

# REFLECTIONS

# WONDER

Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the Unitarian Church of Calgary  
Volume 2, Issue 15 • December 2015

## ***What Does It Mean to Be a People of Wonder?***

We need to be careful this month. Figuring out what it means to be a people of wonder might require us not trying too hard to figure it out! How's that for a paradox? As one of our Soul Matters facilitators puts it, "It seems to me that wonder is the opposite of knowing. Inquiry and knowing happens in the space of reason and rationality. Wonder occurs when we drift somewhere else. Inquiry takes us to a *eureka* moment. Wonder is more of a gasp, a fluttering of delight, at something unknowable."

What an idea: to really understand wonder, you've got to let go of knowing, or at least hold it a bit more loosely. Openness, not understanding, is the point. Reverence, more than revelation, is the gift. If inquiry has the feel of figuring out a puzzle; then wonder might be best described as feeling like a gift.

And who of us doesn't need more of that in our lives? The feeling of receiving a gift.

It's important to note that our UU faith places wonder front and center. The first of our six UU sources of wisdom, which accompany our seven principles, is "Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life." Notice the bigness of this. We are not being called to notice those few moments when we get lucky or when things go our way. The focus is on the forces upholding everything! We are always fortunate; that's the radical claim. That's the transcendent awareness that truly renews the spirit. It's all a wonder! Every last little part of this thing we call life! Feeling that is the goal. Albert Einstein got at this best: "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

Which leads to a related point: wonder should not be reserved for the so-called "wonderful things." To live as though everything is a miracle is to have the gift of seeing wonder in the "ordinary" as well. Saint Augustine was right when he wrote, "People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars... and they pass by themselves without wondering at all."

So let's not pass it by. This may be the most important part of this month. The goal is not simply to feel gratitude but to recommit. Wonder, when done right, reminds us to stop taking the precious and wondrous pieces of our life for granted. As author, Kelly Vicstrom, writes, "Each of my days are miracles. So I won't waste my day; I won't throw away miracle."

May this month leave us equally committed. Happy wondering; No more wasting!

Namaste

Debra

(slightly edited from reflection by Rev Scott Talyer and Soul Matters Sharing Circle)

### **December Services: Sundays 10:30 (except where noted)**

December 6<sup>th</sup>  
Stars of Wonder

December 13<sup>th</sup>  
Spirit of the Christmas Tree

December 17<sup>th</sup> 5:30  
Wonder About Feeling Blue

December 20<sup>th</sup>  
Wonder Work

December 21<sup>st</sup> 7:00pm  
Honouring Solstice – The Shortest  
Day

December 24<sup>th</sup> 7:00pm  
The Eve of Wonder

Dec 27<sup>th</sup>  
Fire Communion

## Upcoming Services

*\*All services are Sunday mornings at 10:30am\* unless otherwise noted*

### December 6<sup>th</sup> - Stars of Wonder

We stare at the night sky, the myriad stars and wonder ... how did it all come to be? It is said we come from stardust. The star is a symbol found in many faiths – ever wonder about the wonder of stars?

Presenters: Rev Debra Faulk

Music: Jane Perry, Music Director with UUphonia

### December 13<sup>th</sup> 10:30am Spirit of the Christmas Tree

The Spirit of the Christmas Tree incorporates the story of a little boy and his family as he learns that there are many different ways to look at something; a Unitarian Universalist telling of the Christian Story of Jesus' birth and LOTS of singing. All of the children and youth in the CYRE Program will be included in the pageant, and there will be 'pick-up' roles for any children who happen to come on the day of the pageant.

Presenters: a cast of many

Music: Brian Dorscht, musical director with Jane Perry, UCC Choristers

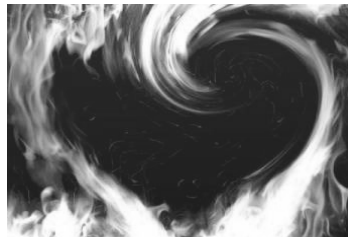
\*\* There will be a mitten tree collection – hats, scarves, mitten, gloves for Inn from the Cold.

