

UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALIST



CONGREGATIONAL  
STUDY/ACTION ISSUE

# ETHICAL EATING

FOOD & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

2008-2012



## WORSHIP RESOURCES SUPPLEMENT

Compiled by the Ethical Eating Core Team  
Rev. John Gibb Millspaugh, Chair  
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# Introduction

When the UUA 2008 General Assembly selected “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice” as our Association’s new Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI) for 2008-2012, they created a delicious opportunity for congregations throughout North America, in their ongoing free and responsible search for truth, and quest to respect the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part.

By holding an “Ethical Eating” worship service in your congregation, you join with hundreds of other UU congregations participating in the new CSAI. These worship services will inspire organized study and action in our congregations that may change individual lives, local communities, and this planet.

Your worship service will launch a CSAI process whose long range goals may be interpreted as threefold. On the individual level, the process will provide individual UUs a means to understand the global reach of their personal decisions, and a means to make easy, tasty, affordable, nutritious food choices that fit with their individual ethical and spiritual values and our common principles. On the congregational level, this CSAI provides faith communities direct means to engage some of the most challenging social issues of our time: hunger and malnutrition, free and fair trade, labor and exploitation, animal rights and human responsibilities, neocolonialism and globalization, environmental degradation and climate change. On the Associational level, the CSAI process provides Association leaders direction in their efforts to build a more just and equitable society.

In this Supplement you will find hymns, chalice lightings, readings, and even “sermon starters” to make organizing a worship service on “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice” easy as pie—or if you prefer, a piece of cake.

As long as you give credit where credit is due, use any of the materials included as you like (though the Earth on spoon logo can only be used with written permission).

If you write an original sermon, consider submitting it to one of the several relevant sermon contests (such as the Social Witness Sermon Award, the Skinner Sermon Award, and the Albert Schweitzer Award) you can find at <<http://www.uua.org/giving/awardsscholarships/index.shtml>>

For more information on the CSAI and detailed suggestions for your congregation’s involvement, see the *Resource Guide for CSAI “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice”* to which these Worship Resources serve only as a Supplement. The *Resource Guide* and more can be found at <<http://tinyurl.com/eth-eat>> or <<http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issuesprocess/currentissues/ethicaleating/121903.shtml>>

# Acknowledgements

Worship Resources for Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice results from the combined contributions of scores of lay and ordained Unitarian Universalists. The Ethical Eating Core Team's heartfelt gratitude goes to all who submitted materials; we regret that not all submissions could be included. Special thanks to Core Team members Rev. Lee Devoe and Vicki Talbert for their tireless content management work, and to the entire Core Team who ultimately produced this compilation.

## Ethical Eating Core Team

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Robette Dias, representing **Diverse and Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries**;  
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Rev. Bob Murphy, representing the initiating congregation: **UU Fellowship of Falmouth, MA**;  
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Maisie Taibbi, **Youth Representative**;  
Vicki Talbert, representing **UU Ministry for Earth**  
Rev. Dr. Michael Tino, representing **Allies for Racial Equity**.

# Worship Materials

## HYMNS

### Celebrating Earth and Harvest

- #21 For the Beauty of the Earth
- #53 I Walk the Unfrequented Road
- #68 Come, Ye Thankful People Come
- #69 Give Thanks
- #70 Heap High the Farmer's Wintry Hoard
- #71 In the Spring, with Plow and Harrow
- #73 Chant for the Seasons
- #163 For the Earth Forever Turning
- #175 We Celebrate the Web of Life
- #203 All Creatures of the Earth and Sky
- #349 We Gather Together
- #355 We Lift Our Hearts in Thanks
- #387 The Earth, the Water, the Fire, the Air

### Celebrating "The Goal of World Community"

- #134 Our World Is One World
- #159 This Is My Song
- #164 The Peace Not Past Our Understanding
- #207 Earth Was Given As a Garden
- #220 Bring Out the Festal Bread
- #276 O Young and Fearless Prophet
- #277 When We Wend Homeward

- #298 Wake, Now, My Senses
- #305 De Colores
- #399 Vine and Fig Tree
- #406 Let Us Break Bread Together
- #407 We're Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table

Some congregations may wish to supplement hymns with commonly available songs such as "Food, Glorious Food" by Lionel Bart (from *Oliver!*), "Ain't You Got a Right? (Tree of Life) by Guy Carawan, "Deportees" by Woodie Guthrie, and "Garden Song" by David Mallett.

## READINGS

### Chalice Lightings

#### ***In Singing the Living Tradition:***

- #451 Flame of Fire (Leslie Pohl-Kosbau)
- #453 May the Light We Now Kindle (Passover Haggadah)
- #459 This is the Mission of Our Faith (William F. Schulz)

#### **Other Sources:**

Today, we light our chalice flame for the beauty of this earth, and for the wisdom to use its blessings for peace and justice. ~Anonymous

We light this chalice for the nourishment of our beings  
 For the food that feeds our bodies  
 For the food for thought that feeds our minds  
 And for the food that feeds our spirits,  
 The light of our shared time together. ~LoraKim Joyner

As surely as we belong to this universe...  
 to this Earth... We belong together.  
 We join here to transcend the isolated self,  
 To reconnect, to come to know ourselves.  
 To be at home, here on this Earth, on this planet,  
 Sustained by the sun, awed by the stars,  
 Linked with each other.  
 Come let us worship together. - Margaret Keip

As we light our chalice, let us remember that, in the words of Robert F. Kennedy, "it is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a [person] stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he [or she] sends forth a tiny ripple of hope; and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance." ~ Robert F. Kennedy

We light this chalice with hopes for a bright future.  
 May our children, their children, all children  
 Intermingle their laughter through the world.  
 May they be as the rainbow  
 Color and hope for the coming dawn. ~ Reena Kondo

## Service Readings

- #461 We Must Be Saved (Reinhold Niebuhr)
- #512 We Give Thanks This Day (O. Eugene Pickett)
- #515 We Lift Up Our Hearts in Thanks (Richard M. Fewkes)
- #558 For Everything a Season (Ecclesiastes 3)
- #567 To Be of Use (Marge Piercy)
- #568 Connections are Made Slowly (Marge Piercy)
- #576 A Litany of Restoration (Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley)
- #588 To Loose the Fetters of Injustice (Isaiah 58)
- #593 Liberation is Costly (Desmond Tutu)
- #643 Shout for Joy (Psalm 65)
- #654 Impassioned Clay (Ralph N. Helverson)
- #656 A Harvest of Gratitude (Percival Chubb)
- #668 Faith Cannot Save (James 2)

Brussat, Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat. *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. In the section entitled “Leisure”, this volume presents excerpts from many authors which consider our spiritual connection to food, and cooking as a spiritual practice.

Frances Moore Lappé. *Hope’s Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet*. New York: Tarcher, 2002, pp. 31, 11.

“To me democracy is an exciting, living practice, what we do every day. To most democracy doesn’t relate to our daily lives and it sure isn’t much fun. I now see that to engage in democracy, to jump into this living practice we all need something tangible to act on....

Because food is our most primal need and our common bond to the earth and to each other, it can ground us as we stretch ourselves to draw in all the interlaced threads – so we can weave a whole meaningful picture for ourselves.

