



Red River Ramblings

The Monthly Newsletter of Red River Unitarian Universalists ♦ Denison TX ♦ Vol 21, No. 3 ♦ August 2019

Sunday, August 4, 2019 - 11:15 am

That Other Four-Letter Word

UU minister D. Scott Cooper, *preaching*

Political theorist and philosopher Edmund Burke wrote, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” Much is currently being written about standing up against and rallying against evil in our world and country. But well-meaning people sometimes hold very different views of what actually is evil. UUs are typically suspicious of absolute concepts such as good and evil – how has our faith tradition historically dealt with such concepts, and what might be the most useful ways for us to wrestle with such ideas today?

Scott is on the final stretch of a year-long Chaplaincy Residency at Parkland Hospital in Dallas and has just begun preliminary fellowship as a UU minister. Scott graduated in 2016 with his Master of Divinity degree from Brite Divinity School and completed his Ministerial Internship at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento. Scott will begin serving the First UU Church of Houston as Assistant Minister for Congregational Life in September.

Sunday, August 11, 2019 - 11:15 am

J.S. Mill’s Satisfied Pig: Thought Experiments in Values

Dr. William Lloyd Fridley, *speaking*

In his 1863 booklet *Utilitarianism*, British philosopher John Stuart Mill wrote that he would “rather be Socrates unsatisfied than a pig satisfied.” What would you rather be, and why? We will look at his reasoning on this and explore other thought experiments in values.

William Lloyd Fridley is a professor of Education at Southeastern Oklahoma State University (SOSU), where he has worked since 1999. His areas of expertise are philosophy of education, ethics, pragmatism and Plato, and he is involved in shared governance and academic policy with the SOSU Faculty Senate and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). His wife Carolyn is the Coordinator for the Liberal and Applied Studies program at SOSU.

Sunday, August 18, 2019 - 11:15 am

The Earth Community

The Rev. Dr. Mark Y.A. Davies, *preaching*

The Earth Community - an exploration of what life might be like if we thought of ourselves as earthlings first.

Rev. Dr. Mark Y. A. Davies is the Wimberly Professor of Social and Ecological Ethics at Oklahoma City.

In 2017, the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church selected Dr. Davies to serve as the convener of the writing team tasked with revising “The Natural World” section of the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church. This is the first time the Social Principles have undergone a thorough revision since their adoption by the denomination in 1972.

Mark engages in advocacy and activism in the areas of peace, social justice, and ecological sustainability. Locally this is expressed through his work with the Human Community Network.

He and his wife Kristin live in Edmond, OK in the United States, and they have two teenage daughters.

Sunday, August 25, 2019 - 11:15 am

Annual Water Communion Service

The Worship Team, *leading*

Water is one of the four elements. We drink, bathe, swim, soak, wash, clean, sprinkle, use and waste it. We watch it flowing in a stream or flooding the Red River. We capture it in countless photos and imagine it while listening to music. This Sunday is our annual Water Communion service, please bring a small container of water with you.



Scott Cooper



Wm Fridley



Mark Davies

Jim's Jabber



We are now one month into our new budget year. Hopefully our old building will cooperate better this year and not surprise us with expensive maintenance items.

There are several things happening in the next 30 days. North Texas UU Congregations (NTUUC) is having a FREE training session on August 10th from 9 am to noon at First

Church in Dallas, with lunch provided. The training topics are:

Love Beyond Belief - How Thandeka's teachings can be used in small groups and other facets of our work.

Widening the Welcome - There has been an active LGBT presence at First Church for nearly forty years - what difference has it made, and how could it transform your congregation?

Training for Teachers and Advisors - What's the latest in RE at First Church, and how could it help your program grow?

CPR/AED Training - Practice using hands-only CPR, and an automatic defibrillator.

Small Group Ministry - Learn how it works and strengthens your congregation; there will be a sample session. There are elements similar to the Wellspring program that you can incorporate without a major commitment.

It would be good if we could have someone from Red River in each of these sessions. I plan on going to the one on **Training for Teachers and Advisors** since one of my areas of responsibility on the Long Range Planning

Committee is the RE section. If you are interested, go to the NTUUC website, our App or Website and make a reservation for the session you are interested in and to sign up for lunch. Let me know if you are going so I can make sure all sessions are covered and setup some carpooling since they do have limited parking.

