

## SEPTEMBER 11 REMEMBERED

Note: While this was written for the first anniversary of the attacks of September 11, 2001, the material is relevant for memorials in subsequent years. A few phrases regarding timing have been changed to accommodate continued use. Helen Zidowecki, 2009

This CGNews is in three parts. This is Part A and includes a complete session plan from the Rev. Mark Christian, senior minister of the First Unitarian Church of Oklahoma City. It is offered, with his permission, for your use. Part B consists of suggested readings. Part C, to follow just after Part B, will include some ideas for discussion.

--Bob Hill

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### CHALICE LIGHTING

**CHALICE READING**-- We begin with words from Thomas Wolfe:  
(See our hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*, Reading # 555, entitled "Some Things Will Never Change")

### INITIAL CHECK-IN

How are you doing, today? How are you feeling, right now? What's going on in your life that you'd like to share right now?

### INTRODUCTION

[On September 11, 2001] four jet aircraft were commandeered and used in a plot that shook America to its very core. Passengers and crew aboard three planes were killed as hijackers flew fuel-laden airliners into the twin towers of New York City's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington.

For years we have been reeling. Some say it was a necessary loss of innocence, some say it was a dagger to a nation's heart. People speak of "A return to normalcy" but no one seems to know how to find the way to what it was that so many saw as so normal for so long.

Part of our makeup as human beings causes us to gauge and affix value to the passage of time. It has now been a year. People have died. People have loved. Children have been born. Time has passed and now we mark an anniversary.

### GUIDED MEDITATION

As people of faith, as Unitarian Universalists, we have chosen to do mark the passage of time in relationship, in covenant, with others of like minds and hearts. Let us allow to build in our presence a holy silence where we may hear a still small voice within. May we let this whisper of truth and justice and hope nourish us, heal us, lead us. Then in the fullness of time let us share our thoughts, our memories and our feelings. Let us share these things with each other in the hope that our sharing may unburden us, offer strength, and solace to those in need.

When did you first learn of this tragedy? Where were you? How did you find out? Who did you tell?

What did you see that day that you can't forget? What did you hear or think or say that you will never forget?

Take a moment, collect your thoughts and memories and tell us your unique story of that day- everyone, everyone, has a unique story to tell. Take a moment and give your story voice. Those of us with you here today will listen with our hearts as well as our ears. When you have taken your share of the time we have together, say "Thank you for listening. Now I am ready to listen." Speak, be thankful, and then prepare to listen until all who would do so have been heard. We all have stories to tell. We all need to listen to the stories of others.

Let us treasure a moment of silence together as we will treasure words that each of us may speak.

### **SILENCE**

(Share in a way that is appropriate to your group-if speaking order is usually informal, or if it flows around the circle or if it is usually prompted by a marker or leader, do so with this exercise)

### **CLOSING WORDS**

Our closing words are from the last passages of the reading we used at the beginning of our session. Thomas Wolfe said that some things never change, but he concluded by writing that: Pain and death will always be the same. But under the pavements trembling like a pulse, under the building trembling like a cry, under the waste of time, under the hoof of the beast above the broken bones of cities, there will be something growing like a flower-Something bursting from the earth again, forever death less, faithful, coming into life again like April.

CHECK-OUT -- Using "one breath or less" share your conclusion to this sentence: "Right now I feel."

-- the Rev. Mark Christian, First Unitarian Church, Oklahoma City, OK

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## **Part B**

For your consideration: a poem with suggested movements, a reading, and a responsive reading.

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### **CHOREOPOEM**

Linda Van Blaricom, Covenant Group leader at our Little Rock, AR, congregation submitted the following poem with choreography, or "choreopoem," from her friend Lucy Dubose, with her permission.

Something from below (down and scoop with right arm up)  
Something from above (up and over and make rainbow across)  
Beckons me (knock on my heart with right fist)  
To befriend myself (legs wide, grab left arm with right hand)  
All others (bended legs, arms outreached to left with palms open/up; circle around)  
And the earth (bent legs, palms toward earth, fingers facing each other)

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### **READING**

Linda Thomson of Hamilton, Ontario, wrote the following responsive reading last year and modified it for our use. She suggests using it either responsively or simply as a reading:

We have come here today; bruised, wearied and saddened by the remembrance of the events of September 11, 2001.

Our sense of ourselves and of our place in the world has been challenged.

The loss of lives and of landmarks has changed the maps of cities and of hearts.