With food as a starting point, we can choose to meet people and to encounter events so powerful that they can jar us out of our ordinary ways of seeing the world, and open us to new uplifting possibilities.

Ethical Eating Core Team. *Resource Guide for CSAI “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice.”* Boston: UUA, 2008. Many texts appropriate to excerpt as readings for worship services are included as introductions to the sections of the Ethical Eating Resource Guide available online at <<http://tinyurl.com/eth-eat>> or <<http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issuesprocess/currentissues/ethicaleating/121903.shtml>> .

## Prayers and Spoken Meditations

“Prayer of the Farm Workers’ Struggle” (in English and Spanish) by César E. Chávez, United Farm Workers Founder (1927-1993). Copyright César E. Chávez Foundation.

Show me the suffering of the most miserable; so I will know my people’s plight.  
Free me to pray for others; for you are present in every person.  
Help me take responsibility for my own life; so that I can be free at last.  
Grant me courage to serve others; for in service there is true life.  
Give me honesty and patience; so that I can work with other workers.  
Bring forth song and celebration; so that the Spirit will be alive among us.  
Let the Spirit flourish and grow; so that we never tire of the struggle.  
Let us remember those who have died for justice; for they have given us life.  
Help us to love even those who hate us; so we can change the world. Amen.

“Oración del Campesino en la Lucha” (en inglés y español)

Enséñame el sufrimiento de los mas desafortunados; Así conoceré el dolor de mi pueblo.  
Librame a orar por los demás; Porque estas presente en cada persona.  
Ayúdame a tomar, responsabilidad de mi propia vida; Solo así, seré libre al fin.  
Concedeme valentía para servir al prójimo; Porque en la entrega hay vida verdadera.  
Concedeme honradez y paciencia; Para que yo pueda trabajar junto con otros trabajadores.  
Alumbranos con el canto y la celebración; Para que levanten el Espíritu entre nosotros.  
Que el Espíritu florezca y crezca; Para que no nos cansemos entere la lucha.  
Nos acordamos de los que han caído por la justicia; Porque a nosotros han entregado la vida.  
Ayúdanos a amar aun a los que nos odian; Así podemos cambiar el mundo.

“Farm Worker Prayer of Praise.” United Farm Workers.

Bless the hands of the people of the earth,  
The hands that plant the seed,  
The hands that bind the harvest,  
The hands that carry the burden of life.  
Soften the hands of the oppressor and  
Strengthen the hands of the oppressed.  
Bless the hands of the workers,  
Bless the hands of those in power above them  
That the measure they deal will be tempered  
With justice and compassion. Amen

“Prayer of Dedication” by Alan Paton, author of *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

O God, open my eyes that I may see the needs of others;  
Open my ears that I may hear their cries;  
Open my heart so that they may not be without succor;  
Let me know be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong;  
Nor afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich.  
Show me where love and hope and faith are needed, and use me to bring them to those places.  
And so open my eyes and my ears that I may this coming day be able to do some work of  
peace for thee. Amen.

“Litany of Gratitude” by Max Coats, Minister Emeritus, UUI Church, Canton, NY

“The harvest will be an attitude, not a time of year. And maybe I'll be wise  
enough to feel a sort of litany of gratitude: For seeds - that, like memories and minds, keep in themselves the  
recollection of what they were and the power to become something  
more than they are. . .For soil - that accumulation of lives piled up by death that gives  
new life. . .For the justice of the earth - that gave me about as many weeds and wilt and scab and bugs as  
vegetables but, in the end, gave me enough  
for what I need. . .For hands - those miracles on the ends of my arms that let me tend  
my vegetables and pull my weeds, and for mind enough to know  
the difference between the two. . .For calluses - life's defense against that softness that makes  
survival difficult. . .For the ability to work and the will to work and the work to do,  
and the time to do it in. . .And, finally, for that sense of kinship to it all, that singleness, that  
unity that is the basis of faith. . . .”

*Earth Prayers from Around the World*, Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, eds. (Harper San Francisco, 1991)  
contains a number of prayers, poems and readings on environmental themes, many of which are relevant to

food, agriculture, animals and eating. The authors included are as varied as Ho Chi Minh, Hildegard of Bingen, and William Ellery Channing.

*A Grateful Heart*, M. J. Ryan, ed. (Conari Press, Berkeley, 1994) offers mealtime blessings from several cultural and religious traditions. Many of these prayers can be used with chalice lightings or as closing words.

United Nations Sabbath Service <[http://www.earthministry.org/Congregations/UN\\_Sabbath.htm](http://www.earthministry.org/Congregations/UN_Sabbath.htm)> A collection of ecologically-themed prayers.

## **Offering**

Consider designating a portion or the entirety of the offering to help a local fair food organization. To find an organization, consult the “Congregational and Community Resources” section of the Ethical Eating Resource Guide, online at <<http://tinyurl.com/eth-eat>> or <<http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issuesprocess/currentissues/ethicaleating/121903.shtml>>

## **Closing Words**

- #641 We Must Be Saved (Reinhold Niebuhr)
- #648 Beginners (Denise Levertov)
- #691 Gardeners of the Spirit (May Sarton)
- #693 Wise Planting (V. Emil Gudmundson)

## **Communions**

Communion services are celebrated in many Unitarian Universalist congregations. Though derived from Christian communion rituals, which in turn derive from the Jewish Passover rituals, Unitarian Universalist communions often celebrate our connection to the Earth through food.

Carl Seaburg, Ed. *The Communion Book*. UU Ministers Association, 1993. 426 pages. An excellent UU book explaining more than sixty meaningful communion rituals in a variety of styles. Whether Easter, Thanksgiving, or All Souls; whether Apple, Salt, or Bread and Honey; whether children, youth, or adult, you’ll find them all here. And yes, that includes coffee. But you’ll have to make up your own Fair Trade chocolate communion, then share it with us at <<http://tinyurl.com/etheating>>.

“A Multicultural Bread Communion” Rev. Frances Deverell

Bread is sometimes referred to as the staff of life. The grain from which it is made comes from the earth, fed by the rain and the sun, just as we also come from the earth, and are fed by the elements. Every culture, everywhere in the world, makes its own bread. Will the ushers please pass the bread brought here today as a gift by many of us. When we bring bread into community we bring ourselves, our individual heritages, to share with one another. Let us celebrate, with gratitude, the bounty of this earth and the blessings of the community that we create together. May all those who are hungry, eat. May all those who seek community find it. May those who seek freedom, or truth, or peace, be satisfied. May the hope of this season lift our spirits.

# Sermon Starters

“What My Grandchild Would Want Me to Preach” (excerpts), by Scott Tayler  
Parish Co-Minister, First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY, April 22, 2007

So, I just don't get it, Grandpa, she'll say.

What, like 98% of all the scientists were telling you this would happen, that it would be this bad, that you only had like--and she'll definitely say “like” because kids will still do that then--they said you only had like ten years to make the changes, and all everybody did was put in new light bulbs and spend an extra \$4000 to buy a hybrid car?

I just don't get it, Grandpa. They said this was going to happen to us--your grandkids--and you all couldn't change things?

