

Newsletter

June 2021

Unitarian Universalist Church in Surprise

Minister: Rev. Terry Sims

Minister Emeritus: Rev. Dr. Walt F. Wieder

President: Sherry Robinson



Newsletter Co-Editors: Gus & Juliet Gustavson

uucsnewsletter@gmail.com

Distribution: Kathryn Pabich

From the Minister's Desk:



Recently, within the space of a week, two contrasting developments in the legal sphere captured my attention as a religious person and former lawyer. The first was the decision by the United States Supreme Court in *Jones v. Mississippi*. Nina Totenberg reported for National Public Radio's "All Things Considered": "The U.S. Supreme Court's new conservative majority made a U-turn on Thursday, ruling by a 6-3 vote that a judge need not make a finding of "permanent incorrigibility" before sentencing a juvenile offender to life without parole. It was the first time in almost two decades that the high court has deviated from rules establishing more leniency for juvenile offenders, even those convicted of murder."

"At the center of the case was Brett Jones, now 31, who was 15 when he stabbed his grandfather to death during a fight about Jones' girlfriend. He was convicted of murder, and a judge sentenced him to life without parole [without considering whether he was "permanently incorrigible", meaning no hope for his rehabilitation]."

"Over the past two decades, the law on juvenile sentencing has changed significantly. The Supreme Court — primed by research that shows the brains of juveniles are not fully developed, and that they are likely to lack impulse control — has issued a half dozen opinions holding that juveniles are less culpable than adults for their acts. And the court has also ruled that some of the harshest punishments for acts committed by children are unconstitutionally cruel and unusual punishment." [Nina Totenberg, "[Supreme Court Rejects Restrictions On Life Without Parole For Juveniles](#)", 4/22/2021, "All Things Considered", National Public Radio.]

The majority opinion in *Jones v. Mississippi* was written by another Brett, Associate Justice Kavanaugh. Now no one accused Kavanaugh of murdering anyone. But we will not forget that, before his confirmation hearing, he was accused of sexual misconduct and excessive drinking when he was a teenager. Nevertheless, the Senate, before the 2020 elections shifted control of that chamber from Republicans to Democrats, confirmed Kavanaugh by just a 2-vote margin to a seat on the nation's highest court.

Brett Kavanaugh was apparently deemed rehabilitated enough from whatever he may have done in his youth to sit on the Supreme Court. But ironically — and yet perfectly predictably — he wrote in the majority opinion that Mississippi did not need to consider whether there was any hope that Brett Jones could ever be rehabilitated. Instead, Mississippi was free to ignore that Jones "had spent a decade in prison, had graduated from high school, and earned a record as a model prisoner." Kavanaugh and the majority reached their decision despite the fact that "former prosecutors and judges, including two former Republican U.S. Attorneys General, . . . sid[ed] with Jones . . ." The Court's majority discounted Jones' testimony at his resentencing hearing: "I've pretty much taken every avenue that I could possibly take ... to rehabilitate myself ... I can't change what I've done. I can just try to show ... I've become a grown man." . . .

So Jones will spend the rest of his life in prison for the terrible murder he committed when he was 15, because the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed the State of Mississippi to throw away the key. "Cardozo Law School's Kathryn Mil-

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ler [said] "A lot of times these judges really [still] want to [] focus on the facts of the crime" even though it is years or decades later, she said. "They're not interested in the rehabilitation narrative." Totenberg added: "Neither, it seems, is the newly constituted conservative Supreme Court majority." [*Ibid.*] And I would add, unless it is with respect to one of their own.

Contrast that with what Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison said after successfully leading the prosecution against former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd. In an interview on *60 Minutes*, Ellison acknowledged the humanity not only of Floyd, but also, courageously, of Chauvin. "I spent 16 years as a criminal defense lawyer," Ellison said, "so I will admit I felt a little bad for the defendant. I think he deserved to be convicted, but he's a human being." When that sentiment was met with surprise, Ellison further elaborated, "I'm not in any way wavering from my responsibility, but I hope we never forget that people who are defendants in our criminal justice system, that they're human beings. . . . I'm not going to ever forget that everybody in this is a person." "[Minnesota AG admits to feeling 'a little bad' for Derek Chauvin. 'He's a human being'](#)", Yahoo! News, 4/25/2021]

May none of us forget that "everybody in this is a person", high or low, graced or disgraced. Every one of us has done things we regret. And every one of us needs some hope for rehabilitation, for redemption. May we be filled with compassion – for all of us.

