

# CURRENTS

A QUARTELY JOURNAL OF THE UNITARIAN CHURCH IN WESTPORT

## Becoming a Center of Learning and Liberation

Rev. Dr. John Morehouse



*The Unitarian Church in Westport is a diverse and welcoming religious community, free of creed and dogma, and open to people of all backgrounds and beliefs.*

*WE INSPIRE and support individual spiritual growth.*

*WE CONNECT through worship, music, learning, and caring ministries.*

*WE ACT in the service of peace and justice.*



Our church was alive with celebration when, on Sunday May 28th, we ordained our intern minister, Lara Fuchs, to the Unitarian Universalist Ministry. Forty eight ministers and over a hundred congregants were in attendance as we witnessed this sacred event. Ordination in our tradition can only be done by a congregation, and it was our honor to ordain Lara and send her with our love back to her home in Europe and her emerging entrepreneurial ministry there. You will find more about Lara's future plans elsewhere in this edition.

We have now become a "teaching congregation; a congregation dedicated to the formation of ministers. TUCW has had the good fortune to send fifteen of its former members into our ministry, and Lara's ordination is the tenth so far celebrated in our church. But unlike those who have risen up through our ranks to ministry, Lara came to us intentionally to learn the ways of parish ministry. Her internship, the first of what I hope will be many, was a new kind of engagement with Unitarian Universalism. Her internship was a formal learning program that we were a part of as teachers and learners. From here on out, internship candidates will be nominated to us by our seminaries and selected by both myself as the teaching minister and the internship committee as the lay body responsible for the candidate's education. I thank Kristen Leddy, the chair of the internship committee and the other lay members, Lyn Hamilton, Bob Welsh, and Jerusha Vogel for all their hard work this past year. We are still waiting to hear if we will have another intern minister next year.

It has been my dream that our congregation would be a center of learning and liberation. We are already becoming a learning congregation. Our status as a training site for ministers not only teaches ministers but teaches us in new ways to be in community and to explore new and exciting avenues of spiritual development. We have long had a commitment to Lifespan Faith Development ( "Religious Education" ) for our children, but this year and into the future I also hope to see us grow our adult learning ministry. I taught a class on the After Life, this spring and plan to teach a class on Transcendentalism in the fall. Also this fall, we will be offering the first of several programs to develop leadership skills for those willing to learn. We learn in so many ways. These are just a few.

We are liberated when we can apply what we learn to our lives and the world in which we live. Our many social justice programs are the most obvious examples of helping to liberate others and ourselves, but so is our learning to lead others, to lead worship, to sing, and to serve the greater cause of our faith. We liberate ourselves when we live out the principles of Unitarian Universalism. We liberate others when we make opportunities for others to follow. We are liberated when we share our struggles and grow spiritually from them.

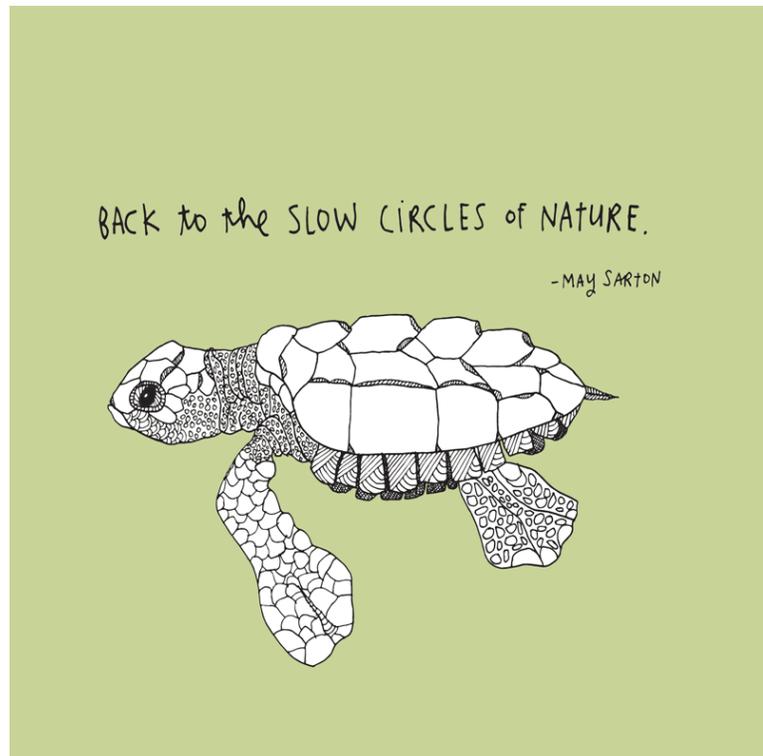
As you enjoy your summer sojourn I leave you with this bit of wisdom from Albert Einstein "Once you stop learning, you start dying" . Lets keep living and learning into our future.