And, of course, I won't really know what to say. I'll start by reaching over and brushing the hair out of her eyes and weaving it back behind her ears. Man, she looks like her mother, I'll think.

It's really complicated honey. I'm only now understanding it myself. We weren't really thinking about it like you and your friends do. It's not that we didn't care about how it would impact you; we weren't really thinking about you at all. Oh that's sounds terrible, I'll say. I don't mean that the way it sounds. Again, honey, it's complicated. It wasn't personal; we just didn't think that far ahead. It was more like a blind spot. Our focus was mostly on our daily living, which felt hard and overly complicated as it was. We had our hands full just trying to think about and find the time to spend with your mama and your aunt and uncle. I'm not trying to defend it. I just don't want you to think we were callous or selfish. It's more like we were overwhelmed. And when you're overwhelmed it's hard to have perspective. I mean, a lot was going on. The whole issue of how our military might was destabilizing the world and also undermining our ability to take care of basic services like public schools, and health care was just beginning to dawn on us. And I can't say I regret focusing on that. Without the anti-war effort and the radical changes we accomplished there, things would be a whole lot worse than they are now.

But I don't get that, Grandpa, she'll say. You mean you could only handle one thing at a time? Didn't global warming also feel huge?

No honey, of course it felt huge, I'll say. And it's not that we could only handle one thing at a time. That's not what I mean. Again it's complicated. I guess what I'm saying is that we knew it was a huge and scary problem, we just couldn't feel it. What we felt was worn out. You're used to things as they are now. These “little things,” as you call them, just didn't feel little to us. The idea of a smaller house, going without air conditioning, voluntarily paying \$5 for gas or finding the \$20,000 to install solar panels just seemed too much and too big to wrap our minds and to-do lists around. And nobody else was really doing it.

And more than that: we were hopeful. Ironically that's a part of it too. We weren't just worn out and overwhelmed with our personal lives, we actually believed the tide was changing, that bigger systems would begin to kick in and stimulate the changes for us.

She'll wrinkle her brow at this point showing confusion, so I'll try to explain.

Scientists, you see, weren't just telling us that we were on the verge of causing irreversible and dangerous climate change, they were also telling us we were on the verge of a technological break-through that would soon make alternative energy sources available and affordable... I think the best way to put it is to say that our optimism and our hope, well, it sort of betrayed us. We had hope in technology. We had hope in politicians. And we had hope in our market system. It really felt like they'd save us without us having to do much. There was a saying back then: “Let go and let God.” I guess we saw science, politics and the market as our gods--more powerful and knowing than us tiny normal folk. So we gladly turned the problem over to them and waited for them to change us.

But I thought you were the cynical generation?, she will say. I thought you felt politicians couldn't be trusted and the

market only cared about making money for the elite few?

Oh, you are like your mother, I'll say. She was a stubborn young woman too, loved a good argument, loved catching people, and especially me, in the midst of rationalizing.

I'll smile.

She won't.

I'm not trying to argue, Grandpa, she'll say. I just don't like thinking badly of you.

Here's where the tone of the conversation will shift dramatically. She won't be angry. It will seem more like sadness. But she'll also be deadly serious. And it will feel scary to me, because it will feel--for the first time ever--like I could lose her, like she could turn and walk away from me at any moment...

Then there will be silence, which I will try to break by once again saying, honey, it's complicated. Please, you've got to remember we're human. If it doesn't affect you directly, then we humans just don't... and I'll stop there in mid-sentence because the rest of it will not feel like something worth coming out of my mouth.

“Ethical Eating” (excerpts), by Rev. Mark Hayes

Minister, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Centre County, in State College, PA, November 16, 2008

Every other year at the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly, delegates select an issue for four years of congregational study and action. Some of those issues in recent years have been peace-making, global warming, civil liberties, and interfaith cooperation.

This past summer, the issue selected was “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice.” ... The purpose of having this as our study/action issue for four years is to encourage our exploration and growth, both as individuals and as a congregation. Our journeys will differ: we begin in different places, proceed along different paths at different rates, and may arrive at different ends. But that's okay. Such a journey is inherently difficult because the factors that influence our relationship with food – culture, family, values, religion, resources, health – are personal and complicated. And so, as we proceed, I ask that we approach one another with open hearts and generous spirits, and remember the words that greeted us on our way into the building this morning: “You need not think alike to love alike.”

Before I go on I want to engage in a little bit of confession. First, I have read and thought quite a bit about issues surrounding ethical eating, but I still have much to learn.

Things are not always as clear-cut and obvious as they seem, and so I know I have to be prepared to change my mind when that is warranted. Furthermore, there are many things that I know I could do to be a more responsible, ethical consumer, and yet I don't do them. That's primarily out of laziness; it's just too darn hard to be perfect. But I share the sentiments of Syd Baumel, expressed in our reading this morning, that it's “not about absolutes. It's about doing the best you're willing and able to do – and nurturing a will to keep doing better.” I hope that we can all – without engaging in too many guilt trips – encourage each other to do the best we can and to keep on doing better.

In that spirit, I'd like to take this opportunity to ramble on a little bit about some of the many aspects of this issue of ethical eating. I don't intend this to be a comprehensive treatment of the topic. In fact, I intend to do another service this coming spring, that I hope will grow out of conversations and follow-up that emerge from some of the issues raised here this morning. That conversation can begin immediately following these remarks of mine, as we will have an opportunity for Congregational Response. So gather your thoughts as you listen, so that you can share them with us.

I will also point out that the Resource Guide from which I've been quoting has myriad suggestions of resources to tap, as well as possibilities for congregational study and action. If anyone is particularly interested in this topic and would like to be part of an Ethical Eating Task Force or Study Group to help keep the conversation going over the coming months, please let me know.

Some folks have already shared some of their interest with me. Dorothy Blair, whose area of expertise is nutrition education, shared with me a draft of a paper on sustainable food systems from that vantage point. The paper enumerates six goals toward attaining a sustainable food system. They are:

1. Eat lower on the food chain (which would have positive impact on health, land use, water quality, and soil conservation)
2. Eat and act to promote good farming/fishing practices (that is, reward those who do it right)
3. Reduce food processing, packaging energy (by eating foods as close to their original fresh state as possible)
4. Reduce transportation energy (by eating locally produced meats, milk, grains, fruits, and vegetables whenever possible)
5. Reduce food waste (by buying sparingly and using leftovers)
6. Eat for social justice (by supporting fair trade initiatives that promote fair prices and sustainable production practices)

... The way we eat also intersects with issues of trade, labor, neo-colonialism, and environmental justice. I encourage you to look into all of these in coming months, with the help of the Resource Guide that I have available.

Before I close, I'd like to touch on one more area directly related to how we eat: hunger and malnutrition. We waste about 3,044 pounds of food per second in the United States. Each year 27% of US food produced for human consumption is lost at the retail, consumer and food service levels. Globally, 4.3 pounds of food are produced daily for every woman, man, and child on earth – enough to make all of us fat. Yet every year, six million children across the globe die as a result of hunger and malnutrition – one child dying of starvation or malnutrition every five seconds. Hunger and malnutrition are responsible for more deaths in the world than AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the human right to food, to secure personal health and well-being. The United Nations member states have agreed to reach eight international “Millennium Goals” by the year 2015, the first of which calls for major reductions in poverty and hunger. It has been said that the one major obstacle to eradication of hunger is political will.

