

# FAITH MATTERS: setting a table for faith

## Why THIS newsletter NOW?



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*"What children are really asking is for us to reveal and share ourselves and our faith, not to provide dogmatic answers. We do not need to answer our children's questions, but we do need to make our faith available to them as a source for their learning and growth."*

John Westerhoff, theologian

When I talk with people about why they come to church, especially those people who quit coming when they were young adults and then started coming again once they had children, the answer I hear most is that they wanted some kind of religious education for their children. Whatever brings people back to church, I am always glad when it happens because I happen to believe that churches are wonderful places to find community and support and to work together to build the world you dream about. When it comes to religious education for your children though, do you realize that YOU, as the parent, are the primary religious educator for your children— not the church. The church has never been the primary religious educator of children. We may act like it is so but it is not and if we are going to be realistic and effective, we need to acknowledge it as truth. When your child sees a dead squirrel in the road on the way to the supermarket and asks you if the squirrel has gone to heaven and you answer her, you are a religious educator. When you talk with your child about why some kids in his classroom make fun of his friend Abdul's mother because she wears a hijab, you are a religious educator. When you talk with your children about making mistakes and the importance of forgiving themselves, you are

a religious educator. These are all ways in which your child's faith is being nurtured and it is not possible to deal with all of these topics in a quality way in a Sunday School class for less than an hour a week.

In her book, *Making a Home for Faith*, author Elizabeth Caldwell says: *"It is imperative that congregations support and educate adults in ways that will enable them to set the tables of faith in their homes, tables of faith that move with them to communities of faith...."*

I like the image of setting a table for faith. Some of the most important "classes in religious education" are held around a dinner table or breakfast table or picnic table. Often we have guests in our midst too and we can learn the importance of beliefs and actions that are inclusive and make room to welcome one more to the table of our home, of our faith and of our life.

So, how can I support parents as they go about the awesome task of nurturing the spirits of their children, whether they go to church every Sunday or every once in a while? One of my answers to this conundrum is to create this newsletter and my goal is to send it out once a quarter to Unitarian Universalist families as a way to help cultivate UU faith

in the home....as a way of supporting you in your role of resident theologian.

Now, I am not suggesting that you read this newsletter and engage in some of the activities you find within and then your family can stop going to church altogether. No, my intention is to help families nurture UU faith in a variety of ways in addition to faithful church attendance as much as possible.

I value your feedback in this new endeavor. And....I hope to see you in church real soon.

*Cheryll*



*This flame glows as light  
glows in the darkness.  
This flame dances as  
growing things dance  
upon the green earth.  
This flame flickers as life  
flickers for a precious  
while in each of us.  
This flame is warm as  
the companionship of  
family and friends is  
warm.*

- Andrew M. Hill

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## Creating Rituals = Faith in Action

*by Cheryl Wallace*

Tom Driver, in his book, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites that Transform Our Lives and Our Communities*, says that rituals are ways of "making paths for behavior to follow."

What kinds of rituals would feed the souls of your family members and give them places or paths to act out their faith? What rituals do you already observe in the life of your family?

**One way to begin to introduce more ritual into the life of your family is to begin with something you already do and add to it.**

What could you cultivate to make a garden for more questions, more growth and deeper understanding?

One way to begin to introduce more ritual into the life of your family is to begin with something you already do and add to it. If your family shares a meal together at least once each day, introduce a short meal blessing appropriate for your family's religious beliefs. If you tuck your kids into bed each night, add a bedtime blessing to the ritual. If you kiss your kids goodbye as they leave for school each day or text or talk to them on the phone daily, add a short saying or a line from a poem that lets you know how much they are loved.

When my son was little and as he grew into an adolescent, I used to wake him up each morning with

the Robert Louis Stevenson poem: "A birdie with a yellow bill, hopped upon the window sill, cocked his shining eye and said, "Ain't you 'shamed, you sleepy head?" I would then add, "Now get your body outta bed!" When he was a senior in high school he had been home with the flu for several days and on this particular morning it was time for him to return to school but he was having a hard time getting out of bed. I kept calling to him and calling to him,. Finally I heard him say, "I will get up if you come and sing me the birdie song." This innocent little ritual had conveyed to my son through the years that he was cared for—he was loved. Even when he was taller and larger than I was, the "the birdie song" ritual was still a comfort to my child.



