

UUCV Service: *We'll Build a Land*

November 25, 2007

"I'm not able to change the world very much, but if we each did one thing . . ."

— Sister Helen Prejean, Carlisle, PA, Oct 2007

Music for Gathering/Hymn Sing

Pat Spader

Welcome

Virginia Jackson

Prelude *Under African Skies* by Paul Simon
Adam's Family Tree-O and Marc Renault

Joseph's face was black as night
The pale yellow moon shone in his eyes
His path was marked
By the stars in the southern hemisphere
And he walked his days
Under African skies

This is the story of how we begin to remember
This is the powerful pulsing of love in the vein
After the dream of falling and calling your name out
These are the roots of rhythm
And the roots of rhythm remain.

In early memory, mission music
Was ringing round my nursery door
I said take this child, Lord from Tucson, Arizona
Give her the wings to fly through harmony
And she won't bother you no more.

This is the story of how we begin to remember
This is the powerful pulsing of love in the vein
After the dream of falling and calling your name out
These are the roots of rhythm
And the roots of rhythm remain.

Ka oomba oomba oomba oh— (4x)

Joseph's face was black as night
And the pale yellow moon shone in his eyes
His path was marked by the stars in the southern hemisphere
And he walked the length of his days under African skies



A group of 44 of UUCV Bursary Project girls are singing anti-AIDS songs in Namarroi town where they attend school. September 2007. Photo by P. Laws

I have always yearned to live under African skies, but when I graduated from college I was afraid to accept a teaching job in rural Tanzania. I would have to go alone. There was no Peace Corps back then. So when I was invited to a physics education conference in South Africa a few years ago, I jumped at the chance to go. I wanted to extend my trip to learn about the development work Peter and Ruth Bechtel do in Mozambique. As many of you know Peter and Ruth are the son and daughter in law of UUCV members -- Joan and Dan Bechtel.

A few months after my visit to Mozambique Ruth put me in touch with Canadian missionaries who wanted financial help to enable girls from rural villages to attend school. So our UUCV Mozambique Bursary Project was born and is now entering its fourth year. In September my daughter Virginia and I traveled to Mozambique to review the program.

It was a JOY for us to meet the bursary girls who were attending school and living in a residence in Namarroi town. We saw how empowered and hopeful they are about their futures. They are beautiful, spirited, and earnest. They sang and danced their hearts out for us, braided Virginia's hair, and taught us how to eat raw sugar cane. We saw them washing clothes in the river and eating heaping plates of rice and beans with their hands. At first they were painfully shy, and yet very curious about us. Though Virginia can't speak Portuguese, I marveled at the quiet mutual affection the girls and Virginia were developing.

After meeting the girls, we visited their villages to meet parents. When we arrived in Molumbo – the furthest point on our trip, my hungry, hot and travel weary daughter became overwhelmed with homesickness. She longed to be back with her children and husband and felt isolated – there was no way to contact them. She realized that when she returned, she would continue to invest herself mostly in her marriage, children, UUCV community, and friendships. Even though I know she deeply admires my work, she will not pick up my torch right now. As Virginia wrestled with this realization, she felt a combination of guilt and defensiveness.

Virginia's unexpected reactions led us to many soul-searching conversations about the broader issues of how to care for the world. Before undertaking graduate education and marrying, Virginia studied in Japan and did volunteer work in a national park in Costa Rica. When I graduated from college I went straight to graduate school. We are different people in different phases of life. Virginia has young children at home -- mine are grown. She is personable and empathetic. As a young child she cherished family times so much. During Ken's mother's last year of life, Virginia and great-grandson Adam visited her faithfully. She lights up the world with her music and I can't carry a tune. Instead, I am a reformer whose concept of caring for the world has been forged in fires set by my politically active parents.

Both Virginia and I realize that she *is* useful to the world, but in a different capacity. The problem is that while supporting schooling for girls half way around the world seems exciting and romantic, there is little public recognition for the work of nurturing a young family and strengthening one's own community in hundreds of small ways each and every day.