“Salt of the Earth: Food and Religion Reconsidered” (excerpts), by Rev. Robert F. Murphy  
Minister, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Falmouth, MA, December 14, 2008

Every human organization - every school, every family, and every congregation - must, inevitably, face the same great question...

It's the question that confronted Moses, after the Hebrew children fled from Egypt into the wilderness. In India, the Buddha reflected on the great question, after he found enlightenment at Benares. Mohammed heard the same question, when he was with the people of Mecca and Medina. Jesus of Nazareth stopped in his great work, to answer the question. The same question was heard in Plymouth, in the 1620s.

Always, it's the same religious question. And it comes back to challenge the Unitarian Universalists.

Sooner or later, somebody in the back row will raise his hand, to ask, “When do we eat?”

... After that, there are other questions... “What should we eat? How should we eat?” ... “Where does our food come from? What does our food cost?” ... “Should we do something religious... Is there something special that we should say or do when we share a meal with others?”

This congregation has been asked to comment on a Congregational Study Action Issue. It's called “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice.” Some of you may think, “Oh, this is another social justice issue... we have to read and

digest, and, eventually, we'll ... send a letter to Congress." Some of you enjoy this kind of activity. Some of you don't. And there are others who sit at the back of the building who ask, "When do we eat?" When do we find a spiritual practice that will bring us out of our isolation, out of our anxiety and disappointment, and into something that is wholesome, something that will provide real nourishment?

Maybe you ask, "How do we build a sense of community? How do we revitalize this congregation?"

Let me offer a suggestion. "This is the moment." The opportunity that you seek is here and now. If you want to experience what is really important in healthy religion - if you want to understand things like hospitality and gratitude and compassion, and if you want to feel connected to something that is larger than yourself - then, please, join us in this conversation about food and religion...come into the fiesta. Come join the dinner party...

...This program can bring you into a series of celebrations. And I hope that it does, because most people, in most places, for all of history, have enjoyed eating and drinking. If you read stories about the Buddha and about Mohammed, or about Jesus of Nazareth, or about the great Native American leaders, you'll find that, again and again, the prophets and the sages are talking about hospitality and about the ways in which people can share beverages and food in the right way. In the different religious and cultural traditions, involvement with food issues often leads to "the teachable moment."

What do we mean when we talk about "the teachable moment" in religion?

A "teachable moment" is one of those special moments - call it "spontaneous" or even "serendipitous" - when you have the opportunity to gain new insight...when you ingest a teachable moment, you change and you can feel the change...Some people can study Israeli cooking or Japanese cooking for years, and, somehow, they never "get it right." However, when you get to the teachable moment, suddenly you think, "Hey, I'm beginning to see the whole story. I'm starting to understand how these ingredients, and those ingredients, all work together in this kitchen."

... In the teachable moments, you can discover what's important in your personal life, and, maybe, you'll discover what's important in the life of your community...

Our new conversation about food and religion can bring us to a better understanding of what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. Today, I'm going to mention three teachable moments that you can anticipate.

Here's the first teachable moment in our discussion about food and religion.

Imagine ... A freethinker...says, "I'm uneasy with this talk about ethical eating. Because I don't want to be involved with a church that tells me what to eat, and how to eat, and with whom to eat. That's not what we do in liberal religion."

Friends, I'm very sympathetic. There are, indeed, many religious organizations that have established dietary codes for religious reasons. Mormons... Seventh Day Adventists...Hindus... Muslims...Orthodox Jews...When I was a boy, the Roman Catholics were told that it was a sin to eat meat on certain days. My Roman Catholic grandmother, who was very devout, asked me on many occasions, "What did you eat for lunch on Friday?"

What do we say to the freethinker, who doesn't want to talk about food and religion? ...Proceed with kindness. Remind him, first, that things are different here. The Unitarian Universalist Association is not a creedal organization...[and promotes] the full participation in all of its activities without "requiring adherence to any particular interpretation of religion or to any particular religious belief or creed." The words appear in our Association's Bylaws and Rules.

Our Association will not establish a dietary code, and, no, you won't be told to stop eating hamburgers, and you won't be told to avoid bacon and pork chops, and, yes, you'll probably be offered a cup of coffee during the church coffee hour. You won't be told to sign a temperance pledge. If you're an adult, and if you want to drink alcoholic beverages at a bar or at a restaurant, you won't be condemned by our Association. If the minister sees a pack of cigarettes in your pocket or purse, you won't be excommunicated.

Our shared concern for “ethical eating” won’t become the basis for a new dogma or catechism. At the end of the exercise, you’ll have to define “ethical eating” in your own way. It’s a matter of personal choice. However, there’s something else that needs to be said. We now come to our second teachable moment.

Imagine a skeptic... “We’re just a small group of individuals,” she says, “and we don’t understand all of the food issues and, even if we did, we can’t do much of anything as a group. Maybe we can swap a few recipes, and... talk about the new restaurants in town, but, please, don’t expect us to do anything as a religious community. It’s not going to happen.”

It’s a teachable moment. Once again, proceed with kindness.

...In today’s world, even the tiniest fellowship, with only a handful of members, has the opportunity to provide “a vision of the world that might be.” Because every congregation, without exception, has to make decisions about the purchase and use of food and drink. Some groups insist on the use of “Fair Trade” coffee and tea. At church suppers, it’s expected that vegetarian meals will be available. Sunday school teachers no longer distribute heaps and heaps of sugar candy...

There are rules, in many congregations, that govern the proper disposal of wastes. Bottles and cans are recycled. In some churches, the use of disposable cups and plates is discouraged, because of environmental concerns... Years ago, a woman gave me a sign that’s now in my dining room at home. The sign says, “My religion has something to do with compost.”

...Think about the ways in which a discussion about food and religion can lead to congregational renewal and revitalization. Share some meals together. Build a sense of communion.

We come to the third teachable moment... at this point, we’ll hear from one of the radicals in our midst. “The world is in a crisis,” says the radical, “and you’re talking about pizza parties and potluck dinners. Get real. How do we stop the suffering that is rampant in the world?”

Once again, proceed with kindness. Take another look at the Congregational Study Action Issue.

It’s called “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice.” If you’ve spent all of your time talking about your grocery bills, and the amount of corn syrup that you consume, and your personal likes and dislikes at mealtime - well, try to expand your vision by just a bit. The statement presents the theme of “environmental justice.” At some point, ask the question, “What does environmental justice require?”

How do we build a just, sustainable, and peaceful world for everybody, not just the fortunate few?

“Environmental justice” has been defined in different ways. During the 1990s, Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and other Unitarian Universalists used the theme of environmental justice as a means to bring anti-racism concerns, and economic justice concerns, into environmental protection work. The result was the 1994 resolution called “Environmental Justice.” At the time, it looked as if the Unitarian Universalists were doing something new, but, in reality, we were building on experiences and concerns that have been with us for a very long time. [Unitarian] Charles Dickens said that he could see the marks of pollution and environmental destruction stamped into the faces of the working poor during England’s Industrial Revolution. A visitor to the American South or the American West during the 1850s would have seen the same scars on the faces of African Americans and Native Americans. The land and the people on the land were hard oppressed.

