

**Eating to Transform Lives and Care for the World
(A Family Service)**

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February 3, 2008

*A good meal makes a man feel more charitable toward the world
than any sermon.*

— Arthur Pendenys

*I do not like broccoli and I haven't liked it since I was a little kid...
Now I'm president of the United States
and I'm not going to eat any more broccoli.*

— George H. W. Bush

*But, hey — at least I *like* the taste of brocolli [sic]
which is more than I can say for my Daddy!*

— George W. Bush

Call to Worship
Jill Kachmar

A few years ago I went for a drive with my college boyfriend, Tom, in Lancaster County. It was late summer, and the two lane country road we were on was surrounded by fields. The rain and sun were in good measure that year and the fields were flush with a vibrant green color, the stalks of the farmer's crop gently blowing in the breeze, the leaves rustling due to the rush of air being forced through the field as our car rushed by. "What's that?" Tom



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asked. "What's what? I replied." "That, over there, in the fields... what's that stalk thing with something growing off it at odd angles?" "Where? Do you see something in between the corn?" "That's corn? Where are the little yellow kernels?"

I gave him an odd look, and then once I realized that he was completely serious, I made him pull over at the next farm stand. That day I showed Tom, who had grown up near Philadelphia, exactly where corn kernels are found on a corn stalk. I remember Tom's intense concentration as he followed my instructions as to how the corn needed to be husked and later, once the corn was cooked, how he tasted, for the first time in his life, the simple pleasure of fresh corn on the cob. He was 23. He had only experienced canned corn up until that day.

Most people in this country buy food that is cleaned, prepped and packaged in grocery stores. They have no real sense of the connection to food as a plant or animal. There is a limited understanding of food as something that was once a living thing and is part of the "interconnected web of all existence." Sometimes the closest we come to "the source" is during the holidays when we buy turkeys (with the feathers, head, feet removed and the giblets neatly packaged in a small bag hidden within). The berries in our winter fruit salad and meatballs we eat at our Sunday dinners often have traveled hundreds of miles, transported to us by using an astounding amount of fossil fuels along the way. Pesticides, antibiotics and the use of genetically altered plants to be bigger and better have led to a greater reliance on them as insects and microbes build up tolerance. Huge corporate farms and their method of farming along with their byproducts cause great damage to the land. Resources to irrigate the land are often taken from others who depend on them to survive.

The 7th principle of the UUA promotes "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part". Part of UUCV's mission statement is to "transform lives and the world with our care". As Unitarian Universalists, we can put our beliefs into action by making small changes that can have great impact. Today we will explore ways that we can "think globally, act locally". Come, let us open our hearts and minds as we find ways to put our beliefs into action. Come, let us worship together.

Sermon
Duane Fickeisen

Lionel Bart's opening song for the musical *Oliver!* is sung by the boys as they line up at the factory for their routine bowl of gruel — think overcooked oatmeal. While waiting they fantasize about piles of better food — sausage and mustard, jelly and custard. But in reality their meals were hardly enough and awfully boring. The song that represents their dreams ends with these lines,

“Why should we be fated to
Do nothing but brood
On food,
Magical food,
Wonderful food,
Marvelous food,
Fabulous food
Beautiful food,
Glorious food.”

Well, we're going to brood on fabulous food for a little while today.

I'll bet that just talking about good food will start your mouth watering and your stomach sending hunger signals. Maybe some of you will begin wondering what's for lunch. That's because our imaginations and memories are really, really important to eating.

What you choose to eat is important to both parts of how you live out the mission of our congregation — transforming your life and caring for the earth. I hope that by the end of our time together today you'll be thinking about — and choosing — the food you eat to give your body what it needs to be healthy and to help keep the Earth healthy, too.

Let's start by asking how many of you *don't* like broccoli? — I'm going to guess that for some of you the broccoli you don't like is overcooked to the point of being kind of gray and mushy. You're not alone. The first President Bush doesn't like it either, and in fact said after he was elected that since he was the President, he didn't have to eat it and wouldn't allow it in the White House.

So how many of you *like* broccoli? I mean the good fresh stuff, cooked just enough to be tender but with a bit of crunch left in it

and bright green. If you like broccoli, you're not alone, either. In fact, you're like our current President Bush. "W" said he's not like his Daddy and he put broccoli back on the White House menu.