In today's service, we want to make the case that our congregation's collective mission to transform lives and care for the world is really quite broad. The world is unfair. Powerless people and the Earth's environment need advocates. We need people who transform lives by addressing problems halfway around the world, and also need people to invest themselves in smaller local circles, for a tree cannot reach high or wide with its branches unless its roots are nourished. But people who are caring for the world must also be nourished and have their lives transformed.

Come, let us worship together.

Lighting the Chalice Flames

Our mission is to be an enduring liberal religious community in the Unitarian Universalist tradition, transforming lives and caring for the world.

Hymn #148

Let Freedom Span Both East and West
The Congregation

Children's Moment

Making Do

Lighting the Children's Chalice Flame

Dave Mooney

Children's Recessional

Congregation

Go now in peace,
Go now in peace,
May the spirit of love surround you,
Everywhere, everywhere you may go.

Greeting Newcomers

Bev Motich

Member of the Board of Trustees

Offering for the Work of the Beloved Community

Change for the World*Guest at Your Table***Offertory Music**Siyahamba (S. African)/Mangwani Mpulele (Zulu)
Arr. by Theodore Bikel**Reading***To Educate a Girl*
Kofi Annan

. . . Every boy and girl around the world has a right to expect that we will do all we can to ensure that they will enjoy their right to an education. But in most countries, girls are the most disadvantaged when it comes to school. As this year's State of the World's Children reports, millions of young girls never attend school at all, millions more never complete their education, and countless numbers never receive the quality education that is their right. These millions of girls slip easily to the margins of our societies – less healthy than they could be, less skilled, with fewer choices in their lives and less hope for the future. As they grow into women, they are ill-prepared to participate fully in the political, social and economic development of their communities. They – and their children in turn – are at higher risk of poverty, HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation, violence and abuse.

Conversely, to educate a girl is to educate a whole family. And what is true of families is also true of communities and, ultimately, whole countries. Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, lower infant and maternal mortality, improve nutrition and promote health – including helping to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation.

Reading*This Is To Have Succeeded*
Ralph Waldo Emerson

To laugh often and love much; to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children; to earn the approbation of honest citizens and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give of one's self; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived - this is to have succeeded."

Hymn #121*We'll Build a Land*
The Congregation

Virginia: The Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley set out to develop a mission statement a few years ago, and by committee, agreed that our collective mission is to “transform lives and care for the world”. That *is* broad. By design, I’d guess. It doesn’t say anything about *how*, so each of us, individually, is charged with figuring out what our personal role is in this larger mission. But the problems are many, and the solutions not always straightforward. It can be paralyzing. So the question of the day is: How do we decide where to invest ourselves?

Well, in beloved UU style, I’m going to answer that question with 3 questions. And then, my mom is going to guide a discussion amongst yourselves about how you might care for the world effectively. So, be thinking about that as you hear some of my ideas on the matter.

If you want to make the world a better place, I think you start by asking yourself, **Who Am I?** Each of us is born with a unique set of genes, a certain temperament, talents, aptitudes, and interests. And then you have a unique set of life experiences that shape you. I admire my mother’s pioneer spirit—she sees Big Problems and goes at them with Big Energy—but if I tried to emulate her, I would fail. At least right now. I think too many of us try to be someone we think we should be, rather than honoring who we *are*.

We know it inside when we are effective. When you find that place where, as Duane and Judy have said, your passion meets the world’s need, things *click*. When I think back over the phases of my life, I can separate them very distinctly into times when I felt that *rightness* and times when I did not, and I’ll bet you can, too. I felt it when I was teaching 5th grade. I feel it when I make music with people. I feel it in motherhood. Frankly, I have even felt it in this pulpit, and I love that you let me be up here. When we are fully engaged, in our “flow state”, is when we are most potent in the world.

Another important question to ask when setting out to improve our world is, **Is this a sensitive and welcome intervention, or merely an imposition of my values?** Particularly when your mission is broad or cross-cultural, ethnocentrism, religiocentrism, and all kinds of -centrisms can come into play. Too often, I think well-intentioned people set out to transform lives with a very fixed agenda. *These people just need a little Jesus, or maybe some forks, or an anger management class!* And maybe that’s not at all what the people themselves would say they needed if we bothered to ask them! A successful mission begins with a period of inquiry and openness. When you want to help the battered, the undereducated, the addicted, the poor, or the new parent, you must first ask: *Where are you now? Where do you want to be? And how can I help you get there?* As UU’s, it is part of our covenant to affirm the worth and dignity of every person in this way.

