

UUSC REBUILDING IN HAITI: OUR FIRST UU PRINCIPLE

By Linda McKim-Bell with thanks to Nichole Cirillo and Martha Thompson of UUSC

PRELUDE: *"Loreta and Desiree's Bouquet"* (George Winston) Tomoko Maki

Welcome John Tucker

OPENING WORDS: Linda McKim-Bell

Our opening words today are from the Rev. Mark Morrison Reed
"It is the church that assures us that we are not struggling for Justice on our own. But as members of a larger community. The religious community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be done and our strength too limited to do all that must be done. Together, our vision widens and our strength is renewed."

CHALICE LIGHTING: John Tucker

AFFIRMATION: *(Please rise in body or spirit.)*

We need each other, and so we come to this place,
To work and dance and laugh and cry and think.
We call ourselves a religious community,
Not because this place is in itself holy ground,
But because what we do here and say here
And are here make it so.
So let it be.

CREDO:

I believe in life and love and people.
I believe in the rising of the sun.
I believe the world will be much better.
I believe the universe is one.

HYMN: #318 *"We Would Be One"* led by Ellin Snow

GREETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS: Craig Wyss

PASTORAL MOMENT: Don Snow

SPECIAL MUSIC: *"Common Thread"* (Pat Humphries) Peter Renhard

SERMON: *"Unitarian Universalists Reaching Out"* Linda McKim-Bell

It is good to be together today. UUSC is grateful for the efforts of so many in this congregation. The Rev. Eric Kaminetsky has been a strong supporter and we appreciate his leadership in our recent regional Building Bridges conference and ongoing efforts

to bring UUs and Muslims together. We are grateful to Pam Iverson who served for many years as the UUSC Local Representative. We thank to John Tucker and Ellen Squillace for their work on the Building Bridges conference and for their efforts as UUSC Local Representatives at this church.

And we are grateful for my honorarium today, which I am donating to UUSC. We are grateful for the heart-warming donations of so many here and to every child or former child who took home a Guest at Your Table Box. We thank the Women's Group of this church for supporting the education of women in Afghanistan through donations to our partner Barakat. Your recent donation to the UUSC UUA Joint Somalia Famine Relief Fund was a great blessing. This congregation has great and open hearts and we celebrate this today.

I am here to share the good news of the work that the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee is doing in our name, and how we defend and uphold human rights. The mission statement of the UUSC is that "UUSC advances human rights and social justice around the world, partnering with those who confront unjust power structures and mobilizing to challenge oppressive policies."

We are so much more than charity. The added value of UUSC is the confrontation of unjust power structures and the challenging of oppressive policies. This makes our work exponentially greater than a relief or charity organization.

UUSC began by rescuing Jews from the Holocaust in Europe in the 1940's when so many others had turned away. We honor the courage of our founders Martha and Waitsell Sharpe, in not turning away from the people of Haiti, while many may have written them off.

UUSC works in four areas Disaster Relief, Environmental Justice, Economic Justice and Civil Liberties. For now let's take a look at our disaster relief and rebuilding efforts in Haiti. Something for all of us here today to think about as we consider

Haiti is how do we view “the other”, a people who are very different than ourselves. And how can we bring ourselves to “that high cause of greater understanding” in today’s hymn.

Let us pause for a moment and think about the First UU Principle that is an integral part of all that UUSC does. Our First Principle is a “A belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person”.

At UUSC we do disaster relief through the lense of our UU values and we focus our efforts on those that otherwise would be at risk of being overlooked by mainstream disaster relief organizations. We direct our efforts towards women, children, and religious or ethnic minorities and the most vulnerable.

UUSC views its work as “solidarity with” not “charity for” and we call it “aid with dignity”. We do not look at how people are victimized. Instead we begin by acknowledging their rights in a disaster and how those rights are being violated. We view Haitians as resilient survivors who have a right to relief aid and rebuilding with dignity.

In keeping true to the second part of our mission statement, we have helped bring grass roots Haitian leaders to Washington DC twice so they could tell their stories and lobby the US congress directly during Haiti Advocacy Day and for an Ecumenical Lobby Day on Capitol Hill. We made it possible for their voices to be heard by the Congressional Black Caucus. Instead of speaking for them, we empowered them to speak directly for themselves. We made sure that Haitian voices were heard in the ongoing efforts of the Haiti Advocacy Working Group in Washington DC. Thus we honor the UU aspiration of making the world a fairer place.

Just a half hour flight from Miami is one of the most dire natural disasters inflicted on the hemisphere’s poorest country. This is our backyard and the survivors deserve our respect and our support. It is important to remember that Haitians historically have shown tremendous resilience and strength. Haitians

stayed in touch with their West African roots through slavery and oppression, preserving elements of West African culture.