On August 17th we are having a Board Retreat lead by Doug. A big thank you to Cindy Buffington for allowing us to use her lovely home again.

NTUUC held a meeting on July 28th with the Presidents and VPs. Lisa and I went. I'll report back on what we discussed in my next Jim Jabber article.

Every few years, I've been told, we forego our regular Sunday morning activities and have a work day - in honor of Labor Day. This year our "Labors of Love" activities will include removing coffee stains from chairs and carpets, polishing the wood paneling, cleaning out closets, arranging book shelves, washing windows, dusting ceiling fans plus other chores that no one likes to do alone! Sunday, Sept 1 from 10 - noon. Good Times Team #1 will be providing makings for sandwiches.

I have lined up someone to start on the list of repairs and updates to our building so hopefully we will start seeing some progress on getting this list completed.

Dick has been working with the bookkeeper (Rebecca Stanczak who does Horizon's and NTUUC's books) to get her going on taking care of our bookkeeping. I am excited on the progress to date and the ability to create many useful reports to help us create reports everyone can easily read and understand. Starting August 12st we will be emailing an "expenses from July 1 2019 to current" report to the Worship Team, Grounds maintenance Team, Building Team to help them in managing their budget and any surprise expenses.

Jim

EQUIP2019 - August 10th

August 10 is the date, at First Unitarian Church; **no charge**, because we really want you to be there. Light breakfast items, with lunch after the program so you have time to connect with friends in other congregations, discussing what you learned and how you'll use it.

9 am - through lunch

Consider attending this program. We're a tiny congregation alone with only ourselves to rely on to grow our faith and enhance our understanding of liberal religion. A morning with 40-60 UUs will be a unique experience for most of us. Whether you attend a breakout session or sit and chat with someone, the day will bring you joy.

The Dallas UU church is easy to find, about a mile west of 75 when you exit at Mockingbird. Speak with Jim Holmes if you'd like to car pool.

You can register [here](#) (deadline is Aug 6)

Jim mentioned the various topics for the morning in his column. You can read the full details about the breakout sessions [here](#).

There has been one additional breakout session added:

Working for Racial Equity in Our UU Congregations

The Racial Equity Task Force of First Unitarian Church began meeting in the summer of 2018. Come hear their story including their struggles and fumbles, how they regrouped, what they are doing presently and what they have planned for the future to ensure that the congregation is actively engaged in justice-making and liberation.

The Story of Your Life

*Say you finally invented a new story
of your life. It is not the story of your defeat
or of your impotence and powerlessness
before the large forces of wind and accident.*

*It is not the sad story of your mother's death
or of your abandoned childhood. It is not,
even, a story that will win you the deep
initial sympathies of the benevolent goddesses
or the care of the generous, but it is a story
that requires of you a large thrust
into the difficult life, a sense of plenitude
entirely your own. Whatever the story is,
it goes as it goes, and there are vicissitudes
in it, gardens that need to be planted,
skills sown, the long hard labors
of prose and enduring love. Deep down
in some long-encumbered self,
it is the story you have been writing
all of your life, where no Calypso holds you
against your own willfulness,
where you can rise
from the bleak island of your old story
and tread your way home.*

Michael Blumenthal

Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography (WYSA) sounds daunting to most people, even Unitarian Universalists. Each of us could write various versions of our life story - perhaps a romantic or economic, or educational or psychological one. But what about the spiritual story of your life?

I've been pondering what sort of a course I might offer the church, one that may tap into something intriguing and personal. A few have asked about leading our *Building Your Own Theology* course. It is a wonderful class, but I have something different to suggest.

Focusing on one's spiritual autobiography is a task most avoid, yet people who have not done so will tell you it was an important odyssey and an insightful experience.

The course is eight evening sessions held over the same number of weeks. I will lead, not teach. Lead in the sense that I present its structure, explain the exercises, and try to set a tone and atmosphere. The evenings involve drawing exercises that evoke memories and lead to discussion, along with writing and reading of brief papers on varieties of spiritual experiences.

