

community news

The Newsletter of the Community Church of Boston
A Peace and Justice congregation since 1920
November 2009

Thoughts on Life, Death... and Afterlife?

by Jason Lydon, Congregational Director

Dear friends and members... The month of November begins with the celebration of *Día de los Muertos*, The Day of the Dead. This celebration can be traced back to Indigenous peoples in Mexico and has spread throughout Latin America and to much of the rest of the world, each community adding their own spin on the traditions. The root of the tradition is in the honoring of those who have died and making tribute to their lives. The holiday pushes us to think about how we honor the dead and celebrate those we have lost in our lives.

Growing up, a friend once told me that we can simplify the purpose of religion as the answers to why we should do good on earth and what happens when we die, all the rest is just details. While all those extra "details" seem to take up a lot of religious communities' time I appreciate the simplified definition as beginning questions about religion's purpose. As we pay tribute to those who have died and recognize the celebrations happening for *Día de los Muertos* I want us to think for ourselves; what do we each think happens when we die?

Universalists believe that all people are saved. John Murray, the person credited with founding U.S. Universalism famously stated, "Give them not hell, but hope and courage." In the early 19th Century a significant number of Universalists found themselves in a debate about the validity of future punishment after death. There were "ultra-Universalists" and "Restorationists" on either side of the conflict. Ultra-Universalists believed that all people were immediately saved after death whereas the Restorationists believed that sins had to be paid for or punished before one was able to experience complete bliss in heaven. The suggestion of universal salvation, regardless of whether it was immediate or after a certain amount of suffering, was a radical theological idea in the 19th Century and continues to be so today.

The suggestion of universal salvation, however, exists with many assumptions about the need to be saved, who is doing the saving, the existence of God, the presence of an after-life, the reality of a human soul, and so on. As a congregation we do a wonderful job of exploring why we should do good and what that good looks like. We do not, however, discuss much of what we all think happens when we die. Like many issues we discuss I am sure that we have a great diversity in opinion of what happens after death.

I grew up in a house that itself had a variety of ideas about the role of afterlife. I have spent different times in my life being sure that we all have a unique soul that is part of a singular Source/Creator that when understood as completely interconnected is the Divine. I have believed strongly in reincarnation and the job of the soul to go through life lessons and learn to be more fully enlightened or connected to the Divine. I have relied on the science of biology and physics to explain the ever-continuing presence of our bodies as they transform and become compost for the planet and fuel the cycle of our ecosystems. Today, all I am sure of is that death is part of the dance of life. Just as I make plans for the future years I am living I am aware that things change and that the unknown can shape my life to come, understanding death is similar. One of the gifts I think Unitarian Universalism has to offer is the balance of reason with mystery. What happens when we die remains a great mystery however it can be shaped by reason and faith. I would encourage you to take some time and talk with one another about what you think/believe/wonder happens when we die. How does this shape how you live your life now? How do you overcome the fear of death? Do you think we have unique souls? I invite us to hold these theological questions and to celebrate those whose lives have passed on to whatever it is we each believe happens next.

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF BOSTON



Sunday Service & Speakers Forum

in Lothrop Auditorium
Sundays at 11:00am

November 1st

Prof. ARTHUR KUBICK

"Voices of the Voiceless in Honduras"

November 8th

Honoring Veterans for Peace

Prof. CYNTHIA ENLOE

**"Making Feminist Sense of
the Afghanistan War"**

November 15th

MARTHA LUCIA GIRALDO VILLANO

**"Extrajudicial Killings in Colombia:
Not in Our Name!"**

November 22nd

A One-Act Comedy by JOHN O'BRIEN

**"The Man Who Died and
Went to Heaven"**

Annual Sacco and Vanzetti Social Justice Award:

Celebrating Joyce & Mel King

Come celebrate this very special day with us and honor two incredible social justice leaders in Boston. Bring family and friends, all ages welcome. Look for more details in upcoming invitation!

**Saturday, November 28th, 3pm
at Community Church**

CCB Board Meeting

The Board of Directors met on October 15, 2009

Following are highlights of the meeting.

The following board members were present: Kevin Devine, Dick Keshishian, Jason Lydon, John MacLeod, Nancy Messom, Susan Mortimer, Virginia Pratt.

Congregational Directors Report: The Sacco-Vanzetti Award for Social Justice will be presented to Mel and Joyce on Saturday, November 28, at 3:00pm.

On October 26th, students from Simmons College were to pay a visit to CCB to advise on how to archive material.

Construction on the roof will begin on November 2nd; it should take four to six days for completion. The meeting of the Building Committee and the roof contractor was to take place on October 28th.



The 90th anniversary of CCB's founding is approaching. Plans for a commemorative event will be undertaken in the near future. The Church will also be thinking about honoring the congregational director's completion of his studies at theological school in May, 2010, as well as his pending ordination during September, 2010.

Financial Consideration: The treasurer reported that CCB has taken in more rent and contributions than expected. However, roof construction was more expensive because of the pointing. Insurance, electricity, general maintenance & repairs and musician's expenses were also higher than anticipated. It will be necessary to budget more money for expenses next year.

