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Winter/Spring 2008 USNF Adult Enrichment Schedule

Theme: World Religions

Enrich your spiritual and intellectual life at USNF!

Our Unitarian Principles are drawn from, among other sources, *wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life*. During January through April of 2008, our Sunday Adult Enrichment programs will focus on many of the world's religions.

Religious beliefs have influenced human behavior since the human race began, & have been called by some, the best efforts of human beings to explain the natural world around us. As we well know, differences in religious beliefs, from one group to another, have fueled far more conflict than the peace most religions claim as their divine desire. Over the next few months, we'll offer you some outstanding speakers, films & opportunities for your questions and discussions on the religions of the world. We hope you will attend as many of the following sessions as possible, looking forward to involving yourself in the lively & interesting discussions that will surely by occur.

NOTE: On each Sunday when there is an Adult Enrichment program, a light lunch will be provided in the Parlor, from 12:30 to 1:00 pm, for a small donation, with thanks to Flora Majumder & Beth O'Neil.

Sunday, January 6, 2008

1:00-2:00 - **Cliff Matthews - Father Sky, Mother Earth: From Cosmochemistry to Biochemistry** - If you've always wondered just how life began and how humans have evolved, this is definitely the time to find out. Cliff will present a fascinating explanation (sometimes slightly technical, but he explains it all so clearly) of how all those disparate components of life came together. He has an amazing ability to make complicated chemical processes sound simple (a sample: "There were all those things lying around on the earth and floating around in the water, and then..." Come and hear how life began! [See Cliff's biographical information at the end of this schedule.]

Sunday, January 13

1:00-2:00 - **The Rev Stephen Cook - Introduction to the Bible for UUs: Part I --** Participants are asked to bring with them to the first meeting any version of the Bible they prefer and to read carefully, before class, *Genesis Chapters 1 and 2*, noting any similarities and differences you may find between them. [See Steve's biographical information at the end of this schedule.]

Sunday, January 20 - 1:00-2:00 - The Rev Stephen Cook - *Introduction to the Bible for UUs: Part II*

Sunday, January 27

1:00-2:00 - Karen Shelley on *Paganism*. Karen says that what is called "paganism" is really the original religions people have created for time out of mind and the modern versions thereof. The word really represents about 400 known earth-based traditions, many of which are still practiced today all over the world. We will explore paganism as background to the world's great religions and as earth-based practices continue today - AND - we'll have an **overview of some "minor" religions of the world with Marybeth Bridegam**, plus a hand-out summary of most of the world's religions.

Sunday, February 3 - Congregational Discussion with Board & Interim Journey Team after the second service

Sunday, February 10

1:00-2:00 - Sanat & Flora Majumder - Talk plus Q&A on Hinduism [See their biographical information at the end of this schedule.]

Sunday, February 17 -

1:00-2:00 - Sanat & Flora Majumder - Talk plus Q&A on Hinduism

Sunday, February 24 -

1:00-2:00 - 1:00-2:00 - Chris Stetson - Talk plus Q&A on Buddhism [See his biographical information at the end of this schedule.]

Sunday, March 2 - Congregational Discussion with Board & Interim Journey Team after morning worship service.

Sunday, March 9 - 1:00-2:00 - Chris Stetson - Talk plus Q&A on Buddhism

Sunday, March 16

1:00-2:00 - Chris Stetson - Talk plus Q&A on Buddhism, with an Introduction to Meditation

Sunday, March 23 - NO ADULT ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS - EASTER SUNDAY

Sunday, March 30

1:00-2:00 - Presentation on the Bahai Faith with Carol Rutstein plus Q&A and discussion [See Carol's biographical information at the end of this schedule.]

Sunday April 6

1:00-2:00 - PBS film, *Three Faiths, One God: Judaism, Christianity, Islam* as an introduction to our topic for the next four weeks, Judaism, Islam and the Middle East. There

will be an opportunity for Questions & Answers about the film with **Morris Salame**, at its conclusion. [See his biographical information at the end of this schedule.]

Sunday, April 13

1:00-2:00 - **Morris Salame** will present a talk on **Judaism**, followed by time for Q&A and discussion

Sunday, April 20

1:00-2:00 - A 30-minute film, *Islam, A Closer Look*, made in Canada with "ordinary" Islamic men and women, as well as Islamic scholars speaking about their faith and its basic tenets. The film will be followed by a short talk by **Morris Salame**, on the general religious conflicts in the Middle East, the difference between Shia and Sunni Muslims, the Taliban and other Islamic groups that have appeared in our news. This will be followed by an opportunity for Q&A plus discussion.

Sunday, April 27

1:00-2:00 - This final session of our World Religion Series will fittingly be the marvelous PBS film by **Bill Moyers**, *Spirit & Nature: An Interfaith Dialogue*, based on a symposium held at Middlebury College. The featured speakers include Steven C. Rockefeller, Chairperson of the Middlebury College Religion Department; Audrey Shenandoah, Native American Elder of the Onandago Tribe; Sallie McFague, Professor of Religion at Vanderbilt University; Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, Chancellor of Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City; J Ronald Engel, an Islamic expert; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Tibetan Buddhist; and the Dalai Lama. The film offers a wonderful summary of the basic tenets of many of the world's religions, and draws out their common belief in the natural world's basic relationship to the spiritual world.