Yours in our faith,



Message from our President

Happy Summer: On May 9th I had the pleasure and the privilege of attending the first "in person" Worship Service at UUCS with 60 other members. I cannot begin to express how it felt and how much I enjoyed seeing the smiling faces of those with whom I have had no contact for over a year. Rev. Terry, and the Board felt comfortable re-opening our Sanctuary for many reasons, including the decreasing numbers of Covid and the increasing numbers of vaccinations being reported. However, I believe one of the strongest supports behind our decision to "Come Back" was the trust we have in our members and friends. And on May 9 you all reinforced that trust – everyone was masked, remained socially distant and greeted their fellow members with virtual hugs. The Service was, as always, beautifully offered to this group, as well as to our Live Streaming audience, and we even had 3 new attendees who had found us on -line before coming to the sanctuary. I think I heard that we may have found two new members, or maybe more.



By the time this goes to print and appears on your computer, we will have completed the Interim Minister's search and will know who is to be our guide for the next two years, as we move toward our next Settled Minister. We will also have gathered to wish our current Minister a fond farewell and a gracious thank you for all that he has shared with us over the last 15 years. I hope it was a successful party and all who attended found time to visit with Terry. Rev Terry will also have given his last Sermon, which of course I cannot comment on, having not heard it yet. But I am sure it was something special to hold in our hearts as we move on without him and he heads off for a life filled with music and art and family.

We have work to do over the next two years deciding what path we will take in supporting our Church and in serving the wider community. We will be focusing on what we wish to accomplish as a congregation – a vision for our future and a mission to support that vision. We can learn much from our Interim Minister; however, that learning may be difficult at times. Seeing how well we have come through this last year, I believe in my heart, that together we can make this transition smooth and successful; I look forward to the journey.

Blessings for a healthy and happy summer.

Sherry Robinson

Summer is the time when I do my planning for the next season. I will be busy picking new and engaging curriculum and working on setting up a family/child lending library. And I'm really looking forward to sitting in on some summer services. Usually my class times prevent me from doing so!

I'm so glad the availability of the Covid vaccines allowed us to safely gather in time to celebrate Reverend Terry's years of service. I truly believe in the importance of acknowledging life's milestones. I will miss Reverend Terry very much and wish him well for his next adventure. Reverend Terry has always given me the right amount of freedom and support to encourage program growth and creativity. Terry's dedication to Children's RE has been critical in maintaining the program. After working with him for ten years, it's going to be hard to imagine the children's program without him, but we are in great shape to move forward. I'm very excited to meet the new Interim Minister this summer and looking forward to seeing the kids in person again next Fall!



Summer is upon us with children on summer vacation, which means a somewhat more leisurely summer routine perhaps and some of us off to summer homes away from the Arizona heat. The Questers Adult Education Program will take a sort of summer break but with on-going offerings continuing.

If you already participate in BUUK Circle, UU Women's Group, or Insight Meditation, you already know that these offerings are a valuable addition to your life. If you are not familiar with any or all of them, we invite you to consider adding one or more to your summer schedule. Below is a brief description and sign-up information for each. All of them are attend-when-you-can opportunities, and they are open to everyone year-round.

BUUK CIRCLE— Do summer and getting lost in a good book just seem to go together? If so, you can sign up for BUUK Circle with Julie Wambach (azwambach@hotmail.com) and get the perk of stimulating discussion about the books read. BUUK

Circle will meet via Zoom through the summer on the second Tuesday of each month. Below are the books for June and July.

June 8 —“The Code Breaker: Jennifer Doudna, Gene



Editing, and the Future of the Human Race” by Walter Isaacson

July 13—“Hidden Valley Road” by Robert Kolker



INSIGHT MEDITATION – This opportunity for a peaceful “getaway” will continue to be available twice a week (Wed. and Saturday) on Zoom through the summer. For complete information go to [uusurpriseaz.org/Adult Programs/Questers/Offerings](https://uusurpriseaz.org/Adult-Programs/Questers/Offerings). Or call the leader, Yvonne Bentley (623-521-2242).

UU WOMEN'S GROUP – Summer may be the perfect time to spend the 1st and 3rd Tuesday mornings with our UU Women's Group, where friendships grow and there's always something to talk about. **1st Tue. via Zoom—3rd Tue. in person at church.** To sign up email or call Judy Reynolds (jmr2642@yahoo.com/623-882-6012).



Social Justice Aims & Actions

This has been a challenging year for social justice action. Many activists across America and the world have asserted themselves in spite of Covid-19. Not me. I mostly stayed in my cave. Lately I've been pondering what next year might offer in the way of opportunities for engagement and how I might want to respond. The results of pondering my social justice aims and actions are below. Maybe you could help begin planning by doing the same exercise. List for yourself several areas of concern and then state in a few words what you would like to see happen. You can either keep your results or send them to me (reemtsma623@msn.com) for safe-keeping until we convene with renewed vigor for justice.