# Summer Spirituality



Summer time has traditionally been a time to slow down, take some time to catch fireflies, or read a book or two of something you don't have to. Something just for fun. So my question is will you?

The Summer Program for our children Pre-school and any wiggly children will rest in the overarching topic of Joy in Nature. During the year Families are so tightly programmed between work, school, and other activities that I'm suggesting slowing it down. Gift yourself with some quiet, unstructured time: play more, remember joy, connect with the forest and nature, and connect with your inner self more often in whatever way makes you feel centered.



## Story for All Ages: May Sarton



There once was an inquisitive, thoughtful girl named May. She was born in Belgium, about 105 years ago. She lived there only a few years until the German invasion in 1914. Fleeing Europe, May Sarton and her family came to live in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where May's father became a professor.

When she was ten, May's friend Barbara brought her to a Unitarian church. She liked the minister very much. She liked listening to his sermons. One day she heard him say something that would stay with her for the rest of her life: ***"Go into the inner chamber of your soul—and shut the door."*** These words would be with her always.

(continued)

As May grew older, her love of poetry and writing grew. She also loved acting in the theater. Once her poetry was known, she began to tour the country doing poetry readings and lectures all around the country. She traveled to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she met and fell in love with a woman named Judith.

Judith and May loved one another. With Judith, May felt for the first time what it meant to be home with someone. But May also felt a need to be by herself, too. After the death of her parents she went to be alone to contemplate and write in a house in New Hampshire. And this is why we are talking about her now.

It was there in the solitude of that house that she could do what the Unitarian minister so long ago told her to do. She could go into the inner chamber of her soul. And go she did. Her book, *Journal of Solitude*, which she wrote there begins, "I am here alone for the first time in weeks, to take up my 'real' life again at last....Without the interruptions, nourishing and maddening, this life would become arid. Yet I taste it fully only when I am alone."

Alone, she was free to look deeply into her life. She explored inside herself. She paid close attention to what she was thinking and feeling. Her quiet noticing brought her to joyful understanding—revelations about herself, her life, and life itself.

**May wrote, "If one look long enough at almost anything, looks with absolute attention at a flower, a stone, the bark of a tree, grass, snow, a cloud, something like revelation takes place." It is these words, in which she directs us to look with absolute attention, that we focus on today. As we look deeply at anything in nature, any part of life, we can see within it a miracle unfolding or the whisper of a miracle already unfolded.**

Like May Sarton, by paying close attention, we may find miracles. They are all around us, waiting to be revealed. Will we draw the miracles we see? Write about them, like May Sarton, perhaps to share with others? It may be enough simply to know miracles. Let them feed our awe and wonder at the universe and our place in it. From <http://www.uua.org/re/tapesry/multigenerational/miracles/session-2/may-sarton>



## More info about Mary Sarton's Poetry... and other observations

"May Sarton's best and most enduring work probably lies in her journals and memoirs, particularly *Plant Dreaming Deep* (about her early years at Nelson, ca. 1958-68),

*Journal of a Solitude* (1972-1973, often considered her best), *The House by the Sea* (1974-1976), *Recovering* (1978-1979) and *At Seventy* (1982-1983). In these fragile, rambling and honest accounts of her solitary life, she deals with such issues as aging, isolation, solitude, friendship, love and relationships, lesbianism, self-doubt, success and failure, envy, gratitude for life's simple pleasures, love of nature (particularly of flowers), the changing seasons, spirituality and, importantly, the constant struggles of a creative life. From Wikipedia:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary\\_Sarton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Sarton)



# HARVEST THE POWER: DEVELOPING LAY LEADERSHIP

Facilitated by *The Leadership Development Team*

**JOIN** Rev. John as he offers a series of leadership development training sessions aimed at both existing leaders and anyone who would like to feel better prepared for leadership.