This is not a writing class, you won't stand up and share only to have your classmates rip apart your grammar, or content.

Ditto for the drawings, this is not an art class, no competition. Paper, crayons, markers with the finished piece becoming the guidepost for a discussion. The writing and sharing brief papers is an important step leading to the final assignment: preparing your two page, written spiritual autobiography.

The course starts in early September so the eight weeks will conclude before we return to standard time. Those wishing to participate will select which evening we will meet.

The class concludes with a catered dinner at which participants, who have taken a week to prepare, read their spiritual autobiography. Everyone who wants to make the commitment is encourage to sign up. The course is powerful, personal, thoughtful, and insightful.

If you are interested and wish to participate, or have questions about the course, please speak with me.

Doug Strong

Worship Team Meeting

this month is on Sunday, **August 11th at 12:45** in the chapel. The team has only two unscheduled Sunday's to fill this year and have started inviting speakers for 2020.

Welcoming Congregation

Our next meeting will be **Sunday, August 4 at 1:00** at church. We are flexible and adapt to other uses of the building before deciding on our meeting space.

Earth Day Planning

The Planning Committee will meet Tuesday, **August 13 at 6:30 pm** in the chapel. We plan to have a booth at the Sherman Arts Fest on September 21, where we will hand out recycling guides for north Texas and southern Oklahoma and cloth shopping bags left over from the 2019 Earth Day Festival. We will also assist Sherman residents with enrollment in the residential recycling program.

Water Communion

Remember to collect a small container of water for our annual Water Communion ceremony, which will be on **Sunday, August 25th**. Then, remember to bring it with you!

August Birthdays

- iii August 06 - Linda Tracy
- iii August 09 - Peter Nichols
- iii August 09 - Helen Schulze
- iii August 10 - Lisa Cates
- iii August 17 - Karen Droegemeier
- iii August 29 - Carolyn Fridley
- iii August 31 - Doug Strong

Treasurer's Report

In the month of June, we had total receipts of \$3,638.54. Expenses for the month totaled \$2,147.24, leaving an excess of receipts over expenditures for the month of June of \$1,491.30.

For the twelve months ended June 30, 2019, we had total receipts of \$61,447.56, and total expenses of \$50,881.68, leaving an excess of receipts over expenditures of \$10,565.88, which was \$5,724.88 over budgeted net income.

As of June 30, 2019, we had \$9,162.85 available in checking, a total of \$66,983.22 in all savings accounts and a total of \$14,644.91 in Certificates of Deposit.

All bank accounts have been reconciled with no exceptions noted.

Pursuant with the Board's decision, I have met with Rebecca Stanczak, the bookkeeper at Horizon UU who, effective July 1, is keeping the books for Red River UU. She and I are working together effectively to ensure a smooth, efficient and trouble-free transition of these responsibilities.

Dick Powell,
Treasurer

School Supplies Drive

Our congregation is partnering with Grand Avenue Presbyterian along with Grace UMC and The Church at Texoma to gather school supplies. Grand Avenue will be doing the distribution as they have for many years. They gather supplies thru Aug & Sept & in late Sept they donate directly to the schools.

To know what to donate, just look at any student supply list. In addition to supplies, socks and undies are needed. School nurses need a supply for children who may have an accident. Without a change, the child must remain in the nurse's office for the remainder of the day. You can leave your contributions on the corner table in the upper lobby, outside the Barton Parlor. For more information, contact Jack eroshome2011@gmail.com

Texoma Nerds

Texoma Nerds, a local Dungeon & Dragons group meets in the church every **Tuesday evening from 5-8 pm**. Anyone who enjoys the fun of D & D is welcome to drop in.

LGBTQ Movie Night

Save the date!! Friday **August 23rd at 7 pm** the Welcoming Congregation committee is hosting an LGBTQ social event and all are welcome!



We'll be watching *It's in the Water*. Filmed in Dallas it's a 1997 independent film. Written and directed by Kelli Herd, the film touches on themes of homosexuality, AIDS, coming out and small-town prejudice. Since this was an independent movie there is no rating. There is some slight nudity, sexual references and cursing. No blood, guts or gore. Run time 1h 40m. Watch the trailer by tapping the red You Tube play logo above.