### December 17<sup>th</sup> 5:30pm

#### Wonder About Feeling Blue

A special Blue Christmas service to honour the pain many feel around the holidays. The merriment of the Christmas season often reminds us of what we've lost or never had. This will be a quiet service of readings, reflections, and candle lighting, with room made to honour sorrows and pains in our lives. Rather than encouraging you to get happy or in the spirit of the season, we will honour how you are feeling in your heart, no matter what that may be. Second Sunday Supper follows the service on the 13th. A light meal will follow the service on the 17th.

Music: Brian Dorscht, musical director with Jane Perry, UCC Choristers



### December 20<sup>th</sup> - Wonder Work

Have you ever been blindsided by the wondrousness of life? Maybe a moment of pristine beauty, of human compassion, of tranquility amid chaos. In a world where it is easy to lose our balance, can we create the conditions to find those moments when we need them most? Time to do our Wonder Work.

Presenters: Sean Neil-Barron and Rev Debra Faulk  
Service Leader: Danielle Webber

Music: Jane Perry, Music Director with UUphonia

### December 21<sup>st</sup> 7:00pm -

#### Honouring Solstice – The Shortest Day

On this the shortest day of the year, when the time of sunlight begins to lengthen again, we gather to celebrate the wonder of its return with pagan ritual, followed by a mummings play and wassail. Please join us one and all and bring a length of ribbon and some greenery and perhaps a few sweets to share.

Presiding: Brandis Purcell, Rev Debra Faulk and Danielle Webber

### December 24<sup>th</sup> 7:00pm - The Eve of Wonder

On this Christmas Eve we gather to celebrate the essence of this holiday of kindness, compassion, sharing and the recognition of every birth, every child, everyone as a holy birth. We will do this by singing and imagining the messages present in the Good King Wenceslas carol and of course the traditional interactive singing of 12 Days of Christmas and the candlelight Silent Night.

Presenters: Rev Debra Faulk

Music: Jane Perry, Music Director and musical guests

### Dec 27<sup>th</sup> Fire Communion

One of the traditions of the Unitarian Church of Calgary as we enter the New Year is a Fire Communion. This ritual is a shared acknowledgement of the experiences and lessons of the past year and an opportunity to make intentional choices for the year to come. We do this with gratitude for what has been experienced and hope for the future. Come join us in the celebration.

Presenter: Mary Anna Louise Kovar

Musician: Guest pianist

## December's Spiritual Exercises

### Option A:

#### **Share An Ordinary Wonder**

What seemingly simple thing sustains your sense of reverence right now? What ordinary object or relationship reminds you of life's preciousness? What is currently helping you not take things for granted? Or even, what keeps you curious and engaged? Hopefully, this is an easy question for you. If not, figure out why and use this month to reconnect with the source of ordinary wonder that is surely right under your nose. Either way your task is straight-forward: bring in an object or story to your group that testifies to our everyday lives as a source of wonder. One more piece: be sure to also share why this wonderful thing sitting in the center of your ordinary life makes everything not feel so ordinary.

### Option B:

#### **Who's Been Wonderful Lately?**

We say it with a huge smile: "I love it when people surprise me!" The jerk at the office who, out of nowhere, is the one most kind; the nervous and cautious child of yours who unexpectedly turns brave. The self-sacrificing friend who finally stands up for herself. All of them leave us in wonder at what people are capable of—of what we are capable of. This assignment challenges you to find at least 2 "wonder folk" this month—two people who surprise you, two people who remind you why it's important to never write people off. Come to your group ready to share not only the story of your two wonderful folk, but also why you needed this wonderful reminder.