I myself am guilty of overlooking this. About 10 years ago, I used to provide “wrap-around” therapeutic services for mostly poor, mostly black children in Harrisburg. In retrospect, we’d basically insert ourselves into these families’ lives, impose some treatment goals on them, do a bunch of paperwork, and then exit. I don’t remember ever asking the aforementioned questions in any form. And I don’t think I had much impact, actually. I’d like to think I’d do better now.

In contrast, I have a strong sense that my mother’s bursary project in Mozambique, *is* a welcome intervention. One can measure this by the lengths the girls

and their parents go to to take advantage of the opportunity. The parents travel for miles and miles in bare feet, often carrying a 40 lb. sack of grain or a small child, to attend a meeting and lend their support. They often band together to build fences, fix roofs, and provide food for the girls. They express a deep and fierce gratitude. Their daughters are thriving and happy; they have aspirations! The girls *glow*. They attract a lot of attention from younger children in the villages. They sing and sing and sing—about AIDS prevention, about education, about gratitude and affection for their teachers and leaders.

One girl named Felizeida had polio at an early age, and it left the lower half of her body completely dead. (*Point out photo.*) She recently got a wheelchair, which is basically a modified bicycle, but before this, she used to *crawl* to school everyday on her own muscly arms. It was a 3-mile round trip. She wanted so badly to learn, to become a Nurse. School was her joy, her salvation, and a *privilege*.

We also saw adults attending classes with children. If a village school recently added grade levels, adults in the community who didn't have the opportunity when *they* were young, were invited to come to school. The point is, all these observations indicate plainly that the people of Mozambique value education and relish opportunities for more of it. My mother's efforts are indeed welcome.

And finally, we need to ask, **Is my mission rational?** Yes, let's care for the world, but let's do it intelligently! I've been using the word "invest" as in where should we invest ourselves? When we invest money, we are looking for the greatest return, and I think we need to invest our time and compassion similarly. When we see a wound, yes it needs to be cleaned up and bandaged. But if we're smart, we will also remove the source of injury so that it doesn't happen again.

For example, many of us are concerned about the air quality in this area. It is abysmal. The Clean Air Board is doing excellent work bringing the problem to the attention of the public and local leaders, monitoring and reporting on air quality, and promoting anti-idling regulations. But the *root cause* of this problem is that there is a public demand for Stuff, for endless loads of merchandise that need to be transported from point A to point B, usually in a semi. Unless we can encourage each other to Make Do with things that are produced locally, the problem will not go away. It might move to someone else's back yard, but it won't go away.

Responsible attempts to care for the world will strike a balance between reaction and *pre-action*. It could be that your own work is bi-level, or it could be that we complement each other within our community, with some of us on triage and some of us on prevention.

Priscilla:

Interactive Discussion: We'd like to invite you to spend the next few minutes discussing ways of caring for the world with each other. Each of you can take 3 minutes to describe to someone sitting in front or behind you: (1) what *you've done*, or (2) *are doing now*, or (3) what *you'd like to do* in the future when you have more time or resources.

Continuation of the Sermon: Now that you've had a chance to express some of your current ideas about transforming lives and caring for the world, I'd like to embellish on Virginia's third question: "**Is my mission rational?**" On the one hand we can choose a mission that focuses on "social and environmental justice", "making wise investments",

“sustainable development”, and “prevention of the root causes.” On the other hand our mission might be characterized as “symptom management”, “charity”, “mercy” or “compassion.”

The dichotomy between concepts like prevention of root causes and mercy raises often leads to heart wrenching dilemmas. In his book, *The White Man's Burden*, global economist William Easterly comments that the tradeoffs between prevention of AIDS and the merciful act of treating it are stark:

“If the money currently spent on treatment were diverted to effective prevention, between 3 and 75 new HIV infections could be prevented for each extra year of life given to an AIDS patient.”