So bring your pillow(s), favorite snacks & drinks & let's have a ball!!

Choir Meeting

Sunday, Aug 18th 12:45 in the chapel, to look over when we can sing and to talk about rehearsal schedules. Interested? Speak with Dan Althoff

Welcoming Com. Update

The request for status as a Welcoming Congregation has been submitted to the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). There was a delay as the report was reviewed, edited and supplemented with historical information about our congregation. We will continue to keep the congregation updated about our status over the next few months.

We are revitalizing our Texoma LGBTQ Meetup group with a movie night in the chapel on Friday, August 23 at 7:00 pm.

We also have plans for two outreach projects for the fall:

1. Launching a support group for people who are transgender and their immediate family/support members.
2. Inviting members of other congregations we are working with to attend webinars provided by the UUA in order to assist them with their work to become LGBTQ affirming places of worship.

Common Read for August

Tales of a Traveling Preacher

By the Rev. Christine Tata

An 8 minute read



When I'm not writing satirical and spiritual tales as the [RevDrSparky](#), I often go around telling those tales in person, as a traveling preacher for small congregations who need a 20-minute mes-

message for the Sunday morning worship service.

Believe it or not, there are people who still want to hear a preacher in person, even though they could all stay home and stream brilliant podcasts and TED talks and videos all day long. Somehow, real people still want to get together in real time with other real people. Go figure.

It's not a very efficient side hustle, but it suits my skills. Showing up in person, preaching for 100 or 75 or 50 souls in a room somewhere, reminds me that there still remain some elements of life that stubbornly refuse to be scaled up, photoshopped, or autotuned.

It's not for everyone. But it's for real.

Have words, will travel

The traveling preacher gives the sermon and maybe some prayers, but volunteers usually lead the rest of the service — they are the readers, bell-ringers, ushers, greeters, sound technicians, singers, instrumentalists, janitors, kid wranglers, and crowd control.

The operative word being: volunteer. Which means they can't be fired. Keep that in mind.

In my perfect, prissy fantasy world, all the worship volunteers would arrive together at dawn in a black van, huddle in small tactical groups for materiel and weapons check, and regroup for a full run-through an hour before the prelude.

But that never happens. Instead, it's like a 3-D pinball game in there, as you figure out who does what with the lay leader, and somebody mics you up, and there's feedback during the sound-check but they fix it, and the treasurer makes sure you have your check (usually), and then some kids go running through the sanctuary, and somebody notices the candle-lighter is missing.

You're lucky if someone realizes you just drove four hours and shows you where the restroom is.

There is *always* chaos, but I breathe deeply and remind myself that the *world* is chaos, which is the very reason we need this time and place of worship, so it's all good.

We join the worship that is already in progress

Eventually, they ring the bell, or light the candles,



or play the prelude — each congregation has its own routines that it performs, more or less religiously, and the service is underway.

Congregations take a while to settle down these days. Speakers are distracted. Phones beep. The people have to juggle bulletins and hymnals, write a check or dig for a dollar, stand up, sit down — anything but "worship."

Often there are children in the room until the "Time for All Ages," after which they clatter out, none too soon for me. I try to avoid doing the "Time for All Ages," since kids these days are freakishly smart and self-assured and therefore terrifying.



Many small congregations then have a time for Joys and Concerns, where people light a candle and share what's on their mind. I like to make little bets with myself on who will forget a) to tell us their name or b) to talk into the microphone. Because someone *always* forgets one or the other, despite the fact that Al or Margaret reminds them every blessed week.

Then, there's prayer or meditation, and even if there's a "moment" of silence, it's only about 12 seconds. Most of us can't stand much more than that, what with the ambient sounds of our own sniffing



and our neighbor's [borborogmi](#).

Still, over the course of a half-hour, the chaos of the world roughly and gradually falls away, and if all goes well, the community begins to feel safe.

This message is brought to you by...

Eventually, we get to the preaching. Lots of churches don't like to call it a "sermon" anymore. Apparently, that's too judgmental. Too negative.

