



JPD Newsletter

Connecting all Unitarian Universalists in the Joseph Priestley District:

Southern New Jersey, Delaware, Eastern and Central Pennsylvania, Maryland,

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District of Columbia, Northern Virginia

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Dr. Elaine Pagels Compares Gospels in GA Ware Lecture

As the General Assembly's Ware Lecturer and recipient of the Melcher Book Award, Dr. Elaine Pagels compared the Gospels of Thomas and John and their relationship to the four canonical Gospels.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a sealed jar of 51 ancient writings, that included the Gospel of Thomas, first published in 1959, influenced her work and thinking.

She described the gospels as "like listening in on an argument" where different communities asked, "What's the good news about Jesus?" The Gospels of Thomas and John are similar, each assuming a familiarity with stories found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, but each presenting knowledge beyond that found in the public preachings of Jesus. Each deals with the Kingdom of God as an "actual ongoing spiritual reality here and now" and stresses a metaphor of light for God and Jesus.

Pagels said in Thomas the "good news is that Jesus manifests divine light— and so do we." In John's gospel, Jesus is the "only-begotten son" and Jesus is God incarnate, while the rest of us are nothing like God.

From the second through the fourth century, the ideas in John are developed, while those in Thomas are forgotten or suppressed, suggesting John's approach is "the only possible truth," which Pagels said, "impoverishes Christianity."

In a question-answer period, she addressed such issues as Mary Magdalen, women in ancient Christianity and the Trinity's history. She pointed out that there were Christians for 300 years before there was a doctrine of a Trinity.

Dr. Pagels, professor of History, Princeton University, is author of *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas (2003); The Gnostic Gospels, The Origin of Satan* and others.

Based on an article by Margy Levine Young, reporter and editor of UUA News & Events: General Assembly 2005.

Fairfax UUs Build Iraq War Memorial Cairn

Members of UU Congregation of Fairfax, Oakton, VA built a cairn as a memorial to men and women, both military and civilian, who have died in the Iraq War.

Bagpipe music played while members placed a stone on the cairn and then joined a Circle of Reflection until the last stone was placed. A Book of Remembrance and Reflection was available for recording people's thoughts and prayers.

The Memorial Cairn "will record the full human cost of this war...and reach out across time and space, to stand in remembrance with those whose families have been disrupted, damaged and lost because of this war," according to a newsletter statement.

UU Churches Back Gay Rights Efforts, Become Welcoming Congregations

Throughout the Joseph Priestley District last spring, UU Churches and fellowships not only "talked the talk" they "walked the walk" where LGBT rights and support were concerned.

At Cedar Lane UU, Bethesda, MD, its Social Justice Council established an LBGT Task Force to explore a new program, "Living the Welcoming Congregation," developed by the UUA Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Concerns. The task force plans to identify and address current LBGT needs. A Welcoming Congregation, Cedar Lane has provided space for regular meetings of PFLAG (Families and friends of Lesbians and Gays).

The GLBT and Social Justice Committees of UU Congregation of York, PA joined with O.P.E.N. (Ordinary People...Extraordinary Needs) for a summer ice cream social on church grounds to benefit this organization that helps those infected with HIV/AIDS.

At UU Congregation of Columbia, MD members voted to give its Social Action Council the authority to act on GLBT issues. Last year, at the request of Equality Maryland, the Council signed an

amicus brief in support of a lawsuit giving nine same-sex couples the right legally to marry. UUCC also will sign that brief. Columbia also joined with some five other UU congregations to take part in Baltimore's Gay Pride Day.

In New Jersey, UU Church in Cherry Hill will host in December a town meeting as part of a series, "New Jersey: A State That Doesn't Hate."

One of five meetings, Cherry Hill's event, "A Salute to South Jersey Champions of Equality," will honor community members who have helped make South Jersey a welcoming community for same-sex couples. Garden State Equality and Lambda Legal are sponsoring the series supporting marriage equality. Lambda Legal also has asked Cherry Hill to support its efforts to legalize civil marriage. Along with other churches and synagogues, UUCCH would appear on Lambda Legal's stationery and be linked to its website.

First Church of Baltimore, MD held an interfaith worship service, "Celebrating the Spirit's Radically Inclusive Love" during Baltimore's Gay Pride Week. Several area UU churches attended that service, including UU Fellowship of Southern Maryland, Leonardtown, MD that took part in a procession and carried its marriage equality banner.

UU Congregation of the Susquehanna Valley, Northumberland, PA and UU Fellowship of Easton, MD recently voted to become Welcoming churches.

Notes About Our Ministers

Rev. Ken Beldon will serve as the minister of the new large church in Chester County, PA supported by Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA. He served as called minister of the River of Grass UU Congregation, Western Broward County, FL. The Main Line congregation voted last November to mentor the new church, with a certain percentage of its current members expected to transfer to the Chester County church.

Several churches called ministers to serve in a variety of capacities: Rev. Lori Staubitz as settled minister for UU Fellowship of Southern Maryland, Leonardtown, MD and Rev. Lynn Thomas Strauss, minister of UU Church of Rockville, MD; Heather Janules as assistant minister for Cedar Lane UU Church, Bethesda, MD to be installed in November; Rev. Mary Katherine Morn as Minister for Worship for UU Congregation of Fairfax, Oakton, VA.

Rev. Peter Newport and Rev. Patricia Hart, a husband-wife ministerial team, will serve for a second year as interim ministers at UU Church of Delaware

County, Media, PA .

What's Happening....Unitarian Universalists of Gettysburg, PA was recognized as the newest JPD congregation at General Assembly....UU Church of Annapolis, MD voted to become a Certified Green Sanctuary....UU Church of Silver Spring became a "large" church when it added its 400th member....UU Congregation of York, PA is organizing a dialogue group for Atheists, Agnostics, and Secular HumanistsMt. Vernon Unitarian Church, Alexandria, VA will celebrate its 50th anniversary September through June 2006....Accotink UU Church, Burke, VA will celebrate its 25th anniversary at a banquet, September 24....UU Congregation of the South Jersey Shore, Oceanville, NJ raised \$276,345 for its capital campaign, surpassing its \$275,000 goal.

What We Care About....UU Fellowship of Harford County, Churchville, MD began building its wooden "Silent Witness" figures for its October ceremony, honoring those killed by domestic violence in the county. Five more figures were added for this year's ceremony. The figures are placed along Route 22 as a reminder of this community problem....First Church of Baltimore has divided its congregation into geographic Neighborhood Caring Circles. The goals are: to become better acquainted with one another, learn about needs and resources, respond more quickly if a member has a problem, incorporate new members and help them feel more connected to the church....Members of UU Church of the Restoration, Philadelphia, PA participated in Darfur Sunday and a letter-writing campaign to Congressmen, supporting the Darfur Accountability Act, which will provide \$90.5 million for victims of atrocities in Darfur.

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