitment, the return on your investment? To hope is to give yourself to the future, and that commitment to the future makes the present inhabitable.

The future is dark and uncertain, but is that darkness of the womb or the grave? It is not a time to be lazy or detached. The future of this church and its mission in the world needs your commitment and generosity. Anything could happen, and whether we act or not has everything to do with it.

We are keepers of the faith.

Gary

CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

Please keep in mind that the calendar is updated daily and does not show outside rentals. Refer to the Web Site calendar for up-to-date information.

Wednesday, March 1

7:30 p.m. - Choir Rehearsal

Thursday, March 2

5:00 p.m. - Facilities Meeting (C1)

6:30 p.m. - Toward Justice, (C1)

Sunday, March 5

10:00 a.m. - Worship Service (S)

11:15 a.m. - Visitor Orientation

11:30 a.m. - Budget Summit 2017 (CH)

7:00 p.m. - Toastmasters (CLK)

Tuesday, March 7

2:00 p.m. - Qigong Class (CH)

Wednesday, March 8

6:30 p.m. - Library Committee

7:30 p.m. - Choir Rehearsal

Thursday, March 9

5:00 p.m. - Cooking for Unfish Fry

Friday, March 10

5:30 p.m. - UnFish Fry (FH, CH)

Saturday, March 11

5:30 p.m. - Partner Church Dinner (FH)

Sunday, March 12

Newsletter Deadline/Fair Trade Coffee

9:00 a.m. - Sandwich Making for the Homeless

10:00 a.m. - Worship Service (S)

11:15 a.m. - Visitor Orientation (DR)

11:30 a.m. - Knitting Ministry (C7)

Tuesday, March 14

2:00 p.m. - Qigong Class (CH)

6:30 p.m. - Policy Board Meeting (C1)

Wednesday, March 15

7:30 p.m. - Choir Rehearsal

Sunday, March 19

10:00 a.m. - Worship Service (S)

11:15 a.m. - Fire Side Chat (DR)

11:30 a.m. - Colton Covenant Group (C7)

7:00 p.m. - Toastmasters (CLK)

Tuesday, March 21

2:00 p.m. - Qigong Class (CH)

7:00 p.m. - MWM Men's Group

Wednesday, March 22

7:30 p.m. - Choir Rehearsal

Thursday, March 23

1:00 pm. - Susan Knoll Covenant Group (L)

Friday, March 24

7:00 p.m. - Young Adult Vespers & Fellowship (CH)

Sunday, March 26

9:00 a.m. - Sandwich Making for the Homeless

10:00 a.m. - Worship Service (S)

11:30 a.m. - RE Parent Meeting (CH)

Tuesday, March 28

6:30 p.m. - Church Council Meeting (C1)

Thursday, March 30

7:00 p.m. - Book Discussion "White Rage" (L)

For updates to the church calendar visit

firstuustlouis.org

**Newsletter Deadline:
Sunday,
March 12**

Don't Miss the
DEADLINE!

**Newsletter Folding
Tuesday, March 21**

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Submit news to office@firstuustlouis.org
(314) 361-0595/96 • fax: (314) 361-0712

Minister

Rev. Gary James

☎ ext. 27

gjames@firstuustlouis.org

Minister Emeritus

Earl Holt

Religious Education Team

Lynn Hunt, Credentialed Religious Educator

☎ ext. 25

lhunt@firstuustlouis.org

Rhonda Buergler, Sunday Assistant

Augustine Underwood, RE, Admin. Assistant

Music Team

Joel Knapp, Choir/Music Director

music.director@firstuustlouis.org

Earl Naylor, Organist/Accompanist

Administrative Team

Yvette Clemons, Church Administrator

☎ ext. 23

yclemons@firstuustlouis.org

Membership

Dan Livengood, Membership Coordinator

Mary Thompson, Sunday Sexton

Elliott Smith, /Darrius Salisbury Custodian

Donald Jeffries, Newsletter Proofreader

Office Hours

Mon — Fri. 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday Closed