A gently traditional church may call this part of the service the "Teaching." A gently progressive one may suggest it is the "Reflection." A steadfastly secular congregation will label it the "Remarks." (They're just trying to act cool.)

Usually, I go with "Reflection," but reluctantly, because it sounds as though I'm about to deliver a spiritual selfie.

Maybe I'll make up my own word for a humorous sermon, which is what I specialize in. What about "Sermonella"? I think I'd like that. I really would.

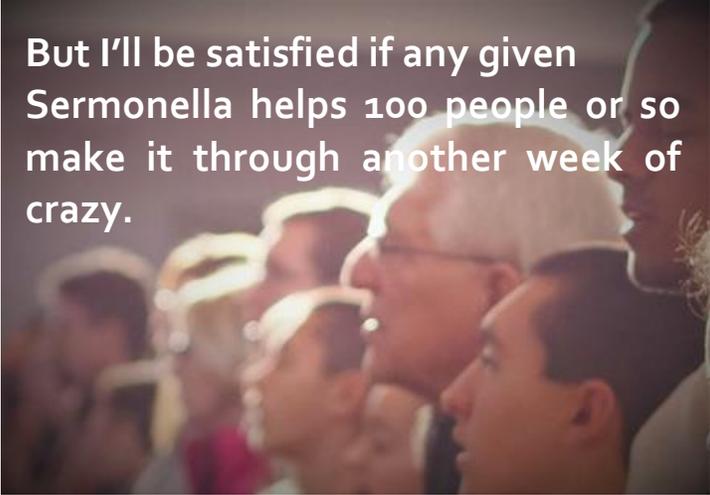
"I'm quite certain there's an afterlife — it's the one right BEFORE it that I'm not so sure about!"

That was a recent opening, and it got a pretty good chuckle. I always like to start with humor, because: a) it releases tension; and b) I want people to like me. Most preachers want people to like them, and if they say they don't care about that, they are liars just

like everybody else.

Certainly, I've dreamed of being a dramatic, transformative speaker. I'd love to ignite the *Third* Great Awakening, the way Jonathan Edwards supposedly ignited the Second Great Awakening in 1741 with his two-hour, over-the-top sermon, "[Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God](#)" that had people wailing in the pews.

Of course, today's version of that sermon title would have to be, "Emotionally Fragile Victims of Poor Life Choices Being Negatively Influenced by the Cosmic Aspects of A Proposed Metaphoric Ultimate Being" — and I don't see that going viral any time soon.



But I'll be satisfied if any given Sermonella helps 100 people or so make it through another week of crazy.

Time out of mind

Preachers have to be on top of time. We have to know precisely how long our "remarks" will take to deliver. (Not like that lady who rambled on in Joys and Concerns for what, *seven minutes*? And they just *let* her? Have mercy, people.)

A good, progressive Sermonella is about 17–19 minutes — just like a TED talk — and the rules are the same as for a good blog post. Provoke thoughtful engagement and/or humorous perspective. Use vivid images. Present complex concepts in simple language. Hope for many claps.

Sometimes, afterward, someone blurts out that they like my preaching *better* than the regular minister's. It's gratifying, but the regular minister hasn't got a thing to worry about from the traveling preacher. Why? Because next week, I get to do more writing and get a pedicure. *They* have to start a stewardship campaign or bury a longtime friend. Oof. There but for the grace of God...

We few, we happy few....

Unless it's the Pope, the traveling preacher usually speaks to the smallest crowds. We do the Sundays *after* Christmas or Easter when attendance is lightest. If we are filling in because the regular minister is taking off, chances are good that many of the regular churchgoers are taking off, too.

So, theoretically, the traveling preacher *could* just sort of throw something together; make it an easy gig. Who's going to care?

But I do my best anyhow, because I figure maybe the people who bothered to show up on that no-account Sunday had a *particular* need for church that day. You never know. Angels unaware, and all that.

You had to be there

If the preaching seemed to touch someone, they might ask me for a copy of the text, but I don't give it out.

That Sermonella's essence wasn't words-on-a-page. It was the event they experienced in the course of their real life, in the company of other real, physical people who bothered to get up, go somewhere, shuffle in, shake hands, sit together, and breathe their coffee breath together. The Sermonella was an event created in the presence of those people.