### Option C:

#### **I Wonder What Would Happen If I...**

You are thinking it right now. And if not right now, then certainly at least once this past week. All of us regularly find ourselves asking, "I wonder what would happen if I..." If you are sick of asking and finally want to move from wondering to action, use this month to at least share your secret. Come to your group ready to share what you've been wondering about for far too long, and most importantly, come ready to share one thing you are going to do to live into that curiosity rather than just make guesses about it.

### Option D:

#### **Do You Prefer Child-like Wonder or Adult-like Wonder?**

Of course there's no need to pick. Truth is we prefer one type or the other depending on what we need most right now. So, this month, engage the question with that awareness front and center. What type of wonder are you most in need of right now? Figure out one small way to meet that need.

Check out this blog to help you: [http://www.gretchenrubin.com/happiness\\_project/2014/06/do-you-prefer-childlike-wonder-or-adultlike-wonder/](http://www.gretchenrubin.com/happiness_project/2014/06/do-you-prefer-childlike-wonder-or-adultlike-wonder/)

## Questions to Live With

*As has become our practice, be sure to engage these questions in advance of your group meeting and find the one that “hooks” you most. Then let it take you on an adventure. Live with it for the entire month. Allow it to break into—and break open—your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Journey Group meeting prepared to share that experience with your group.*

- 1. When you were young, was your sense of wonder encouraged or squashed?** How is the legacy of that playing out today? How do you want to change that legacy? Or build on it?
- 2. Do you take the time to wonder?** We make time for what matters. Does your life prove that wonder matters to you? How might you need to be more intentional about making room for wonder?
- 3. Which wonder are you embarrassed by?** Many of us have experiences of wonder we keep secret. We worry our “rational” friends would worry about us if we told them about it. Or judge us. Is this the month you might be able to finally share it out loud?
- 4. What’s wrong with trying to figure it out?** The introduction to this packet talked about wonder and inquiry being two different things. Does that make sense to you? Have the two been more closely related in your life? What’s at stake here?
- 5. Why have you stopped wondering?** You once were a dreamer, but now you talk more about the importance of being realistic and responsible. There was a time when you couldn’t wait to see how things were going to turn out, now you are find with how things are. This may not describe you at all. But then again maybe it does. Are you ok with that?
- 6. Do you believe in miracles?** It’s not really more complicated than that. Miracles are the biggest wonders of all. How do you define a miracle? Why is it important to you that others understand what you mean?
- 7. What takes the wonder out of your holiday season?** How are you going to prevent that from happening again this year?
- 8. What does a different generation need to know about wonder?** Why haven’t you told them yet?
- 9. What do you wonder about wonder?** What question do you wish had been asked on this list? Why does that missing question hook you?

## For Inspiration

*As always, the following texts are not "required reading." We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our groups. They are simply meant to spark your reflections—and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to "live in and with Integrity."*

## Quotes to Inspire Wonder

### wonder n.

The feeling of surprise, admiration and awe aroused by something strange,

### wonder v.

to think or speculate curiously;  
to be filled with admiration or awe;  
to doubt

Synonyms: doubt, reverence, surprise, uncertainty, meditate, ponder, question, marvel

People go abroad to wonder at the heights of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motions of the stars, and they pass by themselves without wondering.  
~ St. Augustine

Something began me and it had no beginning;  
Something will end me and it has no end.  
~ Carl Sandburg

We are the miracle of force and matter making itself over into imagination and will. Incredible. The Life Force experimenting with forms. You for one. Me for another. The Universe has shouted itself alive. We are one of the shouts. ~ Ray Bradbury

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle. ~ Albert Einstein

A mature sense of wonder, does not need the constant titillation of the sensational to keep it alive. It is most often called forth by a confrontation with the mysterious depth of meaning at the heart of the familiar and the quotidian. ~ Sam Keen

The sense of wonder, that is our sixth sense and it is a natural religious sense, ~ D.H. Lawrence

There are mysteries which you can solve by taking thought. For instance, a murder-mystery whose mysteriousness must be dispelled in order for the truth to be known.

