

## *News from Live Oak – December, 2013*

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### *Sharing Our Bounty with Youth from APC – THIS SUNDAY!*

This Sunday (December 15) please bring gifts (items from the list below) or cash or checks to help us make Christmas merrier for more than 300 children and youth who live at Alameda Point Collaborative. APC has suggested gift cards (in amounts from \$15 to \$25) from major stores, particularly Target, as they have just opened a new store in Alameda, close to APC.

For Teens:

- Gift cards (\$15 to \$25 each) from Target (because it's near APC) or other stores
- Novelty socks – stripes, argyles, brand name sport socks
- Accessories – trendy bracelets, scarves, earrings, bags, baseball hats, gear for local sports teams
- Headphone earbuds



For Youth:

- Board Games
- Art/craft/science kits
- Backpacks/lunchboxes
- Snazzy school supplies



You are also welcome to bring cash or checks made out to APC with (holiday gifts in memo line). APC will purchase items for the children with the money. Many thanks to Nancy Balassi and Renee Harper for organizing this drive. And, of course, many thanks to each of you for your generous donations.

### *Holiday Concert – And Solstice Service: THIS SUNDAY, December 15*



Join us for a truly wonderful concert at 3:00 p.m. this Sunday in the sanctuary at Christ Episcopal Church. Invite family and friends for this joyous event. Those who come, may stay just for the concert or also stay for the Solstice Service which begins at 4:00 p.m.

Following a brief break, join Worship Leader Nanci Armstrong-Temple and Worship Associate Peter Hand in a solstice service celebrating a return to the light. The service will include inspirational choir pieces, a lovely story about light during the time for all ages, and a candle lighting ritual led by our beloved Richard Stromer.

## *December 22 -- Live Oak's 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday Worship*

*Why I Love Christmas: Confessions of a Unitarian Universalist Christian Buddhist Mystic Scientist Poet...*

Worship Leaders: Mary MacKay & Richard Stromer

Like many Unitarian Universalists, we are accustomed to making our own sense of the scriptures. And like many, we sometimes find ourselves drowned out by the cultural din around Christmas. JOIN US as we share and reclaim our love of the Christmas stories -- for the beauty of the words and the simple vision of hope that they offer. Today more than ever, we hear the promise of peace and justice as we pray not to this child, but for all children.



## *This Holiday Season, Buy for Equality*

The Human Rights Campaign, with the shopping season well underway, offers folks their 2013 Buying for Workplace Equality Guide. This Buyer's Guide includes results from the 2013 Corporate Equality Index (CEI), which features 252 businesses that scored a perfect 100 percent. All scores are based on the same set of criteria, rating 40 LGBT-related policies, benefits and corporate practice among the largest U.S. businesses.



Whether you are buying a cup of coffee or renovating your home, by supporting businesses that support workplace equality you send a powerful message that LGBT inclusion is good for the bottom line. We hope that you will use this guide as one component when determining if a business's social practices make it worthy of your dollars.

Here is a link to the full [Buyer's Guide](#):

And here's a link that allows you to [search for a business' score](#) by category (apparel, home & garden, kids, newsstand, e.g.) or by company name (from Ace Hardware to Zales and everything in between):

Your Live Oak Welcoming Congregation Team (Bernadette Alexander, Lisa Fry, and Richard Stromer) encourage you to use these guides -- and to support the [Human Rights Campaign](#) (HRC).

Live Oak UU Fellowship's Mission:

*We create loving community through worship and service to others.*

## *A Letter about Santa and God*

*Several of us enjoyed this article (from UU World, Winter 2013) and chose to share it in its entirety with our community. You may enjoy other articles from UU World, available at <http://www.uuworld.org/index.shtml>. -lsf*

By telling the truth about Santa, maybe I can better explain what I believe about God.

By [Gillie English Bishop](#)

Dear Maggie and Brynn,

For a while now, you have been asking about Santa and about God. My answers about God have been confusing, and, I admit, I haven't told you all I know about Santa. I'm ready to come clean. By telling the truth about Santa, maybe I can better explain what I believe about God.