The series is based on the UUA's **HARVEST THE POWER** leadership development program. The program's 12 sessions are divided into 3 modules and offer opportunities for both new and experienced leaders to enrich the skills they bring to their leadership and to experience their leadership journey as a UU faith journey.

Sessions will run in 3 modules with 4 sessions in each module. Sessions will be held on consecutive Sundays in the given month from 12:30-2pm. Topics will include:

## October 2017-IDENTITY

October 1, 8, 15, 22

\* Leadership Journey \* UU Journey \* Power & Authority \* Turning Points & Moments of Grace

## January 2018-PURPOSE

January 7, 14, 21, 28

\* Fated to be Free \* Caring for Ourselves and Each Other \* Integrity \* Imagination & Creativity

## March 2018-PATH

March 4, 11, 18, 25

\* Facing Danger \* Understanding Systems in Your Congregation \* Keeping Distress Productive \* Adaptive Leadership

Participation will be limited and it is expected participants will attend all sessions within a module, but participants are not required to attend all modules, however it is strongly encouraged. Please visit <http://uuwestport.org/lifespan/harvest-the-power/> for more details on The Unitarian Church in Westport's HARVEST THE POWER modules/sessions and dates, as well as a link to a short application to participate. Please contact David Vita at [david@uuwestport.org](mailto:david@uuwestport.org) with any questions.

# Introducing ... The Leadership Development Team

The Leadership Development Team was spun off from the Nominating and Leadership Development Committee (NLDC). Its members include, Rev. John, Mary Collins, David Vita, Lorna Donnelly, Anne Khanna, Sudha Sankar, and Carol Seiple.

As a church, it is important that we put some time and effort into developing our current and future leaders. Many people underestimate what they are capable of and/or would feel more comfortable with a little formal training. You might find you have skills and gifts you never knew you had, so please consider the following:

- *Have you ever thought about taking your leadership to the next level?*
- *Have you ever wondered about the differences between leading in your corporate career and leading a team or committee at church?*
- *Have you ever thought that accepting a call to leadership could deepen your commitment to your faith and the congregation?*

The Leadership Development Team will be offering opportunities in leadership development from technical to visionary skills, and our first offering will be **HARVEST THE POWER** beginning in the fall of 2017. Rev. John will be leading training sessions and space is limited. This will be a valuable opportunity for new and experienced leaders alike. Please reach out to David Vita at [david@uuwestport.org](mailto:david@uuwestport.org) if you would like to become more involved.



# A Spiritual Center with a Civic Circumference

by David Vita

**“There is, then, in Unitarian Universalism a seamless garment of spirituality and social action; we are a ‘spiritual center with a civic circumference’. Faith exists by mission.”**

UU Reverend Richard Gilbert

UU Reverend Richard Gilbert wrote the following from *In Justice, Equity and Compassion in Human Relationships*: “

Unitarian Universal seeks to be a "church without walls" which social concerns become the agenda of the people as they take their spiritual and ethical values into the public arena.

Our congregations seek to be communities of moral discourse and social action on the frontiers of living. The congregants become conspirators for Beloved Community conspiracy meaning "to breathe together." There is, then, in Unitarian Universalism a seamless garment of spirituality and social action; we are a ‘spiritual center with a civic circumference’. Faith exists by mission.” I remember Reverend John introducing this language during his candidacy week here. It caught my attention then and has stimulated my thinking since.