But, spending all the resources on AID's prevention seems cold hearted, because those with AIDS are visibly sick while those who might benefit from a prevention program are invisible to us since they have no symptoms. Easterly notes that the only way to avoid making cruel choices would be to have unlimited resources to pay for both prevention and treatment.

In some projects, both justice and mercy become part of the mission. This is the case in Helen Prejean's merciful ministering to prisoners on death row while she is also fighting against the injustices wrought by the death penalty. A balance between charity and justice is also evident in the Social Action Council's Correctional Justice Initiative led by Kathy Bell.

There are other examples of the tension between charity and justice. In a recent discussion with Elaine Livas, I learned that Carlisle's Project SHARE is overwhelmed trying to feed more and more working poor. On the one hand we can't let people starve. On the other hand, if minimum wages and benefits were raised through political means, perhaps those who needed charity could be greatly reduced. In addition, all members of a self-sufficient family gain self-esteem. So just feeding people is symptom management. It is not enough.

The local projects that I am most attracted to involve capacity building that enhances self-sufficiency. Examples include Project SHARE's cooking classes where families learn to prepare low cost and nutritious foods such as rice and beans. The YWCA sponsors many self-improvement classes and support groups for women and girls of all ages. The offerings include Ann Gero's new *Gather the Women* program. This capacity building program is designed to help women -- with limited financial means -- achieve personal growth and economic self-sufficiency. There are many other worthy local programs.

During my trips to Mozambique I have learned about several amazing projects directed by Peter Bechtel in Quirimbas National Park. They are amazing because they completely defuse the need to choose between symptom management and cause prevention. For example, in 2004 farmers in the 40 villages in the Park were concerned because a drought had caused their crops to dry up half-way through the growing season. While other agencies scrambled to send food to the drought stricken area, Peter called Joan and Dan and asked if they could raise \$8000 for the purchase drought resistant seeds. With the help of several of us, the seeds were purchased. The rains came, the crops grew, and 40,000 people in the Park villages were able to feed themselves. Better still, villagers saved seeds from their harvests and now have a much more diverse seed stock with which to cope with future droughts. This is a win-win problem solution. I'd call this intelligent “caring for the world.” A rational mission indeed!

Virginia: Here's the thing. I think as long you are asking yourself tough questions and being sensitive and judicious, there are hundreds of callings that are equally valid and meaningful. Everything from political activism to grand parenting can fit the bill. *Transforming lives and caring for the world* is a mission with layers and contours. It's stretchy. Make it yours. Jump into the fray. It doesn't have to be some grand act of sacrifice or heroism. Just be generous. Embrace someone outside your usual circle. Lower fences. Heal wounds. Take an interpersonal risk. Deliver a message to people—*You are worthy and you are held in love*. Tell this to people next to you and people in far away lands, to people who think like you and those who don't, to people with no money, and to the filthy rich. Tell it to people with addictions and vices and jaded pasts. In Jane Wyman's words, "The opportunity to practice brotherhood presents itself every time you meet a human being."

I see our community as a spectrum of light. You are obligated to discover your color. At what frequency do you vibrate? What is your wavelength? Is it narrow and gentle or does it have a wide reach? Maybe you are infrared light, unseen but offering warmth. See, when you find your color, and you radiate your light, you become part of something magnificent. And remember your science—the combination of all the colors of the spectrum makes pure white light. Like the Sun. Like God. May it be so.

Hymn #169

We Shall Overcome
The Choir & Congregation
(African American Spiritual)

Joys and Sorrows

Prayers of the Congregants

Closing Words If You Have Known Love Lauralyn Bellamy

If, here, you have found freedom,
Take it with you into the world.

If you have found comfort,
Go and share it with others.

If you have dreamed dreams,
Help one another,
That they may come true!

If you have known love,
Give some back
To a bruised and hurting world.

Postlude

Brighten the Corner Where You Are, Ina Ogden/

It's a Small World, Sherman Brothers

Extinguishing the Chalice Flames