In the conversation about food and the environment, we are introduced, once again, to a world of paradox and tragedy. Agribusiness produces enormous wealth, on all of the inhabited continents, but small farmers and farmworkers in the developing world are often poor. Some people in the world enjoy many food choices while others are starving or dependent on handouts. In the United States, government officials talk about “food security.” Individuals have “food security” if they can obtain enough nutritious food to support an active and healthy life, without depending on charity. The Department of Agriculture reports that 10% of all adults and 17% of all children in America are “food insecure.” Native American, African American, and Hispanic households experience “food insecurity” at higher rates than the national average.

... The Unitarian Universalist Association has a vision of environmental justice. Go back to the Association's Bylaws and Rules... We have one very famous principle that acknowledges "the interdependent web of all existence." We have other principles that affirm the importance of human rights. Together, all of the principles form one holistic statement in liberal religion. Everything connects. With this package in mind, it's difficult to say, "Oh, we'll do environmental protection work this week, then we'll go back to social justice work next week." If you're working for environmental protection, but you're not concerned about the problems of racism and economic injustice, what kind of apartheid society are you trying to create? Who pays the price?

The radical asks, "How do we stop the suffering that is rampant in the world?" In this new century, one of the best things that we can do is to speak to the issues of environmental justice. We can try to see environmental issues from the point of view of the oppressed. Our congregations can support the grassroots organizations that address hunger issues. We can march with the farmworkers and we can join with the community gardeners. As social justice advocates, we can bring human rights concerns into discussions about food policy and land use. Theologians say, "We can express a preferential option for the poor." The rich and the middle-class are important, too, but, clearly, there are plenty of conservation groups that speak for the rich and for the middle-class. Keep asking for environmental justice.

"You are the salt of the earth," said Jesus of Nazareth. "But if salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?" Even if you're not a Christian, I encourage you to keep that thought in mind. Our churches and fellowships can make a difference in the world. At the very least, we can bring people together and we can provide them with a taste of "the world that might be." We can teach the fragile art of hospitality. Some of you are on low-sodium diets, so, maybe, we should go easy on the saltiness, with just a little bit of heaven provided at meetinghouse breakfasts and suppers. Not too much, but, please, not too little.

Salt is a preservative, and that, too, should be remembered. In these new discussions about religion and the environment, the world needs people of faith who can preserve the old values that need to be preserved. We can speak for the inherent worth and dignity of every person, not just the rich and powerful. We can encourage a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, and we can celebrate, once again, some of the great teachers who have warned us against "idolatry of the mind and spirit."

It's a teachable moment. Put it to good use. "Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice" may do some good in our congregations. If it provides spiritual nourishment, we'll gain strength and vision.

"Ethical Eating" (excerpts), by Rev. Christine Brownlie  
Minister, the Unitarian Universalist Congregation (Blacksburg, VA), October 5, 2008

By now, many of you have heard or read that Ethical Eating is the study action issue that was approved by the delegates to our annual General Assembly as our focus for the next four years. In case you're curious, the other option had to do with nuclear proliferation — certainly an issue that concerns many people. Why did the delegates choose Ethical Eating? As one person commented, "This is something I can really do something about!"

That makes sense to me — not that we should ignore complex and difficult issues like nuclear proliferation. But I think in this time of endless complexity and uncertainty, there is great appeal in an issue in which we can have an impact by our own decisions and actions. We're aware of some of the issues concerning food production, distribution, nutrition, and food safety. We know that these issues affect every one of us, every day. What we may not realize, is that even these issues are wrapped in layers of complexities, and that even changes that seem to be "good" and "right" have unintended consequences for ourselves, for the huge numbers of people who make their livelihoods in the various sectors of the food industry, and for the Earth.

Let's just start with the words "Ethical Eating."... The words "Ethical Eating" "make me uncomfortable, because I hear some possibility of judgment or the sense of a hierarchy of "purity"...

I'd suggest that we begin this four-year conversation with the agreement that to respect each person's right and need to make choices that work for them. I might be willing to listen to your concerns about the problems of beef production

in America or the link between child slavery and chocolate, but you need to know that my decisions about what I eat belong to me, just as yours belong to you. I like the way Sid Baumel, the editor of the Web site <eatkind.net> puts it, “Ethical eating, like ethical living, is not about absolutes. It’s about doing the best you’re willing and able to do — and nurturing a will to keep doing better.”

Food and the ethics of food have been issues for human societies since ancient times. In the oldest books of the Jewish scriptures, we find commands that those who grow food must make provisions for the poor...Islam demands that the well-to-do provide alms and food for the hungry, as does every other faith tradition.

Since 1987, delegates to General Assembly have approved a number of statements about hunger, responsible consumption of all kinds of resources including food, environmental concerns, and other related issues. These were attempts to raise the consciousness of people in our congregation and to encourage mindful change. But now we have agreed to take on a substantive issue over a number of years.

...Some of the things that we can do are obvious even if they are not easy for all of us. Again, food choices are not just a matter of nutrition, health, or economics. Food also says something about our family of origin, our lifestyle preferences, the habits and ways of self-care that we’ve developed, and how we like to spend our time. This means that changing our food habits can take time and patience. Giving up the nightly bowl of ice cream before bed might seem like an obvious way to get started on a healthier diet, but if this is something we’ve done since childhood it could be easier and wiser to begin with something less ingrained in our daily routine

My desire to consume a more ethical diet has led to some changes in my behaviors. This year, I grew a variety of vegetables and put flowers on the back burner. I tried to make the most of the garden. What I didn’t eat, I put away in the freezer. I not only froze beets, I froze the beet greens too. I started making yogurt to avoid the plastic containers. I eat less meat and try to buy organic meats and eggs despite the higher cost. I buy milk that is produced by a local dairy. I am trying to be more mindful about snacking and to catch myself when I’m tempted to eat because I’m stressed out or bored. Instead, I take a walk, play with my cats, knit, or work on a project.

The food needs of the community got my attention as well. I contributed to a couple of canned-food drives. With the support of our food bank volunteers, I worked with our local interfaith food bank to make it easier for working parents to get food by being open one weeknight a week.

There’s nothing very startling on my list. And I consider it just a warm-up, a little exercise in becoming more mindful about what I eat and the choices that are available to me. A worthwhile beginning, but I know that there is more that I can do to address this issue of Ethical Eating.

We need to study the politics and the economics of food so that new solutions to old problems like hunger can be addressed in ways that really help. I was surprised to learn that the food banks that I’m supporting might not be the best way to help people who struggle with hunger.

I’ve always thought of the local food bank as a necessary institution, because every community has to find a way to assist those who cannot meet their need for affordable food. I’ve worked in food banks and for meals on wheels...I continue to believe that this help is important and necessary. But after reading *Closing the Food Gap, Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty* by food policy activist and journalist Michael Winne, I now know that it is a band-aid approach to the issue. Winne...decries the two-tiered food distribution in our country. He says that there is one for the well-to-do middle class that gives access to better and more costly food through posh grocery stores, organic food markets like Wild Oats and Whole Foods, and high-priced Farmers’ Markets...