People: The lay leader who didn't know their part, the greeter who forgot to make coffee, the pianist who stumbled over the prelude, the kid who kept interrupting, the lonely widow who monopolized Joys and Concerns, just like she always does.



People need worship to be interdisciplinary. It needs to involve their whole selves: minds, bodies, hearts, and souls, in the company of others.

For example, we are better able to hear a message of compassion if we have first had the opportunity to offer compassion. Maybe to someone lonely enough to ramble on for seven minutes in Joys and Concerns.

I'm flattered when someone is moved by something I've said. But it's as if I've dropped a grain of sand into the oyster of their community of faith, and they think I am responsible for the pearl that it made.

So when they ask me for the text of the Reflection, I tell them that whatever they heard in that Reflection was probably their own wisdom just ready to come clear. (Okay, fine. I guess it was a Reflection. *Just not of the preacher.*)

And then, before it gets too heavy — since I am not their regular minister — I just assure the good soul that I was happy to be preaching to the choir today.

I say my farewells, and promise to come back, and make sure I didn't leave my notes in the pulpit, and sometimes I change clothes for the trip home.

I always hope that the sermon they heard that day was a good one. But it was more important that it be real. And we were really gathered there together.



And so I drive away. Where to next?

Leaders

Board of Trustees

Jim Holmes, *President*
Lisa Cates, *Vice President*
Dick Powell, *Treasurer*
David Dyer, *Secretary*
Sabra Jones, *Trustee*
Helen Schulze, *Past President*

Committee on Ministry:

Dan Althoff, Elbert Hill, Marla Loturco

Nominating:

Kelly Cofield- Dyer, L.D. Clark, Amy Hoffman-Shehan

Team Leaders/Members:

Adult Forum: *Sabra*
Aesthetics: *Carol, Doug, Joyce*
Caring Circle: *Kelly*
Communications: *Doug*
Endowment: *Carolyn, Dick, Doug*
Facilities:
Finance: *Jim, Dick, Doug*
Grounds: *Marilyn*
Long Range Planning: *Jim, Marilyn, Robert, Ronda*
Membership: *Marion*
NTUUC Rep: *Marla*
RE Team: *Linn, Tommi*
Safe Congregation Panel: *Dan*
Social Action: *Rebecca*
Welcoming Congregation: *Jack*
Worship: *Doug, Marla, Rebecca, Robert, Tommi*

Contact Us

Red River Unitarian Universalists
515 North Burnett Ave
mail to:
PO BOX 1806
DENISON, TX 75021-1806



How to reach us:

- Phone: 903.231.3232
- Email: info@redriveruu.org
- Website: redriveruu.org
- Facebook: [RedRiverUnitarianUniversalist-Church](https://www.facebook.com/RedRiverUnitarianUniversalist-Church)
- Mobile App: 'RedRiverUU' free from the [Apps Store](#) and [Google Play](#).
- Calendar [here](#)

Circles & Interest Groups

Church activities are open to everyone. Contact the facilitator if you wish more information.

EARTH DAY PLANNING COMMITTEE ~ the group is responsible for the creation, each year, of the Texoma Earth Day Festival. All who enjoy planning a large-scale community event are invited to learn more. During the Festival many church members and friends volunteer to help. Next Meeting, August 13th @ 6:30 - in the chapel Amy Hoffman-Shehan, *facilitator*

FLEDGLING CHOIR ~ a small group of people who like to sing and are hoping to encourage other singers to join us. When we rehearse, it is Sunday after the assembly. Open to all singers.

MOVEABLE FEAST ~ a culinary chalice circle of people who enjoy food, preparing, sharing, and enjoying. A very popular church group that welcomes newcomers. The Feasters meet monthly and may gather in someone's home, at a restaurant, or church. Marion and Elbert Hill, *facilitators*

WEB OF LIFE MONARCH WAYSTATION ~ a new group in the planning stages right now, to tenderly love our monarch waystation and to help spawn more gardens at other churches or various locations. More as the summer wanes into autumn. Linn Cates, *facilitator*

Red River Unitarian Universalists
515 North Burnett Avenue
PO BOX 1806
Denison TX 75020