Yet we have come here today; to be together, to struggle to understand and to risk hope.

We come to listen to one another, and to be listened to, to share our tears and our anger, to find again our understanding that each of us has the power to heal, that each of us is a small seed of the divine.

We come to look with compassion into the eyes of another, and to trust having another look into ours.

Together we bear witness to acts of simple kindness. We wonder that the capacity for goodness can co-exist with such hatred.

All: Truly, it is when we come together, reaching out to be with one another, that we can resolve to believe in a world of justice and peace. Together we can risk hope. Together we can invite back the image of beauty. Our small voices can join and form an insistent chorus that affirms that love is an awesome force.

-- Linda Thomson, Hamilton, Ontario

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## RESPONSIVE READING

(An adaptation of an adaptation)

**Facilitator:** Ministry is not only the province of ordained clergy. It is the calling and work of the entire church. Let us reach out to one another in mutual ministry.

**Left side of room:** *Let us foster a quality of relationship between and among us that beckons forth hidden possibilities.*

**Right side of room:** Let us invite people into deeper, more constant, more reverent relationship with the world and with one another.

**Left:** *Let us carry forward the long heritage of hope and liberation that has dignified and informed the human venture over many centuries.*

**Right:** Let us be present with and for one another in our terrors and torments, in our grief and pain.

**Left:** *Let us celebrate the triumphs of the human spirit, the miracles of birth, the wonders of devotion and courage.*

**Right:** Let us struggle for human responsibility in our institutions and structures, witness to life-enhancing values, and stand for dignity and equity, for compassion and aspiration.

**All:** *Let us strive to be what we wish to see, ever growing in our capacity for a shared ministry of hope and healing, joy and justice.*

-- Based on the words of the Rev. Gordon McKeeman, adapted by Bob Miess and the Rev. Lindi Ramsden, First Unitarian Church, San Jose, CA

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Several readers have suggested the use of a piece by Loren Eiseley which some call "Singers of Life." It is, I believe, in a section of his book "The Immense Journey," in a section entitled "The Judgment of the Birds." If you can look it up, please do. Copyright issues cause me to refrain from reproducing it here.

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## Part C

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Our Arlington, VA, church is only a few blocks from the Pentagon. When September 11, 2001, happened, the ministry team there had begun a series of monthly sermons called "The Big Questions." These were delivered by the Rev. Joan Gelbein and the Rev. Michael McGee, with the other member of the team, the Rev. Linda Olson Peebles, leading the children in a monthly service on the same questions, and with 15 of the church's 25 Covenant Groups making them central to their meetings.

Although this program had been planned long before 9/11, the questions served well in the aftermath of that event. McGee writes, "They gave people the chance not only to ask the big questions that were so prominent in everyone's minds, but to have others to listen, to respond, and to share feelings and ideas."

One or more of these questions may be useful to Covenant Group Ministries in this month of reflection.

- What is the meaning of life?
- Why do we need religion?
- Why evil? How do I know what I know?
- How do we face death?
- Why do we suffer?
- What does it mean to be human?
- How can we survive?

The Arlington church's ministry team has "The Challenge of Religious Pluralism: Searching for the Big Answers," as its theme for the current church year. The focus will be on the answers proclaimed by the religions of the world. Covenant Group participants will discuss those answers to see which they find helpful and which they do not. McGee says, "The premise of this series was that we find deeper meaning in our lives when we have the courage to ask the big questions of life and then to faithfully seek to answer those questions."

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### **INTERDEPENDENCE DAY?**

Linda Van Blaricom and her friend, K. A. Buckelew, have been discussing the idea of a Unitarian Universalist holiday to be called "Interdependence Day."

Van Blaricom writes, "I think that Sept. 11 might be a good date for such a holiday so I am passing this idea on to you to share with other UU's and see if the time has come for such a holiday. Given that our Principles and Purposes include respect for the interdependent web, it seems a natural to my mind to create a special holiday that would underline the incredible importance of our interdependence."

K. A. Buckelew, a member of the Covenant Group Van Blaricom facilitates, has designed art work that could be a symbol for "Interdependence Day." She and Van Blaricom propose that Covenant Groups consider how such a holiday might come about, whether it should be connected to remembrance of 9/11, how people might be educated about it, and how it could best be celebrated.

If you wish to comment about this idea, please send your views to my email address below and put into the Subject line the title: Interdependence Day. I will forward your messages on to Van Blaircom.

-- Bob Hill