Winne believes that food banks should become advocates for changes in our national and local food policies. He offers an example of an effective program of advocacy by a food bank in Oregon. The Board of this food bank developed an advocacy committee that took on some hard issues such as the minimum wage. They encouraged low-income clients to take advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit. The food bank has taken a strong position in support of expanding the Food Stamp program and other state welfare legislation that directly affect low-income working families.

Winne laments that the organic food movement and the anti-hunger movement have not joined forces to help develop

innovative programs that would make organic foods and local produce more readily available to low-income families through government food programs.

..It's clear to me that this new study action issue has a very broad scope — even if we limit our discussions to the needs of people in United States. Looking at this issue on a global scale is mind-boggling! I'm glad that we have four years to look at this issue. We'll be having an intensive focus on food this month, and after that we'll have an occasional conversation on food issues. With the rising cost of oil and gasoline, the production costs for farmers and the food distribution sector are also rising. Solutions are not going to be quick and easy to put into place, but the need is only growing.

What can we do to help? Where might we start to make helpful changes in our own lives? How can we, as a religious community committed to justice, make a difference in a way that supports the dignity and worth of those who need food assistance? What steps can we take to help create better policies at the local, state, and national level? These are the questions that I come away with. I hope that you will bring your own questions and observations to the AfterWord discussion that will be held in Elarth Hall after the ending of the service. Food justice is something that affects all of us, and I believe that we can make a difference for the better.

May it be so.

“Giving Up Bananas” (excerpts), by Rev. Peter Friedrichs  
Minister, Unitarian Universalist Church of Delaware County (Media, PA), November 9, 2008

Last summer, I experienced something of a spiritual crisis... two years ago...I had been fishing...I knew it was time for that "last cast," that last prayer at the end of a wonderful vacation week. And as luck would have it, with that last cast my prayer was answered, and a big old bass sucked down my fly and the battle was on...within a few minutes I had him by the boat...the biggest bass I'd ever caught in my life. After a few moments of admiring him, I said one last prayer, this one a prayer of gratitude, I said goodbye to him, releasing him back into the water.

So, this past summer, when we returned to that same cabin on that same lake in Maine, I was anxious to see if my old friend was lurking among the rocks just off shore... It sounds strange to say it, but I felt an affinity for that fish, like we shared some secret bond. "I'm back," I called to him with each cast. "Come out and play!"...He jumped once so I could see him, and by his size I could imagine that this was the same fish as last year.

[I cast the lure, and] you guessed it, he took it again!...But suddenly the line went slack... As I reeled in my limp line, my disappointment turned to horror when I saw...the line had broken off at the knot between the line itself and the leader. There was no lure on the end of the line, and the break was caused by my own negligence, a badly tied knot...my friend was down there with a mouthful of hooks. Unable to shake the lure, he wouldn't be able to eat. I had signed his death warrant.

You can ask Irene, or the many family members and friends I've told this story to about how despondent I was afterwards. For days I went out to the rocks and tried to coax my friend back up with all sorts of baits, just so I could remove that lure from his mouth. If I had had a mask and snorkel, I would have dived down to see if I could ...free him. But I couldn't save him and I'm certain he slowly starved to death.

This all may sound rather silly to most of you, but as I said, it caused me a serious spiritual crisis. At first, I asked myself ... "Why do I fish?" Although I almost always "catch and release," I have inadvertently killed fish in the past, and even when they are released successfully they are undoubtedly traumatized by the experience. My answer was, "I fish for pleasure, for enjoyment, for the 'sport of it.'" That led me to ask myself about whether it was appropriate to traumatize, torture and even kill a fish simply for my own pleasure. That doesn't seem right, does it? Somehow it seemed to me that "catch and release" was suddenly much less justifiable than "catch and eat." According to the Book of Genesis, God gave us dominion over all the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and all the animals of the earth, but do I believe that that means I can treat them any way that I want, that they're put here simply for my pleasure? And there I was, at the "Big Question:" What is my relationship to the creatures on this earth, and to the earth itself? Are

they, is it, here for me, or am I a part of it? How far does the interdependent web extend, and do I really believe that all of us are intimately connected with all of existence? These questions haunt me now as I stand in a stream casting to a rising trout. And I double-check all the knots that I tie. Life was so much simpler before that line broke.

It has been said that one of the functions of ministry is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable, so I want to be right up front with you. My goal in sharing this story with you and telling you what I'm about to tell you is to raise questions that will haunt you too. I want you to be haunted while walking the aisles in Acme, in Genuardi's, in Pathmark and even Trader Joe's. To be haunted as you unload your groceries from those plastic bags that seem to reproduce like rabbits beneath your kitchen sink. To be haunted as you serve your Thanksgiving dinner to your family, in that Norman Rockwell moment as the browned bird is placed before approving eyes and watering mouths.

I have here before me a bowl of fruit. Bananas, apples, oranges, grapes, even an avocado. . . . Delicious and nutritious fruit. Good and good for you. So, let's see, these bananas are from Ecuador. The apple was grown in Washington State and the grapes come from California. These particular tomatoes come from Mexico, and they're still attached to the vine so you know they're "vine ripe." The avocado was grown down in Chile, and these particular oranges come all the way from South Africa. All told, this bowl of fruit has traveled a distance of more than 18,000 miles to be with us here today. Definitely our most far-flung guests in the service!

It's not news to tell you that bananas aren't grown in the backyards of Media or on farms in Lancaster County . . . Americans consume about 400 gallons of oil a year per person for the food they eat . . . Author and scientist Steven L. Hopp writes sarcastically that "a quick way to improve food-related fuel economy would be to buy a quart of motor oil and drink it." He then goes on to point out that, if every American family were to eat just one meal each week that was composed of locally and organically raised foods, "we would reduce our country's oil consumption by over 1.1 million barrels every week. . . . Becoming a less energy-dependent nation," he writes, "may just need to start with a good breakfast." [Barbara Kingsolver, et al., *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, p. 5]

The whole idea behind the concept of "ethical eating" is that we think about the food that we're putting into our mouths. And by this I don't mean the nutritional value, whether it's good for us or whether it's going to go straight from our lips to our hips. Ethical eating is consumption wedded to awareness and intention. It is about educating ourselves about the true costs of the foods that we buy and consume. It's about facing up to the ugly facts of the agri-industrial complex. It's knowing, for example, that while we've increased the average yield of an acre of farmland from 24 bushels of corn in 1930 to more than 160 bushels per acre today, to achieve this astonishing improvement we apply about 1.5 billion pounds of nitrogen to the soil each year in the form of fertilizers. And that about half of that nitrogen is taken up into the atmosphere and falls as acid rain or stays up there as greenhouse gases, or it washes into our watersheds, causing massive algae blooms that choke off all other aquatic life. [Amy Hassinger, "Ethical Eating," *UU World*, Spring 2007, p.30.]