## Food Blessings

THESE 2 CAN BE SUNG TO THE TUNE OF "THE OLD 100TH" OR "THE DOXOLOGY":

*Earth, who gives to us this food,  
Sun, who makes it ripe and good;  
Dear Earth, dear Sun, by you we live;  
To you our loving thanks we give.*

\*\*\*\*\*  
*God, we thank you for this food,  
For rest and home and all things good,  
For wind and rain and sun above,  
But most of all, for those we love.*

*May we hold hands  
quietly for a moment,  
Feeling love flow around  
us and through us,  
Knowing that as we give  
love away there is always  
more within.*

\*\*\*\*\*  
*May we have grateful  
hearts and may we be  
mindful of the needs  
of others.      Amen*

### When you have Company:

A circle of friends is a blessed thing.  
Sweet is the breaking of bread with friends.

For the honor of their presence at our table we are deeply grateful.      Amen.

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*For bread, for friends, for joy and sorrow,  
for the comfort of quietness,  
let us ever be grateful.*

Rudolph W. Nemser

# Bedtime Blessings

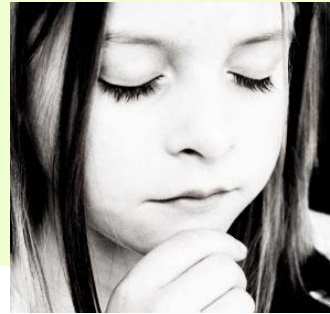
I am thankful for the night  
And for the pleasant  
morning light,  
For health and strength  
and loving care  
and all that makes the  
world so fair. Amen

Spirit of Life, hear my  
prayer.  
Hold those I love in  
your loving care.  
Guide my life in all I  
do.  
And bless all those who  
love me too.

Everyday for  
these three things  
I pray:  
To show Love more  
clearly,  
To love Others  
more dearly,  
To follow Peace &  
Patience more  
nearly everyday.

Amen

*Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
See me safely through the night,  
And wake me with the morning light.*



## Parents as Resident Theologians

In her book [Making A Home for Faith](#), author Elizabeth F. Caldwell tells about a passage in a Madeleine L'Engle novel- *The Severed Wasp*. "In the book, L'Engle describes Felix, who introduces himself as a window cleaner. His conversation partner knew he was a violinist and queried, "A window cleaner and a violinist?" "No *and*," he replied. "Music is my window cleaning....All our windows have been so fouled with futility and folly that we can't see out. So there have to be window cleaners. Artists clean the muddied windows with the purity of their art."

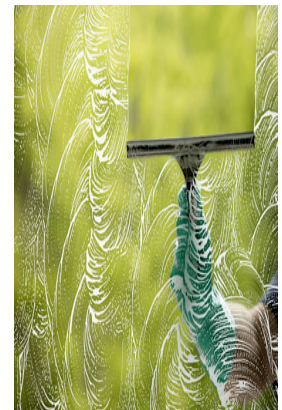
Who or what cleans the

windows of your soul?  
What opportunities have pushed open the window of your thinking and allowed a breath of air to come in and raise questions about yourself, your faith, your place, your commitments, your call, or your vocation? I think that each person of faith is a theologian and so by nature we are also window cleaners. ....Cleaning windows and knowing when to open and close them seem...to be essential parts of maintaining a home for faith."

Questions for Reflection:

1. In what ways was your faith nurtured or not nurtured in your home when you were a child

- or youth? What practices enabled the growth of your faith?
2. What faith questions do you remember as being important to you when you were a child or youth? Who was there to listen or to respond to these questions?
3. When it comes to thinking about faith, of what are you most confident? Least confident?
4. What faith question has your child asked recently? How did you respond?



"Cleaning windows" and knowing when to open and close them seem to be essential parts of maintaining a home for faith.

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**Unitarian religious educator, Sophia Fahs, suggested that the companionship of an older person in the religious search is a better security than absolute answers about what happens after death and about the existence of God.**

## **The Representation of God in the life of a Child**

“When a three-year-old child stands, wondering, before the crushed form of a turtle in the road and asks his questions about death and life, his religious search has begun. Unitarian religious educator, Sophia Fahs, suggested that the companionship of an older person in that search is a better security than absolute answers about what happens after death and about the existence of God. The process of religious education can then become a process of questioning, experimenting, studying the variety of answers that people have found.”

Based on her research and study of young children and the ways that they represent God, Ana-Maria Rizzuto has identified three theses. 1. She found that by the age of six, all children have constructed some image or representation of God. 2. She affirms that the representation of God that the child has developed is drawn from the parent(s) or other family members who are important in the child's life. 3. “the representation of God takes form in the space between parents and the child.” This same space is occupied by transi-

tional objects such as teddy bears or blankets, the things that comfort children and remind them of the constancy of love, trust, and security. Rizzuto believes that occupying the same transitional space as a beloved bear or blanket, a child's representation of God becomes another way to express consistent love, trust, and faith.

(from *Making A Home for Faith* by Elizabeth F. Caldwell)