

# Powerline

First Unitarian Universalist  
Church of Niagara

October 2018

639 Main Street  
Niagara Falls, NY 14301  
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*Learn, Love, Build a Better World*

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The Powerline is a monthly publication of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Niagara. It is free online to anyone who wishes to subscribe- members, friends, and anyone else anywhere in the country and beyond.

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Many thanks to our contributors Teresa Labuszewski, Erica Kopp, and Betsy Diachun.

## Sunday Programs

### October 7: "Fall Harvest,"

The earth-centered traditions encourage us to consider what the spiritual teachings of each season might be. As we move deeper into fall, today we'll consider--through responsive reading, reflection, and song-- three spiritual touchstones fall may offer us.

Rev. Theresa Kime

*Coffee hour: Nan Simon and Glen Herman*

*Usher: Susan Diachun*

### October 14: "The Eve of Hallows"

With Halloween approaching, we'll be looking at ancient traditions of staying in touch with deceased relatives and ancestors. Some elements of ancient Pagan tradition are alive and well, when we dress our children for trick-or-treat.

John Snodgrass

*Coffee hour: Patty and Bill Lisk*

*Usher: Pat Velky*

### October 21: "Human Being, Being Human"

As a unique human being, I have inherited the particular genetic mapping of my ancestors, making me unique and special, one of a kind....or am I? Let's talk about being human.

Rev. Sally Hamilin

*Coffee hour: Joy and Norm Rowlinson*

*Usher: Shelley Baxter*

### October 28: Rev Don Reidell

*Coffee hour: Jen and Will Gray*

*Usher: Erica Kopp*



## President's Message

Every morning before work, Pablo (my dog) and I go for a 30-40 minute walk around our neighborhood. As we walk, we pay attention to the things around us-I may see beautiful cloud formations that make me get my phone out to take a picture, or he may smell something really exciting that requires running with nose to ground. But what we both really love is when it is garbage and recycling day. We get to see (and smell) what our neighbors have purchased or what they are throwing out. I used to think that I could tell a lot about people by their junk. But then I realized that I was making assumptions that might or might not be correct. For instance, ten wine bottles in the recycling bin at one house made me think, "Wow, they had quite the party." But I could have just as easily thought, "Wow, they drink too much." I think it is important to realize that we all make assumptions about the world that may or may not be true. Where do those assumptions come from? Do they come from our own personal experience? Or do they come from what other people have told us? Are assumptions based on fact, or are they things we tell ourselves because we don't have the facts and we need a story to make sense out of what we are seeing? Maybe all those wine bottles were stored over a year on a shelf and are only now being recycled. So no party, no overindulgence.

What does this have to do with anything? A lot, really. When we come to church each Sunday, we assume that there will be someone in the pulpit. But the speakers don't just materialize. They have to be discovered and asked and paid for their time. Someone has to do that and lately, those jobs have been performed largely by two people, as I pointed out in church last Sunday. I was so pleased to have two different people approach me in coffee hour and volunteer to help. Thank you so very much.

We also assume that working on a committee will be boring or take up too much of our time or be too much of a commitment. Patty Lisk likes to say she joined the Stewardship Committee with trepidation. Who likes to ask for money? But she has returned year after year because it is fun to think of new ways to celebrate our community; because we on the committee got to know and value each other better than we could have by simply chatting at coffee hour. We have developed a stronger sense of belonging and community by working together for the good of our church home. So think about trying a committee or coming for a work party at the church. Think about becoming a member if you are not.

You know what they say (whomever they are). When you assume you make an ass out of u and me. So the next time you look at someone's recycling bin, don't make an assumption about the 10 wine bottles. If you really want to know, ask how they happen to be there. And then, actually listen to the answer. You might become enlightened.

I believe in you,  
Teresa Labuszewski

## Our People

*Here is a letter our friend Reverend Bob LaVallee posted on his facebook page. We thank him for his support. But being angry and upset is not enough. Many of us have experienced the sexual violence and discrimination and that comes with being a woman anywhere in the world. Let's do something about it. Let's get out and support the many women running for office in our country and support the men who are enlightened and would work to take the shame out of admitting to having been sexually abused. Let's have more women police, police chiefs, principals, university presidents, coaches. Let's tell boys that it is not all right to force a woman to do anything she does not want to. Let's teach men that no means no. Let us plan a better and safer future for our daughters and nieces. It can be done by voting and speaking our mind when we hear the victim being blamed for having been victimized.*

Hello Dear Ones:

Content warning: Sexual Assault

This week, as I prepared the letter for the Beacon, I was ready to write a note about worship at South Valley, about why we do it and how, and to state my appreciation for this congregation's openness to change and experimentation. I was ready to write a nice, safe letter. I can't do that today.