They formed cultural groups that stayed together. Haitian slaves preserved their language, culture and religion. They created their own language mix of French and West African languages that became Haitian Creole.

It should be remembered that Haitians showed strength and leadership as they organized the first successful slave rebellion and revolution starting in 1789 and ending in independence from France in 1804. These are great achievements that are truly inspiring. Thus, UUSC is assisting a brave people to help themselves in their own ways.

It is my hope that the Haiti that we take home in our hearts today will be very different from the one we have seen on television. In the aftermath of the earthquake and in the year's anniversary coverage on mainstream media we were bombarded with some negative images of Haitians that left a hopeless impression.

We will remember the same kind of negative reporting about the people of New Orleans. Do you remember how African Americans in New Orleans were described as "looters as they carried bottles of water out of damaged stores, while white people were "getting needed supplies"?

I was appalled to see a CNN special on Haiti last winter that portrayed Haiti as a violent, out of control country that needed our military help to keep order. Spooky threatening music played in the background to add to the sinister impression. The media in both cases portrayed a people out of control, looting, violent and unable to act in their recovery and incapable of taking their future into their own hands. While history and events tell us that nothing could be further from the truth!

As UUs we respect the inherent worth and dignity of every Haitian person. Our religion requires us to look deeper and

upwards to recognize and respect the efforts of Haitians to create a better narrative for Haiti.

We saw the heroism of the Haitian people... in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, where 80% of the people were living in abject poverty, where 50% of the children did not go to school. Let us remember instead the images of a people who organized themselves using their shovels and their bare hands to dig their neighbors and families from the rubble when rescue teams were late in coming. They took it upon themselves to save themselves when no one else had come! People in the countryside took care of the multitudes that streamed out of Port au Prince. They shared whatever food and shelter they had. UUSC decided to step into Haiti because these people were the most marginalized of all.

Now let's look at how UUSC steps into a country and begins to help after a disaster. First of all UUSC asks who is left out and who is the most vulnerable. Then staff activates its time-honored networks in the country to identify effective grass roots organizations as partners. Then they decide how work can be done according to UU values and our mission statement.

UUSC carries out disaster relief in two phases. The first phase is called the Emergency Response where direct aid is given. The second phase is a rebuilding phase where people are empowered to do for themselves. We help our carefully chosen grass roots partners with respect and we learn from them as well. We use knowledge gained in one country to help with the next disaster or the next economic justice project.

We focus on helping local, effective NGOs because they know the country, have background information and functional networks. We ask them what they need to carry out their plans and we supply it. We may offer technical know how to help them realize their goals. UUSC liaisons with other NGOs in a country so that cross-fertilization of ideas and solutions can take place.

UUSC is working with several NGOs in Haiti. We are working to build a girl's camps and school in Port au Prince, we are assisting a countrywide peasant organization in rebuilding a sustainable Haiti. We supported single mother street vendors to start small businesses; we are supporting mental health trauma recovery leaders throughout Haiti, among other efforts.

For today I will focus on two organizations, the MPP, the Papaye Peasant Movement in rural Haiti, and the APROSIFA Health Center in the Central Plateau. These are examples of how we do disaster relief by uplifting the first UU principle. UUSC uses the model of what we call Eye to Eye Partnerships. This means that we work beside NGOs and we respect the wishes and ideas of our partners and learn from them.

The MPP or Papaye Peasant Movement was founded 30 years ago by Chavannes Jean Baptiste. Today it has 100,000 members living out in the Haitian countryside. Chavannes Jean Baptiste is truly an extraordinary, visionary leader. He recently was awarded the Goldman Prize for International Environmental Human Rights.

This is in what we call the pockets of functionality that are in the countryside which was not damaged by the earthquake. The MPP teaches peasants how to grow food and build homes and villages that are sustainable by building good nutrition, good health, building better soil and reforestation to combat soil erosion. Father Chavannes and his organization are building an ecovillage with help from UUSC. This sustainable community will serve as a rebuilding model for other NGOs in Haiti.

It is to the Central Plateau where the MPP has its national headquarters that thousands streamed out of Port au Prince after the earthquake seeking relief. UUSC helped the MPP in the initial phase of disaster relief, by providing materials to build large communal kitchens and we gave food aid so that the earthquake refugees who arrived from the city were provided for. People who worked construction and who cooked for the

crowds or worked to grow food earned income to sustain themselves and their families.