Environmental Justice

Really Reuse Routinely

Population Justice

Birth a child and Choose a child

Education Justice

Make comprehensive for everyone

Family Justice

Fairness, Forgiveness and Funding

Racial Justice

Become anti-racist

Tom Reemtsma

Social Justice Committee Facilitator

The Monthly Book Report

MaryAnne Balzer

Faithful readers, the change of season means it's time for those summer reading lists. What's on your list this year? I hope this column helps you to consider a few good UU-oriented books; especially from our **NEW** Golden Rule Collection (introduced last month). Joyful and fulfilling reading to you all!

In this month's column I complete the listing of our new purchased books with their shelf 'call numbers' for your reference for book check-out, when our library reopens.



"Real Change—Mindfulness to Heal Ourselves and the World", by Sharon Salzberg, number 126SAL.

"Conversations with the Sacred—A Collection of Prayers", by Manish Mishra-Marzetti, number 242.8MIS.

"For Small Creatures Such as We—Rituals for Finding Meaning in Our Unlikely World", by Sasha Sagan, number 390.09SAG.

"Great Occasions—Readings for the Celebration of Birth, Coming-of-Age, Marriage and Death", edited by Carl Seaburg, number 808.81SEA.

"Twelve-Step Unitarian Universalists", edited by Ken and Cathlean (the long-time 12-step program uses first names only), number 616KAC.

We have received donations of several **Maya Angelou best sellers**. They are terrific books to enjoy a first time or return to as an old friend. All these fine literature books are located alphabetically at shelf number 818ANG:

"The Heart of a Woman"

"Singin and Swingin and Getting Merry Like Christmas"

"I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"

Next month begins our reviews of our new Golden Rule Collection books. *Until next month then, have a beautiful start to your summer!*

TIDBITS



REMEMBER...

OUR CHURCH DOORS ARE OPEN
FOR IN-PERSON, 10:30AM, SUNDAY
WORSHIP

Livestreaming is still available, as well.

**NOTE 2 JUNE IN-PERSON WORSHIP
EXCEPTIONS!!!**

**JUNE 6 & 27 WORSHIP—LIVESTREAM
ONLY...SANCTUARY CLOSED**

We Are Here To Be Of Assistance!

Lay Pastoral Care Committee

Are you unable to come to church but would like a visit in your home from a member of the Lay Pastoral Care Committee? Do you know someone else who is in that situation? If so, please let us know by contacting Joan Carlson (jomc127@gmail.com), Darnell Kirksey (dirk38338@aol.com), or Sharon Beard (sabeard@gmail.com).



Unitarian Universalist Church in Surprise NEWSLETTER

17540 N. Avenue of the Arts
Surprise, AZ 85379

Ph: 623.875.2550

Email: uucsaz2@gmail.com

Affirmation

Love is the spirit of this church.

And service is its law.

This is our great covenant:

To dwell together in peace;

To seek the truth in freedom;

And to help one another.

Join us for Sunday worship at 10:30 a.m.

If you are not receiving church email announcements but would like to, please send your preferred email address and full name to uucsaz2@gmail.com.

Sermon Titles For June 2021

6/6 – UUJAZ (Livestream Only—No In-Person).....Springing Into Change: Dream (er)s for the Future

Spring has come to Arizona, bringing with it signs of a new life. Will we emerge from our COVID winter to a changed world, or will we go back to our old ways? How do we prepare to make real the world we've dreamed about? Hear directly from a few of UUJAZ's partners in the Latinx community, and how they describe their dreams for the future.

6/13 – Stephanie Tudel and Rebecca Riggs.....A Special Sermon on The Golden Rule

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". In a world looking for spiritual guidance and encouragement, "The Golden Rule", as it is commonly called, is a simple expression of a complex idea that has woven itself into the moral edicts of most religions and continues to bring unique promise and hope to the world. This will be an exploration of how our UU Principles and Purposes express this concept.

6/20 – Juliet Gustavson....."What's Love Got to Do with It?"

What's love got to do with it? When it comes to our daily bread...EVERYTHING.

6/27 – UUA General Assembly (Livestream Only—No In Person).....Sunday Morning Worship Service

This service will be livestreamed from the 2021 General Assembly, the largest annual gathering of UUs anywhere. This is a great opportunity for our congregation to reconnect with other congregations from across the continent and the world and to be inspired as one religious movement.