. . . Have I done enough afflicting yet? I could go on. I could tell you about the conditions under which chickens and turkeys are raised, and the effects that the antibiotics we force into our beef cattle have on our ecosystem. And don't get me started about the human cost of the foods we consume, the living conditions of migrant farm workers who pick our tomatoes and our apples for pennies an hour, who are housed in concrete bunkers without windows or running water, who are sometimes abducted and held against their will as 21st century slaves, right here in America.

. . . As Unitarian Universalists we proclaim to affirm and support respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. What does that mean to us? How far does it extend? And what does it require of us? The most recent proposed revisions to our principles elaborate on the Seventh Principle thusly:

Inspired by the beauty and holiness of the Earth, we become more willing to relinquish material desires. We recognize the need for sacrifice as we build a world that is both just and sustainable. We are called to be good stewards, restoring the Earth and protecting all beings.

In the choices we make about the foods we eat, what does it mean to be good stewards who work to restore the Earth and to protect all beings? What does it mean to us when we proclaim the earth to be "holy?" These principles point us toward questions of ultimate reality and meaning, profoundly religious questions like "Who or what made us?" "Why

are we here?" and "Who is our neighbor, our brother or sister?"

I hope that today will be the opening of a dialogue among us about our relationship to the food we eat, our relationship to the Earth and to every living being. Our Denominational Affairs representatives will have a table set up after the service with some materials if you're interested. I can envision the emergence of an "ethical eating" group here at UUCDC, along the lines of the International Supper Club, where people can share responsibly purchased and prepared meals while diving deeply into this topic. Perhaps we will expand our sale of Fair Trade coffee, tea and chocolate to the point where we covenant only to serve locally and organically grown foods at church functions in a sort of expansion of the "Green Sanctuary" movement. And I'm sure that there are those of you who can think of even more creative ways to engage the vast questions that I've raised today. Like other questions of spirit and deep meaning, there are no easy answers or quick solutions. But also like other questions of spirit and deep meaning, when we confront them together in sacred community, we all become the richer for it.

This day and every day, I wish you peace.

"You Are What You Eat" (excerpts), by Rev. Dr. Michael Tino  
Minister, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northern Westchester (New York), March 2, 2008

. . . Our spiritual connection to the food we eat has also been harmed by a modern culture in which over-processed foods are so ubiquitous that we have ceased to think about foods in their whole forms any more.

Perhaps you've heard author Michael Pollan's slogan when it comes to figuring out what we should eat. "Eat food, not too much, mostly plants," writes Pollan. (Michael Pollan, "Unhappy Meals," *New York Times Magazine*, 1/28/07)

This slogan is deceptively simple in a world where "food" is hard to define. Every day, we are bombarded with studies of food components. Such studies invariably oversimplify a complex diet by focusing on only one or another nutrient even though we don't eat that thing by itself. It's no wonder it's hard to make sense out of any of it. . . .

. . . In the end, what are we supposed to eat? The answer is food. Whole food, as unprocessed as possible, a great diversity of it, and a lot less than you're probably used to eating.

As Michael Pollan writes, "try this: Don't eat anything your great-great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food." What he means to steer us away from are heavily-processed foods, foods that make health claims based on one or another nutrient they contain, foods with unpronounceable chemical ingredients, and, high-fructose corn syrup. Don't even get me started on high-fructose corn syrup.

Why? Because, in a nutshell (no pun intended) that's what our bodies were meant to survive on. Food, mostly (but not necessarily entirely) plants, and enough but not too much.

But going through the supermarket, it's not easy advice to follow. I believe this is because we no longer have a connection to the food we eat: Meat comes not from animals whose treatment might matter to us, but from little Styrofoam trays with plastic wrap. Carrots are not long, pointed things that come from the ground—they are uniformly-carved two-inch-long nuggets that come in a bag. Coffee comes from a round red can, not from bushes growing on hillsides that need to be hand-picked.

Our modern society has many ways of removing us from our connection to food. . . .

. . . To be honest, it doesn't bother me if a company wants to splice a gene for beta carotene production into a rice crop, or if molecular biologists find ways to do things that used to be done with careful cross-pollination. To be honest with you, I wouldn't even mind if scientists could figure out how to put pig genes into plants so that my collard greens don't need fatback to taste yummy.

It bothers me, however, when the genes that are being put into plants that cause those plants to secrete pesticides—creating plants that could wind up killing monarch butterflies or ladybugs or honeybees.

It bothers me when the genetic modifications produce sterile plants just so that farmers can't save seeds from one year to the next—forcing an ongoing dependence on newly-ordered seeds, and fattening the wallets of giant agribusiness companies.

It bothers me when companies are producing genetically-modified crops that make our farmers dependent upon chemical herbicides to grow their crops. . . .

. . . The perils of agribusiness for our connection to the Earth through food hardly end with vegetables—I just figured I'd start there so that the vegetarians among us didn't get smug when I brought up the horrible world of meat processing.

A search of the Times website for “beef recall” turns up 570 articles. Five hundred and seventy. I learned this when I was looking for information on the latest beef recall—an order issued two weeks ago that recalled some 143 million pounds of processed beef that made its way through a plant in California.

The beef was recalled after an undercover investigation by the Humane Society documented workers using such techniques as picking up sick cows with forklifts in order to pretend they could walk. Such sick cows—called “downer cows” in the industry are fairly common, and are more likely than healthy cows to be infected with mad cow disease, among other things. (Andrew Martin, “Largest Recall of Ground Beef is Ordered,” New York Times, 2/18/08)

Why is our food supply riddled with meat from cows so sick they cannot even walk? Why have enormous corporate hog farms become reservoirs for antibiotic-resistant bacteria even as seventy percent of the antibiotics used in this country are fed to livestock? (Michael Pollan, “Our Decrepit Food Factories,” The New York Times Magazine, 12/16/07) Why are Australian honeybees, perhaps carrying foreign bee viruses (and no, I am not kidding) shipped to California every spring to pollinate almond orchards, and then shipped home once that job is done?

It is because our system of factory farming has become unsustainable, and we, far removed from any connection with our food, fail to notice. . . .

. . . Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants. Know where your food comes from. Know what it took to get it to you—the human cost, the environmental cost, the carbon footprint it left behind. Develop a relationship with your food.

What we eat and why are profoundly moral, ethical and spiritual questions. You are, after all, what you eat. Blessed be.

May we each exercise our personal will and our collective political will to make a difference. . . . May it be so.

“Eating to Transform Lives and Care for the World” (excerpts)

by Rev. Duane H. Fickeisen, Minister and Jill Kachmar, Lay Worship Associate

Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley in Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania, February 3, 2008.

Call to Worship (Jill Kachmar) A few years ago I went for a drive with my college boyfriend, Tom, in Lancaster County. It was late summer, and the two lane country road we were on was surrounded by fields. The rain and sun were in good measure that year and the fields were flush with a vibrant green color, the stalks of the farmer's crop gently blowing in the breeze, the leaves rustling due to the rush of air being forced through the field as our car rushed by. “What's that?” Tom asked. “What's what? I replied.” “That, over there, in the fields... what's that stalk thing with something growing off it at odd angles?” “Where? Do you see something in between the corn?” “That's corn? Where are the little yellow kernels?”