Various Concerns: Members of the board participated in a discussion related to a "statement of purpose" concerning the Church. They concluded that people came to CCB for political rather than religious purposes; the Church is a free community of peoples, united in practice; during the luncheon, following the Sunday program, people should be asked their opinion regarding various aspects of the Church's functions.

The Reverend Bob Murphy from the Falmouth Unitarian-Universalist Association is willing to coordinate a New Year's function again this year at CCB on December 31st, from afternoon through the evening hours.

The next meeting of the board is scheduled for Thursday, November 19, 2009 at 7:15pm. Members and friends of the Church are invited to attend.

-Dick Keshishian, Clerk

Soldiers and Suicide: Remembering The Hidden Casualties of War This Veterans Day

American troops are taking their own lives in the largest numbers since records began to be kept in 1980. In 2008, there were 128 confirmed suicides by serving army personnel and 41 by serving marines. Another 15 army deaths are still being investigated. The toll is another of the terrible consequences that have flowed from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The army suicide rate is now higher than that among the general American population. The rate has been calculated as 20.2 per 100,000 soldiers, compared with 19.5 per 100,000 civilians. This is a shocking statistic, as soldiers theoretically are screened for mental illnesses before enlistment and have access to counselling and health services that millions of ordinary people cannot afford.

An estimated 30 percent of soldiers who took their own lives in 2008 did so while on deployment. Another 35 percent committed suicide after returning from a tour of duty. In one reported case, a highly regarded marine pilot hanged himself just one month before he was scheduled to return to Iraq.

Veterans Affairs (VA) reported in January 2009 that 178,483 veterans of the two wars had been diagnosed with one or more mental illnesses between 2002 and September 2008. The conditions diagnosed included 92,998 cases of possible PTSD; 63,009 possible depressive disorders; 50,569 neurotic disorders; 35,937 cases of affective psychoses; 27,246 cases of drug abuse and 16,217 cases of alcohol dependency.

The true extent of mental illness among war veterans is believed to be far worse than VA's figures. It has only treated around 400,000 of the 1.7 million men and women who have served. "We know there are guys who desperately need help who aren't coming to us," a spokesman told the Air Force Times. A Rand Corporation study last year estimated that 20 percent of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans—some 350,000 people—were suffering from PTSD.

Responding to data released [earlier this year] by the Department of Defense (DoD) revealing a record-high suicide rate in the Army, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the nation's first and largest nonpartisan group for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, has introduced a comprehensive report on the psychological injuries faced by our newest generation of veterans.

"The suicide numbers released come as no surprise to veterans, who have experienced first-hand the psy-

chological toll of war. Since the Iraq war began, suicide rates and other signs of psychological injury, like marital strain and substance abuse, have been increasing every year," said IAVA Executive Director Paul Rieckhoff. "The DOD and the VA must take bold and immediate action. Our new report recommends tangible, effective policies to help troops and veterans get the care they need."

According to military data at least 128 Army soldiers committed suicide in 2008, compared to 115 in 2007. These numbers do not include suicides among veterans, for whom suicide is a growing problem. According to

the VA records from 2002 to 2006, at least 254 Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans have killed themselves.

The IAVA report shows these numbers are reflective of larger trends. Servicemembers

deploying on long and repeated combat tours face higher rates of combat stress. In combat and at home, these invisible injuries are exacerbated by inadequate mental health screening and limited access to counseling.

To read the full report, "Invisible Wounds: Psychological and Neurological Injuries Confront a New Generation of Veterans," visit:

<http://www.iava.org/mentalhealthreport>

To arrange an interview with IAVA Executive Director Paul Rieckhoff or Policy Director Vanessa Williamson, please contact Chrissy Stevens at (212) 982-9699 or Chrissy@iava.org.

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) is the country's first and largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization for veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and has more than 125,000 veteran members and civilian supporters nationwide. Its mission is to improve the lives of this country's newest generation of veterans and their families.

<http://www.IAVA.org>



40th National Day of Mourning

November 26th, 12:00 noon
Coles Hill, Plymouth, MA

An annual tradition since 1970, Day of Mourning is a solemn, spiritual and highly political day. We are mourning our ancestors and the genocide of our peoples and the theft of our lands. It is a day when we mourn, but we also feel our strength in political action.

There will be a rally with speakers, followed by a march through the historic district of Plymouth and a potluck social.

For more information:
<http://www.uaine.org>



Our Purpose

Community Church of Boston is a free community united for the study and practice of universal religion, seeking to apply ethical ideals to individual life and the democratic and cooperative principle to all forms of social and economic life.

Staff

Jason Lydon, *Congregational Director*

Mark Laskey, *Office Manager*

Xinli Xu, *Bookkeeper*

Luis Alonzo Guzman, *Custodian & Cook*

Jim Casteris, *Superintendent*

Rodney Burston, *Building Maintenance*

Board of Directors

John MacLeod, *President*

David Broeg, *Vice President*

Virginia Pratt, *Treasurer*

Dick Keshishian, *Clerk*

Kevin Devine, Nancy Messom, Susan Mortimer,
Matt Osborn, Leonard Shames



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