[Final Adult Enrichment Program until the Fall of 2008]

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NOTE: Q&A = Questions and Answers, which will be the format for ALL of these sessions on World Religions

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BIOGRAPHIES OF SPEAKERS IN THE WORLD RELIGION SERIES

Cliff Matthews will speak on & show his film, "Origins" on Sunday, January 6, 2008. Born in 1921 in Hong Kong & educated there, Cliff's college years at Hong Kong University were interrupted by WWII & his imprisonment in Hong Kong and Japan. After the war he did his undergraduate work at the University of London, & graduate work in chemistry at Yale. He did research in industry, initiating fundamental investigations of the origin of life. In 1969, he became Professor of Chemistry at the University of Illinois at Chicago, becoming emeritus in

1992. Here, his continuing research on cosmochemistry & the origin of life led him to use the unifying theme of universal evolution in all his teaching efforts. In Chicago, Professor Matthews regularly organized a symposium - "The Milky Way to DNA" - at the Adler Planetarium, & in 1993 & 1999 he organized symposiums on "Cosmic Beginnings & Human Ends" & "At Home in the Universe" (on the developing dialogue between science & religions) for the Parliament of the World's Religions, including work with the Dalai Llama. In these activities his major aim has been to convey to the general public something of the excitement and significance of science as the shaping cultural activity of our time. He and his wife, Magdalen (Ibi) - both members of this Society - moved to Northampton a few years ago to be closer to their daughter.

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Stephen Cook will speak on Christianity & Unitarians on Sundays, January 13 and 20, 2008. The Reverend Stephen Cook is the Interim Minister of the Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence. Trained at Bangor Theological Seminary, Mr. Cook is a Christian by faith, a Unitarian Universalist by denomination and a former Executive Director of the UU Christian Fellowship. He enjoys helping religious liberals find ways in which the Bible may speak to them both as a literary work and as a source for religious inspiration.

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Karen Shelley will speak on "Paganism: The Root of all Religions," on January 27, 2008. Karen is a life-long Unitarian Universalist and grew up as a minister's daughter. Her family served churches in Tacoma, WA, San Jose, CA, and Melrose, MA, and then her father served as the District Representative for the Southern NE District, all of MA, CT, and RI, during the years in which Unitarians and Universalists merged. As an adult she has participated in the Amherst, MA, Cambridge, MA, Keene, NH, and Milford, NH churches while being a friend of the Society from 1975 and a member since 1982. Karen says that the language and images which most clearly express her theology are the language of the Goddess and of Wicca (which is only one part of the multitude called "paganism." She has been living this feminist, liberation-based approach since her early 20's.

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Sanat & Flora Majumder will speak on Hinduism on Sundays, February 10 & 17, 2008 Sanat was born into a Hindu family in what is now Bangladesh, but which was part of India under British rule. He moved to Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) to live with his married sister in order to attend college, & later the rest of his family became refugees in Calcutta when the partition of India left them on the Moslem side of the boundary with East Pakistan. Sanat came to the U.S. to earn his doctorate in plant physiology, & has taught botany at Smith & Westfield State Colleges. Flora grew up as a Methodist in Maine, met Sanat at an international student conference, and they were later married by the renowned Dr. Howard Thurman. They lived in India for 2 & 1/2 years, and have frequently visited family there since they moved to the U.S. Flora has had ample opportunity to observe Hindu rites and celebrations in the family setting.

They have been members of the USNF for forty years. They have two children & five grandchildren.

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Chris Stetson will speak on Buddhism on Sundays, February 24, March 2 & 16. Chris has been a self-identified Buddhist since age 15. After ill-advised reading of Zen texts and Thoreau led him to drop out of UMass, Chris studied Buddhism while working as an attendant at a large homeless shelter in Boston, a babysitter, and a woodworker. Eventually he came to practice Korean-style Zen at the Cambridge Zen Center, receiving lay precepts (the basic statement of being a Buddhist) and the Buddhist name Jeong Yeo, "Complete Like This", from Zen Master Seung Sahn. Later, seeking a more family friendly practice, Chris had a brief association with Sokka Gakkai, "Values Creating Society", Buddhism, then found (and helped found) the Northampton Shin Buddhist Sangha, receiving lay precepts (basically the same ones) in Jodo Shinshu, "The True Pure Land School", at the New York Buddhist Church and the name Chi Ken, "Understands Through Knowledge", from the Rev. Taitetsu Unno. He works as an Infant/Toddler Teacher at the Smith College Center for Early Childhood Education (Fort Hill) He will talk about Buddhist history, philosophy, and psychology, and will help attendees to try a little meditation.

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Carol Rutstein will speak on the Bahai Faith on Sunday, March 30. Carol Rutstein, a member of the Baha'i Faith serves as Chairperson of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Amherst. She was raised in a Baha'i family and is the mother of four grown children and 11 grandchildren - all of whom have embraced this Faith. She has a life-long interest in music, having sung professionally in her youth. She is also a collage artist.

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Morris Salame will speak on Judaism, Islam & the Middle East on Sundays, April 6, 13, 20 & 27. Morris Salame is the father of Laurie Salame of our congregation, who sometimes joins Laurie and Luz at our services, although he lives in Hartford. Morris is American-born of Lebanese parents, who came here in 1921. His family members are Sephardic Jews from Lebanon, Syria & Egypt. He studied Arabic and Arabic culture at the Army Language School in California for 12 months, followed by service as an Arabic translator for the Armed Forces (1953-55). Upon discharge from the Army, Morris attended MIT and graduated as a Chemical Engineer in 1960. He spent nearly 50 years in the science of developing new polymers and consulting, finally retiring from his own company in 2002. He continues to try to learn as much as he can about the Middle East, and has tried to keep abreast of that restless area.

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We are honored and pleased to have these speakers join us for these Sundays when they will share with us their knowledge of and experiences with many of the world's religions.