But the point of eating well isn't that you have to eat broccoli if you don't like it. But it *is* about learning how to choose and prepare food that is healthy *and* tastes so good that you really enjoy eating it and feel satisfied long before you have overeaten.

Barbara Kingsolver along with her husband, Steven Hopp, and daughter, Camille Kingsolver, wrote a book that came out last year about eating only foods from the county they live in for a whole year. The book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, has the potential to change how we view our food.

The Kingsolver/Hopp family is not the only one that has recently written about eating locally grown foods, but Barbara Kingsolver is such an accomplished writer that this book is a fun read — a pager-turner.

Just last month another book was released, Michael Pollen's latest, called *In Defense of Food*. In it, he argues persuasively that the typical American diet is so unhealthy that it shortens our lives and induces several serious long-term illnesses. He offers guidelines for improving our eating habits.

Pollen argues against nutritionism, by which he means the ideology based on understanding food as a bunch of nutrients. The trouble with this is that we just don't understand the role of nutrients well enough to know what mix of nutrients will support a healthy body. And often when nutritionists have tried they've been terribly wrong. We were told to eat margarine instead of butter, only to later discover that the trans fats in margarine are worse for us than the fats and cholesterol in real butter. When we were told, "eat more low-fat foods," by golly, we ate much more of them and consequently reduced the proportion of calories from fats, not by reducing the fats we ate, but by consuming more total calories!

Worse, nutritionism's approach to food misses completely the gestalt of the foods we eat, including their cultural and social roles. It ignores the pleasures of eating. It leaves out the social connections that solve problems while the bread is rising.

Pollen offers no specific diet and warns against ‘magic bullet’ eating plans. Instead, he suggests some guidelines for making food choices, which are summarized on the insert in your bulletin.

But he makes it even simpler by recommending that you “eat food, not too much, mostly plants.” What he means by food is the real food that your great-grandmother would recognize, not the highly processed, pre-packaged food-like substances that are so common on the grocery store shelves.

Eat more like the Greek, Indian, Japanese, French, or Italian traditional cultures, he says. That means more fresh ingredients, with modest amounts of animal flesh and plenty of plant matter. And it means smaller portions.

It is good to be able to shake the hand that feeds you — to know the grower and to chat about how she manages her farm. Like Kingsolver, Pollen is an advocate of growing some of your own and buying much of the rest directly from the grower.

How many of you have heard that “an apple a day keeps the doctor away?” Apples (and other fresh fruits) are healthy foods, and eating them every day can indeed help you get and stay healthy.

When many people had apple trees in their backyards, there were many, many different local varieties of apples. Now most of the apples you find in the stores are one of about half a dozen commercial varieties, and most of them are Red Delicious. It’s hard to imagine a less satisfying apple than the Red Delicious — it looks pretty, it’s nearly always uniformly bright red, and it has a pleasing shape. But they are almost always mushy and bland with tough skin that’s often bitter.

But not only has the apple become much less than delicious, it has also become less nutritious. You’ll have to eat three apples today to get the same amount of iron that was in one typical apple grown in 1940. The USDA has tracked the nutritional content in 43 crops since the 1950s. Vitamin C has declined by 20%, iron by 15%, riboflavin by 38%, and calcium by 16%. Similar studies in England also show a decline in the nutritional value of a variety of crops.

It’s not clear why that’s the case, but it may be a combination of factors that include selecting varieties on the basis of fast and uniform growth and ease of harvest and shipping; faster growth

promoted by heavy use of artificial fertilizers that doesn't allow time to develop deep root systems to tap into minerals; and soils that are depleted and poorly nourished.

With the focus on processed foods, the cost of sweeteners and fats has gone down 20% since 1980 while the cost of fresh fruits and vegetables has gone up 40%. We spend about half as much of our income on food as we did in 1960, but we're spending three times as much of our income on health care. There just *might* be a link!

We're eating a lot more processed foods with those cheap added sweeteners and fats and a lot less fresh whole foods. That has the hidden expense of causing us to consume too many calories and get too little nutrition.