Dad and I bought all those Santa gifts. It's true. Some of the stocking stuffers you get each year come from me. Some come from Frammar and Aunt Kathy and Aunt Kristin, who send gifts each year, even if we're not spending Christmas with them. The idea that a rosy-cheeked guy in a red suit flies around the world delivering gifts to kids on Christmas Eve is false. It's impossible. (See the Internet for relevant information on the physics of flight, the functioning of chimneys, and reindeer behavior.)

As I've grown up, though, I've realized that Santa is even more of a miracle than I thought when I was a kid. Santa is not a boss running a toy-making business at the top of the world. He does not have huge numbers of toy-making elves and magical, superfast reindeer working for him.

Santa is actually a bunch of imperfect parents and relatives. They're busy earning enough money to live and are sometimes annoyed by their imperfect kids, but they are still able to find the love and time and money to make Christmas magical for them. To me, that's an even better miracle.

You have wondered why Santa is not fair. What about the good kids in the world who don't celebrate Christmas? Why don't they get anything? What about the poor kids our church collects gifts for? Why doesn't Santa just drop off a few more gifts for those good kids?

Now you know the answer. Santa is not one guy looking down on us and trying to make things right for all the good kids. Santa is a network of families, each with different situations, different amounts of money, different traditions, and different feelings about what their kids need or can handle.

That brings us to God. It would be nice to believe that there's a guy up in the sky who gives us exactly what we need. It would be nice to think that if we're good, we'll get a reward. It would be nice to think that someone who loves us is in control of everything.

But, as you've noticed, the world isn't fair either. Why are you complaining that we're out of Go-Gurt while other kids in the world are dying of starvation? Why did your friends Hannah and Rachel lose their mom to cancer while yours is alive and well?

I believe the answer is the same: because God is not a guy looking down on us and trying to make things right for everyone who deserves it. God is a web of natural forces that destroy and heal. As Unitarian Universalists, we believe in something you've heard us call "the interconnected web of life." I believe this interconnected web is what some people think of as God. Every living thing in that web has different needs, different desires, and different ways of affecting the rest of the web, just like every family that celebrates Christmas does it a little differently.

We don't always know how our actions will affect the rest of the web. Sometimes you will be bad, and good things will happen anyway. Sometimes you will be good, and bad things will happen anyway. More often, you'll be trying to be good, but not always succeeding, and you'll get a mix of good and bad things in your life.

Here's what I love about Santa: For ten years, I have watched you enjoy all the gifts, notes, and stocking stuffers from Santa. I've seen all your joy and excitement and known that I played a part in that. And I get amazing gifts, too. Usually, they're not labeled "From Santa" like some of yours are, but they come from the same place—a family that loves me, even when I'm not as good as I'd like to be.

And here's what I love about the interconnected web of life: we are part of it. Just like we make the magic of Christmas for each other, we make the magic of life for each other, too. Every day, even as a kid, you make choices about how to treat people, how to treat the earth and its other creatures, what to do with your time. Every choice you make has some effect on the interconnected web of life. You are an important and beloved part of it.

I've said there's no guy at the North Pole, and I'm pretty sure there's not one in Heaven either. That doesn't mean you should stop sending letters to Santa or prayers to God. Sometimes it can be helpful to sit down and think about what it is you most dearly want and ask for it. Sometimes no one knows what to give you unless you ask. The same goes for praying. Sometimes you need to get those prayers out there, to know what you most dearly want and to let the interconnected web know, too. You won't always get it. But it doesn't hurt to put it out there, and you might even find it helps you make your way to where you want to be. And always remember to give thanks for the good things; giving thanks makes that interconnected web stronger.

Finally, always remember that you are Santa (and God) for other people, and other people are Santa (and God) for you. With this letter, I let you in on the secret truth about Santa and God, as I understand them. You're one of us now. Put all the love and magic you can into your duties as Santa and your little corner of God.