Today, Friday September 28, I write to you filled with a holy rage and a profound sadness. The affairs of the moment bring us face to face with what we've long known: women live in constant awareness of their vulnerability to emotional and physical attack from men. Women live in constant awareness that if that attack happens, they may not be believed when they report it and they will likely be discredited and disparaged for speaking up. Women live in constant awareness that their assailant is unlikely to suffer any consequences. We've known this for a long time, and it is still true. This is something that I cannot accept.

As a person who identifies as male, it's hard to know exactly what to do with all this. Some women I respect are saying that for right now, men should shut up. Given the men that I've seen who are going out of their way to demonstrate their lack of empathy for survivors, I think those women have a point. Others are calling for men to step up as allies. I aim to do that, but I also worry that my support will come off as virtue signaling, making a show of being a "good man" without any real will to change either myself or this misogynist country. I know too well my own past complicity with sexism to hold myself up as an example for anyone.

I think that this is a moment for everyone, but especially men, to go deep into reexamining their attitudes and actions. Let us acknowledge that rape culture exists on a continuum from an unwanted gaze or remark, to an unwelcome touch, to outright assault. The idea that connects all those things is consent, or more to the point, the lack of consent. We (again, men especially) need to think about the times where we engaged in actions (gazes, comments, touches) that were done without consent, and also when we allowed those actions to happen in our presence. This latter part is critical.

I don't know what to do next, and frankly it's not for me to say. I want to listen to women and follow their lead as an ally. That feels like a good start. If folks feel like this is new ground, I'm happy to share resources that helped me better understand the situation. Just email me at [minister@svuus.org](mailto:minister@svuus.org).

I write with rage and sadness, but I also write with inspiration. I'm inspired by Dr. Ford, and all the victims (some men, but overwhelmingly women) who overcame their shame and their fear to share one of the worst moments of their life in hope that we as a society can learn and do better. One of the signs of spiritual maturity is the ability to experience an awful loss or pain and to use that experience to help the world grow and heal. The courage of these women is a lesson to me and to all of us.

Finally, this issue is not an abstraction; there are people in this congregation, who sit with us on Sunday, who have experienced this directly. My prayers are with the survivors among us. If you need support, consider calling 24 hour Crisis Services at (716) 285-3515 to be connected with a trained staff member.

How I wish I could write a nice, happy letter today, but wishing won't make it so. It's time for us to do the work called by our Unitarian Universalist values. I believe in you.

In love and anger,  
Rev. Bob LaVallee

## **Community**

For this year's holiday charity project, FUUN will be BUILDING A WALL OF GOODWILL! The Community Mission needs our help to re-stock their food pantry this winter. We will build a wall of non-perishable foods in the narthex, to fill the Mission's shelves. Please begin bringing items with you on Sundays between now and December 16. We'll build that wall, and we will pay for it with our own FUUN generosity!

We will make Niagara Falls Great Again!

## UUA

### The Compliment

"It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent."

—former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright

*The reflection that follows includes an explicit reference to sexual violence.*

"You have beautiful hair. If you slim down, Honey, you'll have to fight off the men." A very old woman standing behind me in the pharmacy line said that.

"Thanks," I said gently, searching for the way to say what came next. "For the hair compliment, I mean. No thanks on the slimming down part. In fact, please never say that to anyone again. It's not okay. Neither is having to fight off men."

I wanted to talk to her about fatphobia and how harmful it is, specifically to women in our culture. I wonder how her life would have been different if she had seen representation of people living joyfully in the glorious array of real bodies, just the way they are.

But mostly I wanted her to know that the literal trauma of women fighting off men is no joke. It is not desirable. And it is not ever about hair, body shape or size, or any other measure of perceived desirability.

I was fifteen years old, wearing a long, body-covering dress that my conservative faith deemed modest enough for a proper young lady when I was drugged and raped by a man after a church choir outing. My fat body, my harsh up-do, my plainness, and my innocent naïveté did not prevent me from having to try to fight him off. And there was nothing flattering about the fact that I had to.

I am okay now, with a burning in my soul to speak up for other girls and women who too often fall into the path of well-meaning people whose words do harm. And for their sake, I cannot always just smile and say *thanks* if I think you meant well.

I trusted the kind old woman at the pharmacy to be capable of hearing hard truth, no matter her age; perhaps because of it. Bless her wounded heart with its internalized misogyny, the myriad causes of which I will never know.

She just wants women to love and support each other. Thank you. Me too. That's why I said something. Me too.

### Prayer

Great Mother, may we course-correct gracefully when the impact of our words and actions harm a sister, despite our best intentions. May we believe the best of each other, and challenge each other to right living and right loving.

### About the Author



Rev. Misha Sanders is mostly a mom, but also a hospital chaplain and a fiery preacher of the good news of Unitarian Universalism. She believes that the whole world is built and rebuilt by the stories we tell ourselves and each other.

<https://www.uua.org/braverwiser/compliment>

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