We're eating foods that have traveled a long way. The trucking industry is fond of saying that if you bought it, it came by truck, and that's becoming ever so true of most supermarket foods. All that hauling is hard on the environment. It contributes to the greenhouse gasses and it puts more fine particulate matter into our air, which is already unhealthy.

By eating locally grown foods, we'll reduce the need for some of that transport and preserve more of the local farms that give our valley much of its charm.

It might be a stretch for most of us to become locavores, eating only (or almost only) foods that were grown in Central Pennsylvania. But it's not impossible to create a balanced and interesting diet from locally produced foods. Last month — in the middle of winter — Amy Farrell and John Bloom hosted a dinner of almost exclusively Central Pennsylvania foods. It was an event they offered through UUCV's auction. Amy shared their menu with me, featuring cheeses, fresh vegetables, chicken and eggs, even cornbread made with locally grown and ground cornmeal and flour, and sweet potato pie, along with local wines, beers, sodas, cider, and water.

You could start with one meal a week from mostly local sources, or with a single celebratory meal. Or you could, as Jill has suggested, find five items on your regular shopping list that you could replace with locally grown whole foods. Or make it a habit to shop at one of the farmers' markets.

Recognize food as more than a source of nutrition. It is part of many relationships — with your companions (by the way, that word means those with whom you share bread), with the growers, and with the planet, for example. It can also be a source of pleasure, a feast for all the senses, and a reason to sit down with others in a shared meal. For centuries shared food has been a strong symbolic way to celebrate community. Methodists didn't invent the potluck. Jesus didn't invent breaking bread and sharing wine for the Last Supper.

On Wednesday evening this week, as we do every year on Ash Wednesday, we'll have a service of Communion and Confession. You can read more about the Rakovian tradition of our unitarian religious ancestors in the early 17th century in my February Newsletter column, where I write about this traditional service. We'll break bread and share wine, as a symbol of fellowship and community. There will be an opportunity to make commitments for Lent and to ask for help in meeting them. It might be a time to make a commitment to a different relationship with food for the next six weeks.

I'm advocating this because our mission calls us to transform lives and our principles lift up the inherent worth and dignity of every person. They call us to practice compassion. Eating a healthy diet has the potential to transform your life and to help you practice compassion toward your body. In most of the world's religions, the body is recognized as the dwelling place for the holy. We are called to be good stewards of our bodies — to take good care of ourselves — because we are worthy human beings and co-creators of the world around us.

And I'm advocating it because our mission also calls us to care for the world and our principles remind us that we are part of an interdependent web of existence. The world around us is the manifestation of choices we — and others — make. We are part of a complex whole system of interacting elements and events, and I believe we are called to act with integrity and care for all of existence. Again, most of the world's religions ask us to practice good stewardship and to care for our neighbors — both human and non-human.

Making good choices about what and how we eat matters. It matters to our bodies and to the planet. And like many of the choices we face — what's good for us is often what's good for the

Earth. By choosing to eat more locally produced foods and more whole foods, we're also choosing to do a little less damage to the Earth by our living here.

So consider those simple guidelines to "eat food, not too much, mostly plants" and let that be your food-choice mantra. Recognize that food is about relationships at least as much as it is about nutrition, and eat well and with deep enjoyment. Thus you will help transform lives and care for the world.

Amen.

Resources

Carlisle Central Farmers Market:

117 N. Hanover St., Fri-Sat, 8:00 am – 2:00 pm
<http://www.carlislecentralfarmersmarket.org/>

Old Pomfret Farmers Market:

Cumberland County Human Services Building Garage, enter from Church Ave., behind 16 W High St. Sat. (seasonal)

Local Farm Market Directories:

<http://www.buylocalpa.org/index.php?region=3>
http://www.agriculture.state.pa.us/agriculture/lib/agriculture/marketsfiles/Consumers_Guide_PAMarkets.pdf

Slow Food Movement:

www.slowfood.org

Reading:

Barbara Kingsolver, Camille Kingsolver, and Stephen L. Hopp. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*. (2007: New York, Harper Collins)

Michael Pollan. *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. (2008: New York, Penguin Press)

Image: Garden Tomato. from Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. An illustrated flora of the northern United States, Canada and the British Possessions. Vol. 3: 168.