***For me, the “spiritual center” is the heart. It’s why we do what we do to make this a better world. It’s our UU values, our 7 Principles. The “civic circumference” is how we go about doing it. It’s our life in the public square, it’s the “faith exists as mission”, as action.***

When I lived in Washington, D.C. in the 1960’s and 70’s I was in and out of “All Souls” at least 1-2 times a month. Whenever there was a program around a social justice issue, a speaker, or a performance, it was at “All Souls”. When the San Francisco Mime Troupe would be in town performing Brecht’s *The Mother* (1973), or Tom Hayden or Julian Bond were speaking, or a Gay Liberation Front event, it was at “All Souls”, and I was there.

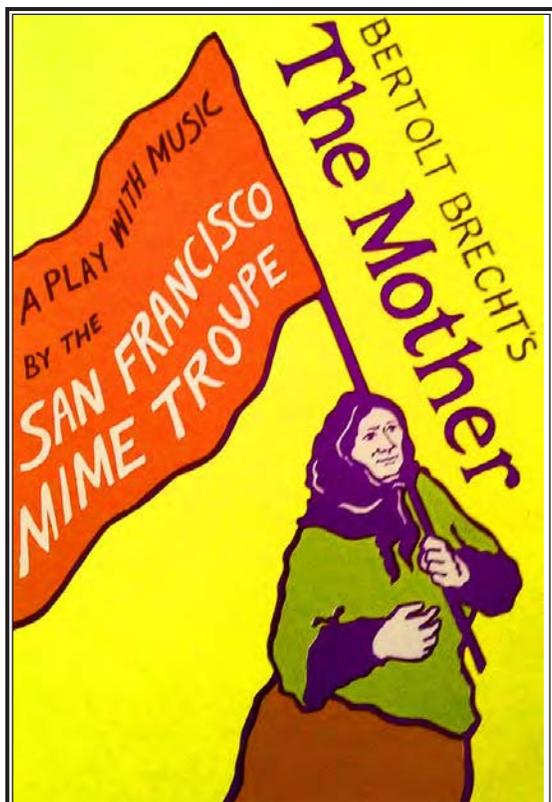
I put “All Souls” in quotation marks because in all of those years I never went to a service, I was never in the sanctuary, it was always the Social Hall, and, while I knew it was a church, I didn’t even know what denomination it was. And there was never any connection made between the church and why the events were being held there. It was, in my mind, simply a venue and I was not alone in thinking this. No one in the very large, extensive, social justice activist community that I was a part of went to “All Souls” on Sundays.

It wasn’t until one day in 2005 when I was applying for the Director of Social Justice position here at The Unitarian Church in Westport that a light bulb went off in my head and I completed the name, All Souls... Unitarian Church!

In fact, what was taking place in the Social Hall was a reflection of what was taking place in the Sanctuary and the community outreach of the congregation. Going back to its founding in 1822 All Souls had a long history of answering the call to serve others and to offer a prophetic voice for justice. And under the Rev. David Eaton (1969-1992) it became THE center of social activism in Washington, D.C., of what I would call, living out our UU values.

*(continued)*

1973 poster for *The Mother*



***... people attending these events will know that they are being held at The Unitarian Church in Westport because this is what we believe, this is who we are, this is what we do, and this is what a spiritual center with a civic circumference looks like in action.***

David Vita

That “seamless garment of spirituality and social action” that Richard Gilbert wrote about existed at All Souls. It just didn’t get connected with the programming.

We will be increasingly speaking of TUCW as a spiritual center with a civic circumference and writing about it as well.

Thinking about my experience at “All Souls” for the purpose of this article I’m going to focus on this programming aspect.

We’ve just created a committee to develop and organize programs under the banner of The Unitarian Church in Westport as a spiritual center with a civic circumference where faith, social justice, and the arts come together.

Voices Café will continue to raise funds for our social justice outreach, build community, and support musicians.

The arts programming will be thematically social justice oriented. Examples might be the poetry of refugees, a dramatic reading of a play like 1984, a one person performance of black women through history, a film about civil rights leader Anne Braden, and a series of events about James Baldwin, already scheduled for December.

In addition, we will also be providing training for our congregation and for the larger community. In the post November election period and, more specifically, after the January 21 Women’s March in Washington there has been an upsurge in new community based organizing efforts epitomized by the “Indivisible Movement”.

