

THOUGHTS FOR THE NEW YEAR 2015

I have never been all that excited about writing New Year's resolutions. I used to see New Year's runners and walkers out to start the New Year while I was walking my dogs. They would give it their all for a while. Usually within a week, and always within a month, it was back to just the regular dog walkers, walkers, bikers and runners who did their exercise year in and year out. I suppose they might have decided to move their efforts to a gym, but more likely their enthusiasm waned. I am not sure I would be such a regular on the circuit if my dogs would let me sleep in, but making exercise a habit rather than a new resolution each year has worked better for me for many years!

I do like to think about the potential for each new year as it appears. We are less than 2 weeks into 2015 and it hasn't been too bad starting off. The murder of French journalists and cartoonists by Islamic Terrorists was disturbing, the discovery of AirAsia flight 8501's December 28th crash site in the Java Sea and the recovery of bodies was discouraging, the situation in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and the Middle East generally unsettling, and the frigid temperatures over much of the country was notable, but many years have gotten off to a worse start!

At our first UU Thursday program of the year, I invited people to share their hopes for 2015 and their dreams for 1UUCS. After the sermon this morning, I thought I would give you a few moments if you have some things to share in response to either hopes for 2015 or dreams for 1UUCS. It seems to me that sharing hopes and dreams is something we ought to do at least once a year, and preferably more often, but we will wind up today's service with hopes and dreams and see what happens!

When I was growing up during the 1960s in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs disaster and the midst of the cold war, I couldn't really imagine that any of us would live beyond 30 or 40 years at the outside. There were so many chances of mutually assured nuclear destruction, that I still am a bit

surprised by each passing year and especially my approach to 60! And of course, if I had really believed I would live this long I should have gotten more exercise and eaten more healthfully, but resolutions aren't retroactive anyway, so I will keep doing the best I can while also enjoying life. I wouldn't mind if the dogs would sleep in once in a while, though!

It isn't a perfect world that we live in, but most of us certainly don't have a bad life in this country or most of the first world. We have decent homes, cars, plenty to eat, lots of entertainment constantly available, even if only on the ever growing small screen. We still aren't doing very well in taking care of the mentally ill, the developmentally disabled, homeless, addicts and alcoholics, and people who have not developed adequate life skills, though. We don't have a very good safety net, and though the Affordable Care Act has pushed many into obtaining insurance, there are still major inequities in health care in this country.

I am not as well convinced as some that having Republican majorities in both the House and Senate will bring salvation through lowering corporate tax rates, holding the poor even more accountable for their difficult lives, or rolling back Obamacare. I know it is a bit heretical, but I really would like to see more commoners in government, you know ordinary working folks. I know that one must have access to millions of dollars to run for state or national offices and that the biggest spenders almost always win, but I can hope, can't I? And of course the Affordable Care Act is not even halfway to universal health coverage, but I would not like to see it disappear—I should admit that I have a personal stake in that fight.

It is hard to believe we are already into the 15th year of the 21st Century. Wasn't Y2K just yesterday? My son turned 30 last year, my daughter 32, my stepdaughter 36, but I haven't gotten any older, at least I wouldn't think so except for a few more ailments each year. Time passes so quickly, where does it go? I want to see new things happen in the world, but I have grown cynical, ok more cynical, about seeing big changes anyway. The rich continue to get richer while the rest of us get by. I think democracy is the best system discovered so far, but it is so easy for some to sway the

masses by telling big enough lies, blaming someone else, and offering simplistic solutions to complicated problems.

More than perhaps anything else, we need to rediscover hope, hope for a better world, hope for more meaningful lives, hope for a better future. Many people around the globe find a sense of hope and meaning in some religious tradition, especially those traditions that promise something beyond this life. As a movement we are becoming more spiritual and more theistic, not necessarily returning to our Christian roots, though for many that would be true. We are also becoming less humanistic, in part because humanism was too often connected with atheism though there have always been religious and spiritual humanists. Like so many religious terms, certain fundamentalists separated themselves by labeling humanists as evil. I tend myself to believe that Jesus was a humanist, one who cared about and for people, but they also forget he was Jewish.

So where do we find hope and meaning in this crazy world in 2015? Younger generations are more accepting of others, less threatened by people who are different colors or are attracted to persons of the same gender. Though racism, ageism, sexism, and heterosexism persist, their overt influence is decreasing. Religious differences still separate many, but the vast majority of religious persons are accepting of others.

There are certainly enough bad things that happen and enough people who perpetrate evil for all kinds of reasons, but that is not the norm anywhere. Everywhere there are good people who work hard, care for their families, welcome the stranger, and work for the common good.

There are also a small percentage of people who out of greed or good fortune, or brilliant ideas end up with more money and more stuff than 99% of us. Even among that group there are many who support all kinds of philanthropy and good works, setting up foundations, paying for scholarships, supporting colleges and universities and museums and religious organizations. Around the world there really are few people who perpetrate evil.

Our UU Principles are all about justice, equity, human rights, human dignity, acceptance and working for the common good. They provide a great guide for us to test our actions, and remind us that we are all connected within the great web of life. If everyone were to live by our UU Principles, there would be far fewer problems in the world. Our Principles are hopeful, committing us to live lives of integrity, accepting and encouraging others and recognizing that all persons have rights and are worthy of respect. Whatever our religious beliefs and theological perspectives, we would do well to test our actions regularly against the values of our Principles.

Unitarian Universalist Association Principles and Purposes

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

These seven Principles, standard of UU actions for 30 years express well the values that can shape healthier lives and a more just and compassionate world. They express acceptance and respect for individuals and their beliefs and challenge us to shape a better world by our ongoing actions. In time they will be replaced by other words, hopefully better fitted to some future time, but for now they remind us to do all the good we possibly can throughout our lives. These words are hopeful for they lead us to loving and creative actions on the part of our fellow beings, calling us to act justly and compassionately even as we seek to shape a world that is more just and more loving.

The work we are called to do is not easy, changing attitudes and challenging deep seated practices never is, but respect and acceptance of others can make all the difference. Shaping a healthier world will take time, energy and commitment. Bringing hope for the future without promises of heavenly reward is itself a challenge, but whatever hope one may have for what might be beyond this life cannot be the reason for making things better here and now! The desire to make better the present world and the world we will leave to others ought to be sufficient.

My Hope for 2015 is that it will be a year of peace, that all people will have enough food to eat and meaningful work to accomplish, that we will discover new paths of understanding between the people of different nations and different religions, that we will become less dependent on fossil fuels and that we may find ways to reverse the current pattern of global climate change.

My Dream for 1UUCS is that we will settle on a new sense of mission that will help us to move forward to support and encourage our members and friends, grow both in attendance and as a UU congregation and to make a positive difference in our community. I would like to see us build commitment within our congregation and in the mission that we seek to offer the broader community.

Each new year provides new opportunities, and 2015 is just full of possibilities. What we or any congregation does with the possibilities will be up to us, but I hope that we will learn together, work together, and together, make a difference! So may it Be. Amen.

And now it is Your turn, I invite you to share:

Hopes for 2015 and Dreams for 1UUCS