In the second phase of disaster relief, UUSC is working to build a sustainable ecovillage for forty families. This will include a community center, a clinic, communal kitchens for a future catering business, reforestation projects, sustainable agriculture model farm, and, a fuel pellet factory. The pellet factory idea came from UUSC's collaboration with MIT's D Lab. They invented a way of making fuel pellets from the left overs of sugar cane processing. Now the destruction of Haiti's forests for firewood and the erosion in its aftermath can be stopped. The village will serve as an example and a training center to teach sustainable building, agriculture, economic development and animal husbandry methods and ideas to small farmers, MPP members and small farmers from all over Haiti.

Chavannes Jean Baptiste has long understood that Haiti's future and its people's economic well-being depend on preserving Haiti's fertile topsoil. For more than 30 years he has toiled along side his fellow peasants to reach these goals. They train farmers to use drip irrigation systems, organic agriculture techniques, and to build low cost erosion prevention structures. The resulting increase in crop yields has helped to make Haiti less dependent on imported foods. His reforestation tree and fruit tree planting program has planted more than 20 million trees in rural areas over the last 30 years to provide food and to stabilize Haiti's soil.

Last June the Rev. Dr. Bill Schulz, UUSC President and UUA officials and UU seminarians from Meadville-Lombard Theological Seminary and Starr King School for the Ministry visited the MPP. UUA President the Rev. Dr. Peter Morales was scheduled to go but was ill at the last minute. Rev. Bill Schulz said: "To meet Chavannes Jean Babtiste, MPP's charismatic founder and president, to meet members of the MPP and their families who insist that a better life is within reach and to work with them to realize their dreams is to be inspired and dissuaded From pessimism." This is the joyful news about Haiti.

Some UU seminarians were also on the trip with Rev. Bill Schulz. This was a transformational experience for them and they came away with valuable ideas and deeper understanding of UUSC and a respect for how Haitians were coping with disaster.

One seminarian wrote about witnessing a meeting last August: "Chavannes mentions that many Haitians live with a sense of fatalism. He gives the Haitian proverb: 'Not all fingers are the same length', meaning that each person is born with characteristics that never change. He cites other beliefs and sayings: "I'm poor because God made me this way or "I'm sick because the witch doctor put a spell on me"- expressions of the belief that people in poverty are controlled by other forces, not by other men and women. Chavannes says that popular education helps people open their eyes to reality. They see that Haiti is poor. Then they ask. Why is Haiti poor? These questions then lead to ideas and action.

Another grass roots organization that UUSC is supporting is APROSIFA. This is the Association for the Promotion of Integrated Family Healthcare. This community based health care organization provides health services using a community participation model. UUSC volunteer medical teams worked with APROSIFA last spring to increase their capacity and to help fight the cholera epidemic. The clinic includes a family planning center, nutritional recovery center for children, home health classes and general practice clinics. They got the word out by radio spots about cholera prevention and treatment at their center. In March UUSC sent two medical teams to work with the clinic.

The Rev. Bill Schulz, UUSC President said, "This is in many ways a ground breaking agency: family planning is still controversial in some Haitian families; malnutrition is widespread and troubled youth commonplace. The agency provides family planning information not widely available elsewhere, malnutrition recovery and teaches parents how to avoid it in the future. And

most remarkably, it uses art therapy to steer youth in the right direction”.

One community based outcome at APROSIFA was an after school program for youth. With a shortened school day for youth after the earthquake, young people were idle after school and needed positive things to do with their free time. The community decided to start an after school painting program that was a combination of art therapy for post earthquake stress syndrome and on the job training for the Haitian painters of tomorrow. Haiti has a noble history of producing its own style of painting called “Magic Realism”. This also offers a cultural history aspect that strengthens these young people who have lost so much.

These youth will be following in the footsteps of others who went on to have great careers as indigenous painters and in the meantime the youth could help support their families by selling their art. This has proven to be a success and it is an example of the ingenuity of a people who know best how to solve their problems and build for their future. Patrick, a young painter in APROSIFA’S painting class said: “I paint to imagine a new future for Haiti After the darkest time is when the renaissance comes!” This project touched my heart when I saw the photos of the young painters and the joy and hope that this gave them.

Their painting class inspired me to create a workshop with UUSC about UUSC and it’s projects in Haiti. Participants are inspired by a slide show about the partners and then a short history of Haitian Painting. The young Haitian painters showed me the way to bring our story to many UU churches. This is but one way that we have learned from our partners. I am grateful to young Patrick for his inspiration and the hope in his young bright face keeps me working for UUSC.

And finally, Haiti has been the first on the ground experiential learning experiment that is the fruit of a spirit of deeper cooperation between the UUA and UUSC. Last year two task forces were convened to identify ways that UUA and UUSC

could join hands to unite our social justice efforts and make them stronger. This is a new way forward for our UU churches and UUSC.