We will be providing training for people to more effectively do the work of social action and social justice. It might be about how to run for public office, or how legislation moves through our Connecticut General Assembly and how to advocate for legislation, or mentor training for refugee fam-

Beginning in the fall and on a regular basis there will be ongoing arts programming and training and, having learned from my 1960’s experience, people attending these events will know that they are being held at The Unitarian Church in Westport because this is what we believe, this is who we are, this is what we do, and this is what a spiritual center with a civic circumference looks like in action.



*January 21, 2017 Women’s March launched new community organizing efforts across the country.*



## *What is next for Lara?*

*A question I'm asking myself too!*



I am going home to Switzerland with my husband, Michael the day after my ordination, returning for the UUA General Assembly in New Orleans. Then I'll join Michael and our dog, Vita, for a much-needed holiday in Lake of the Woods, Canada, where we will spend the summer sailing, swimming and relaxing before returning to Switzerland together.

In Europe, there are currently no UU congregations large enough to support a full-time minister, and my calling is not to parish ministry, although, my time in Westport has shown me the blessings of serving a church. My call to ministry is in assisting emerging groups, networking international Unitarian and Inter-faith organizations, providing leadership and congregational development, acting as a facilitator and representing UU values in conversations with diverse partners, building bridges between cultures and across conflicts. So, what does this mean? It means I am creating an entrepreneurial international community ministry. This entails doing another degree through Meadville Lombard, a Masters of Art in Leadership Studies. A full-time contextual learning program focusing on areas of Cross-Cultural Management and Organizational Development, guided by experts and experiences in Europe and other parts of the world. My vision is to be able to work contractually as a consultant with Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist organizations as well as other international bodies to promote the growth of our congregations, to be a proponent of our liberal values and of inter-cultural communications and collaboration.



I will bring the healing message of our faith into the world.  
Blessings, *Lara Fuchs*

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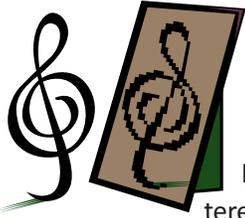
I have truly enjoyed my time in Westport with all of you, and would love to hear from you.

**Lara Fuchs / Hanfgartenweg 4 / 223 Blauen, BL / Switzerland**

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*Gifts towards a scholarship for Lara are very welcome and can be made to Meadville Lombard,  
(memo: European Scholarship)  
Meadville Lombard Theological School / 610 South Michigan Avenue / Chicago, IL, 60605*

## NATURE



On Sunday, June 18th, the Special Projects Choir will be presenting their final project for the year. Since most of us spend time in nature during the summer, I thought it appropriate to hold up Nature and celebrate our relationship to Nature.

In his essay called Nature, Ralph Waldo Emerson had some interesting things to say. When referring to the stars he said that their presence makes us aware of the “perpetual presence of the sublime”. To that category he also added all natural objects such as mountains, flowers, animals and vegetation. He then commented that these “make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence.”

I am reminded that so many artists, such as Mozart, Beethoven and a host of others gained much inspiration when they went for a walk in the forest. And how about all of the visual artists who have painted scenes by the sea shore. And then there are the scientists who are inspired by what they find in nature. Why is that?

Emerson continues:

*The lover of nature is he or she whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into adulthood. Our intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of our daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through us, in spite of real sorrows.*

In “The Road Not Taken”, Robert Frost said “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.” Frost uses his trek in the woods in an allegorical way. Emerson is suggesting something different. The mere fact of being in nature and opening one’s mind is a transformational act. Emerson put it this way:

*“In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, — my head bathed by the blith air, and uplifted into infinite space, — all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.”*

I share these quotes with you not because they are noble sentiments. Rather, anyone can experience this, if they choose, and if they are open to the possibility. And my wish for you is that you have such an experience. One way to get primed is to come to our service on June 18th when the Special Projects Choir will be presenting music about Nature. It will be the perfect transition into the summer. Come to be stimulated and inspired by our musical trek.

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### In Memoriam

**Lynn Peel**  
September 5, 1950 –  
May 23, 2017

**Carol Kovatch**  
January 1, 1931 –  
May 24, 2017