There are other mysteries which do not conceal a truth to think your way to, but whose truth is itself the mystery. The mystery of your self, for example. The more you try to fathom it, the more fathomless it is revealed to be. No matter how much of your self you are able to objectify and examine, the quintessential, living part of yourself will always elude you, i.e., the part that is conducting the examination. Thus you do not solve the mystery, you live the mystery. And you do that not by fully knowing yourself but by fully being yourself.  
~ Fredrick Buechner

I think us here to wonder, myself. To wonder. To ask. And that in wondering about the big things and asking about the big things, you learn about the little ones, almost by accident. But you never know nothing more about the big things than you start out with. The more I wonder, the more I love. ~ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

To pray is to take notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings, the divine margin in all our attainments. ~ Abraham Joshua Heschel

One way to open your eyes is to ask yourself, "What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?" ~ Rachel Carson

Wonder is the basis of worship. ~ Thomas Carlyle

## Resources

-Observe the wonders as they occur around you./Don't claim them. Feel the artistry moving through, and be silent. ~ Jelaluddin Rumi

At the back of our brains, so to speak, there [is] a forgotten blaze or burst of astonishment at our own existence. The object of the artistic and spiritual life [is] to dig for this submerged sunrise of wonder. ~ G.K. Chesterton

### Videos & Online

"What is the greatest gift?" by Mary Oliver  
<http://dancingthedialectic.blogspot.com/2010/09/greatest-gift.html>

What can an atheist possibly celebrate? (A YouTube Video)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptwEVOxhTzI>

We Are All Connected - Symphony of Science (A YouTube Video):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Ky2JQq8Iag>

Mr. Rogers' Wonderings  
[http://pbskids.org/rogers/video\\_wondering.html](http://pbskids.org/rogers/video_wondering.html)

This Little Life of Mine, by Julie Parker Amery  
<http://www.uuworld.org/2005/03/affirmation.html>

### Books:

*A Private History of Awe*, by Scott Russell Sander  
*The Sense of Wonder* by Rachel Carson  
*Wonder: from Emotion to Spirituality* by Robert Fuller  
*House Hold: A Memoir of Place* by Ann Peters  
*Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder* by Richard Dawkins

### Books for Young Souls:

*The Polar Express* by Chris Van Allsburg  
*Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll  
*Wonder* by R. J. Palacio  
*The Wonder Thing* by L. Hathorn  
*Draw Me a Star* by E. Carle  
*Somewhere* by J. Baskwill  
*The Look Again...and Again and Again Book* by B. Gardner

### Movies:

*It's a Wonderful Life*: the story of a small town man wondering if his life really matters.

*The Polar Express*: a wondrous tale about belief and wonder and the priceless gifts of Christmas.

*Hubble*: follow the camera that chronicles the effort of 7 astronauts aboard the Space Shuttle Atlantis to repair the Hubble Space Telescope.

*Avatar*, a wonder-filled film about life on another planet and how one person navigates it.

*Wall-E*: a possible look at our society's future and a robot who brings us back to wonder. Great for all ages.

*The Matrix*: how one person's wonder uncovers a new reality.

*The Wizard of Oz*: Feeling misunderstood, Dorothy plans to run away with her dog, Toto. A cyclone transports them to the magical land of Oz. In order to return home to her family in Kansas, she must seek the Wonderful Wizard of Oz at his home in the Emerald City.

**Lessons from Early Learners: Cultivating a Sense of Wonder** By Lily Jones

<https://www.teachingchannel.org/blog/2013/11/19/cultivating-a-sense-of-wonder/>

Being around young children can be exhausting. With questions like, “What is that?” and “Why is it like that?” they act like they’ve never seen the world before. And oftentimes they haven’t! Young kids approach the world with a wide-eyed sense of wonder, constructing meaning from every new experience. While there are many things young children can learn from adults (how to tie shoes, how to read, how to get along nicely), I’ve also learned that there are many things adults can learn from young children. Teaching young children taught me to see the world through new eyes, embrace my curiosity, and to focus on fun.