For example, the lens of the inherent worth and dignity of every person that is the modus operandi of UUSC as carried out through or Eye to Eye Partnerships is being looked at as a model for UUA social justice in our churches.

In the future every UU seminarian will be going on a UUSC Experiential Learning Trips as part of their training. This will increase greater understanding and enrich their training and give them an experience with hands on social justice. This is being done through a new program called the UUA UUSC College of Social Justice.

Another result of the tasks force is that UUSC's College of Social Justice will be offering more Just Works Experiential Learning Trips for UU Human Rights Activists so that you can experience for yourselves UUSC's efforts and eye to eye partnerships. UU human rights activists are eager to go on experiential learning trips and UUSC is working to build capacity to make this a reality. This coming year there will be three trips to Haiti for UU human rights activists and you can indicate an interest in a form on line at uuscs.org. Participants are expected to bring home and use what they gained to carry the work further.

I am hoping that someone from this congregation will be called to go and bring back the story of our work. These are positive and transformative trips that connect you to the work in a deep way. Participants learn about the history of Haiti and how it got to be the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Poverty doesn't just happen. On a UUSC trip you can learn about the roots and history of Haiti and how things got to be that way

Three experiential learning trips are planned for this year. Some will be going in February from First U. Church Portland. I will be going along on that trip to work beside our partners, I hope for a deeper way of viewing others, for that "greater understanding".

This past August UUSC and UUA sent a Youth Delegation to work with our partners in Haiti. UUSC encourages our youth by making every experiential learning trip multi generational. We are building young social justice leaders for tomorrow.

UUSC has created a new Haiti Multigenerational Curriculum “Beyond the Mountain” for our congregations. It will be ready this fall. You can download this from our website and use it in your church or fellowship.

And most of all, what I hope you take home in your heart today is a view of Haitians that is seen through the lens of our first UU principle and that you have hope for a new Haiti when you have heard about the UUSC partners and the efforts of the Haitian people.

So when you watch the next CNN special on Haiti two years after the earthquake and you see degrading images of despair, violence, chaos, degrading views of black women, and the scary music starts up, remember instead that there is another way of viewing Haitians though the light of our First UU Principle, “A belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person”. And I hope you turn off that television and go to our web site at uusc.org/haiti to see the hope and good news about Haiti.

You can be a part of our work and I hope you will support UUSC’s efforts by joining as a member, consider making a contribution, coming with us to Haiti to see for yourself, using our Haiti curriculum, or by visiting our web site at uusc.org. I hope that some of you will offer to help John, Ellen and Rev. Eric in their efforts to carry the story of UUSC into this church. I hope you stop by at the coffee hour table to learn more about what the brave resilient people of Haiti are doing to bring about their own recovery with our help.

OFFERING

Offerings this month will go to YRWD – JRMD. This

grassroots organization seeks reconciliation and peace by rebuilding homes, schools and orphanages for those traumatized by ethnic wars, injustice, famine, AIDS, and division in Burundi in the Great Lakes Region of Eastern Africa. Please write "Cause" or the organization's name on checks intended for this them. Don't mix with other gifts, pledges, etc. If you want a tax receipt for a cash donation please use one of the envelopes you can find at the back of Chapman Hall. Thank you.

OFFERTORY: "Stevenson" (George Winston) Peter

Hymn: #159 This is My Song

BENEDICTION: Linda

And now will you join me in prayer and a blessing.

EXCERPT OF A PRAYER BY JOHN MILLSPAUGH

Spirit of Life and Love,

Even as we have witnessed death sweep the landscape,

we know that life renews itself, and renews itself even now,

as human good springs up in the face of disaster,

and people reach out to one another across neighborhoods,
across oceans, serving one another across every difference.

We pray for the people of Haiti, that they know the people of the world stand with them as they face the challenges ahead.

We pray for those who work for the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and other relief organizations, that they may act from ongoing wisdom, and courage and compassion.

We pray for ourselves and other people living in comfort, that our hearts may be touched yet again to generously support human beings facing terrible tragedy that we cannot comprehend, but

that they have to live through. May we open our hearts to them and they work to rebuild.

BLESSING:

Spirit of Life and Love, bring blessings on the generous hearts of this congregation as they go forth and give them new eyes to see with greater understanding the just and sustainable Haiti that is theirs to build.

POSTLUDE: "*Arietta*" (Edvard Grieg) Tomoko

VALEDICTION: (We rise in body or spirit and join hands as a congregation.)

Reach out and touch somebody's hand.

Make this world a better place; YES! We can. (2x)

Fivefold Amen (3x)