Love, Mom

## *Live Oak Board Sets Goals for 2014*

At the December Board of Trustees meeting, the Live Oak board selected several goals for the coming year, listed below:

- Grow the congregation, with special focus on City of Alameda residents
  - Develop a “pathway to membership” program that follows up with recurring visitors
  - Start an outreach team to continue -- and increase -- our outreach to potential visitors and members
- Solidify the Every Sunday Programming planning and activities
- Continue developing a mutually beneficial relationship with First Unitarian Church of Oakland and other neighboring UU congregations

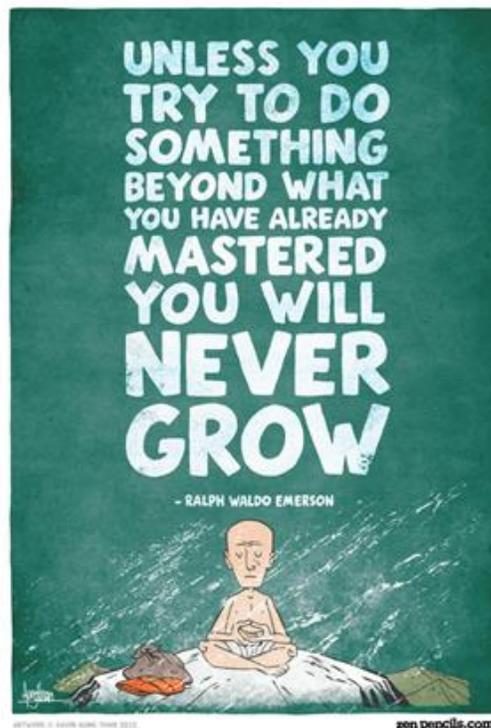
In previous years, we set (and accomplished or moved significantly toward) goals set by the board and/or congregation. For example:

- To meet twice a month for worship and fellowship instead of once a month
- To be wheelchair accessible by the end of the year
- To develop a mission and Mission Statement for Live Oak
- To meet every Sunday by the end of the year

## *Nominating Committee Seeks Potential Leaders*

Judith Heller, Sally Kennedy, and Richard Stromer (our Nominating Committee) are talking to members of Live Oak UU, finding two nominees to join Kathryn Duke, Kate Hand, and Jay Roller on our Board of Trustees. (Kris Arrington and Darlene Pagano are rolling off the board.) The Nom Com is also looking for people interested in serving on the Nominating Committee.

If you are a member and interested in taking on a leadership role, please let one of them know. And, if they come to you, please seriously consider the offer to work with current board members to serve our fellowship. It's a very fulfilling opportunity.



## *Textbooks for CA Prisoners: One of Our Generosity Programs*

UU congregations in California have answered the call to support prisoners by providing textbooks for distance-learning classes offered by Coastline Community College.

The five UU congregations (including Live Oak) that have so far been sending money for textbook scholarships have contributed about \$4,950 to the Coastline Community College Foundation. At \$200 per scholarship, that's about 25 students able to take another class. We hope these books will end up in the prison library after their first use, facilitating other students in the prison to further their education. This is a good start on a very good project.

In addition, three congregations (the UU churches in Los Gatos, Redwood City, and Sunnyvale) raised \$1,700 for textbooks specifically for Avenal Prison's Incarcerated Student program. Since they bought used books, their money stretched to purchase 18 textbooks, including all of the ones on Avenal Prison's high priority list and two copies each of their three most coveted books. The books were shipped to the prison library in October and they arrived safely. Sharon Blanton, Education Coordinator at Avenal, sends a big "Thank You" and is still amazed, because this is the first gift of its kind.

This project grew from a letter written by one CA prisoner to every UU congregation in the state. It is our hope that other congregations will participate in this program in the future. Note: Live Oak, so far, has contributed more than \$800 to the program.

## *Growing! Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Discussion Group*

We are very excited about this program, which really adds to the spiritual aliveness of our community. Ty Meier, who leads the discussions, is an excellent facilitator. We had 17 participants in December – sharing personal stories about blessings (those that were clearly blessings and those that seemed like anything but).

We meet at 4:00 p.m. in the Guild Room (just off the Parish Hall). Join us for a chance to get to know one another better, to explore questions that deepen our relationships with each other and the world, and to enjoy a simple meal afterward. Childcare provided, of course. See you next on January 12<sup>th</sup>. Do come. You will be glad you did.

What seems to us as  
bitter trials are often

*Blessings*  
in disguise.

~ Oscar Wilde