*Early Childhood Education Teaching Channel* recently partnered with *First 5 San Francisco* to create our first batch of early childhood videos. In these videos, we see children questioning, wondering, and working together to make sense of the world around them. When we allow students a chance to wonder freely, we help them become passionate and driven learners.

Here are three ways to cultivate a sense of wonder across grade levels:

### **Ask Questions, Find Answers**

Conversations with young children burst with questions. By building instruction around students’ questions, we can create buy-in and excitement around learning. In [this lesson](#), Nadia Jaboneta has her students share hypotheses about bugs. (<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/pre-k-science-lesson> ) Allowing students a chance to ask questions, form theories, and test their ideas helps to build independent and engaged problem solvers. The most effective strategy of all may be modeling your own curiosity about the world. By thinking aloud about your wonderings, you can motivate students to investigate the unknown and encourage lifelong learning.

### **Value Unconventional Views**

One of my favorite things about young children is their fresh take on life. In [this video](#), preschool teacher Sandra Davis asks a student to talk about his drawing of a sad face. When Ms. Davis asks, “What are these coming down from his eyes?” the student responds, “Crying drips.” Calling tears “crying drips” makes perfect sense! By allowing this boy a chance to come up with his own name before telling him the conventional term, Ms. Davis shows that she values his ideas. (<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/pre-k-lesson-literacy-skills> ) Throughout the grades, we can help students feel free enough to make guesses that they know aren’t quite right. I can imagine a high school student calling mitochondria a “power factory” or a hypotenuse “the longest side.” Of course we want to make sure all students learn academic vocabulary, but it’s also important to let students play with language to approximate their thoughts, not limiting understanding to knowing the correct vocabulary.

### **Prioritize Joy**

In [this video](#), preschool teacher Jennifer Hawkins says, “Young children learn best by interacting with things that are meaningful to them.” I think we all do! When we are encouraged to pursue the things we love, we develop an investment and appreciation for our learning. As teachers, part of our job is encouraging students to follow their passion and another part is helping students find their passion. The most effective teachers help develop students who go curiously into the world around them, finding joy in places they would have never imagined. (<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/pre-k-lesson-emotional-literacy> )

Lily Jones taught K/1 for seven years in Northern California. She has experience as a curriculum developer, instructional coach, teacher trainer, and is also a contributing writer for Teaching Channel.

## Looking Ahead

### Themes for 2015-2016

September - **Promise**  
October - **Grace**  
November - **Integrity**  
December - **Wonder**  
January - **Resilience**

February - **Reconciliation**  
March - **Renewal**  
April - **Revelation**  
May - **Tradition**  
June - **Revelry**

### Theme Based Listening Circles (TLCs)

You are invited to deepen your experience of the monthly theme by participating in a facilitated small group. These groups meet once a month, usually in the later part of the month to allow time to be with the theme, at various times and places in the city. If you are interested in a group, either as a facilitator or participant, please send an inquiry [tlc@unitarianscalgary.org](mailto:tlc@unitarianscalgary.org)

Current times and places include:

4th Wednesday - 1:00 - 3:00  
4th Friday - 10:00-12:00 - Unitarian Church of Calgary  
4th Sunday noon - 2:00 - Unitarian Church of Calgary

The content for these packets is a group effort. We welcome submissions of your ideas of readings, stories, videos, visual images, questions, and spiritual exercises for each month's topic. While not everything will make it into this collection, it is useful for our worship team and our group facilitators. You can send submissions for any theme anytime - for October's theme of "Grace" by September 15<sup>th</sup>, to [debra@unitarianscalgary.org](mailto:debra@unitarianscalgary.org).

Reflections



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*Thanks to all who contributed and deep appreciation to:  
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