I gave him an odd look, and then once I realized that he was completely serious, I made him pull over at the next farm stand. That day I showed Tom, who had grown up near Philadelphia, exactly where corn kernels are found on a corn stalk. I remember Tom's intense concentration as he followed my instructions as to how the corn needed to be husked and later, once the corn was cooked, how he tasted, for the first time in his life, the simple pleasure of fresh corn on

the cob. He was 23. He had only experienced canned corn up until that day.

Most people in this country buy food that is cleaned, prepped and packaged in grocery stores. They have no real sense of the connection to food as a plant or animal. There is a limited understanding of food as something that was once a living thing and is part of the “interconnected web of all existence.” Sometimes the closest we come to “the source” is during the holidays when we buy turkeys (with the feathers, head, feet removed and the giblets neatly packaged in a small bag hidden within). The berries in our winter fruit salad and meatballs we eat at our Sunday dinners often have traveled hundreds of miles, transported to us by using an astounding amount of fossil fuels along the way. Pesticides, antibiotics and the use of genetically altered plants to be bigger and better have led to a greater reliance on them as insects and microbes build up tolerance. Huge corporate farms and their method of farming along with their byproducts cause great damage to the land. Resources to irrigate the land are often taken from others who depend on them to survive.

The 7th principle of the UUA promotes “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part”. Part of UUCV’s mission statement is to “transform lives and the world with our care”. As Unitarian Universalists, we can put our beliefs into action by making small changes that can have great impact. Today we will explore ways that we can “think globally, act locally”. Come, let us open our hearts and minds as we find ways to put our beliefs into action. Come, let us worship together.

Sermon (Duane Fickeisen)... What you choose to eat is important to both parts of how you live out the mission of our congregation — transforming your life and caring for the earth. ... How many of you have heard that “an apple a day keeps the doctor away?” Apples (and other fresh fruits) are healthy foods, and eating them every day can indeed help you get and stay healthy.

When many people had apple trees in their backyards, there were many, many different local varieties of apples. Now most of the apples you find in the stores are one of about half a dozen commercial varieties, and most of them are Red Delicious. It’s hard to imagine a less satisfying apple than the Red Delicious — it looks pretty, it’s nearly always uniformly bright red, and it has a pleasing shape. But they are almost always mushy and bland with tough skin that’s often bitter.

But not only has the apple become much less than delicious, it has also become less nutritious. You’ll have to eat three apples today to get the same amount of iron that was in one typical apple grown in 1940. The USDA has tracked the nutritional content in 43 crops since the 1950s. Vitamin C has declined by 20%, iron by 15%, riboflavin by 38%, and calcium by 16%. Similar studies in England also show a decline in the nutritional value of a variety of crops.

It’s not clear why that’s the case, but it may be a combination of factors that include selecting varieties on the basis of fast and uniform growth and ease of harvest and shipping; faster growth promoted by heavy use of artificial fertilizers that doesn’t allow time to develop deep root systems to tap into minerals; and soils that are depleted and poorly nourished.

With the focus on processed foods, the cost of sweeteners and fats has gone down 20% since 1980 while the cost of fresh fruits and vegetables has gone up 40%. We spend about half as much of our income on food as we did in 1960, but we’re spending three times as much of our income on health care. There just might be a link!

We’re eating a lot more processed foods with those cheap added sweeteners and fats and a lot less fresh whole foods. That has the hidden expense of causing us to consume too many calories and get too little nutrition.

We’re eating foods that have traveled a long way. The trucking industry is fond of saying that if you bought it, it came by truck, and that’s becoming ever so true of most supermarket foods. All that hauling is hard on the environment. It contributes to the greenhouse gasses and it puts more fine particulate matter into our air, which is already unhealthy.

By eating locally grown foods, we’ll reduce the need for some of that transport and preserve more of the local farms that give our valley much of its charm.

It might be a stretch for most of us to become locavores, eating only (or almost only) foods that were grown in Central Pennsylvania. But it’s not impossible to create a balanced and interesting diet from locally produced foods. Last month

— in the middle of winter — Amy Farrell and John Bloom hosted a dinner of almost exclusively Central Pennsylvania foods. It was an event they offered through UUCV’s auction. Amy shared their menu with me, featuring cheeses, fresh vegetables, chicken and eggs, even cornbread made with locally grown and ground cornmeal and flour, and sweet potato pie, along with local wines, beers, sodas, cider, and water.

You could start with one meal a week from mostly local sources, or with a single celebratory meal. Or you could, as Jill has suggested, find five items on your regular shopping list that you could replace with locally grown whole foods. Or make it a habit to shop at one of the farmers’ markets.

Recognize food as more than a source of nutrition. It is part of many relationships — with your companions (by the way, that word means those with whom you share bread), with the growers, and with the planet, for example. It can also be a source of pleasure, a feast for all the senses, and a reason to sit down with others in a shared meal. For centuries shared food has been a strong symbolic way to celebrate community. Methodists didn’t invent the potluck. Jesus didn’t invent breaking bread and sharing wine for the Last Supper.

On Wednesday evening this week, as we do every year on Ash Wednesday, we’ll have a service of Communion and Confession. You can read more about the Rakovian tradition of our Unitarian religious ancestors in the early 17th century in my February Newsletter column, where I write about this traditional service. We’ll break bread and share wine, as a symbol of fellowship and community. There will be an opportunity to make commitments for Lent and to ask for help in meeting them. It might be a time to make a commitment to a different relationship with food for the next six weeks.

... our mission also calls us to care for the world and our principles remind us that we are part of an interdependent web of existence. The world around us is the manifestation of choices we — and others — make. We are part of a complex whole system of interacting elements and events, and I believe we are called to act with integrity and care for all of existence. Again, most of the world’s religions ask us to practice good stewardship and to care for our neighbors — both human and non-human.

Making good choices about what and how we eat matters. It matters to our bodies and to the planet. And like many of the choices we face — what’s good for us is often what’s good for the Earth. By choosing to eat more locally produced foods and more whole foods, we’re also choosing to do a little less damage to the Earth by our living here.

... Recognize that food is about relationships at least as much as it is about nutrition, and eat well and with deep enjoyment. Thus you will help transform lives and care for the world. Amen.

“Priceless!” (excerpts), by Rev. Hilary Landau Krivchenia  
Minister, Unitarian Universalist Church of Lafayette, Indiana October 3, 2004

... Wealth, bounty, scarcity, money, are complex – layered with meaning. We use money all the time, frequently worry over it, try to manage it – but to really think about it is pretty daunting. Money is a tool in a world based upon exchange – it’s a symbol of an agreement – because that exchange enters us into relationship with the world. It can’t be avoided. At one time people exchanged goods, services, labor, poultry – but today we use money in our transactions. As in any event in the world we can look at our transactions on the surface or we can see beyond the surface to the deeper layers – where meaning lives....

... Seldom do we – especially in this powerful nation – have transactions which begin and end between two people. Even between two people there are layers of meaning.

Nilton Bonder, in his book *The Kaballah of Money* describes four layers of meaning – I’m taking liberties because theologically Bonder and I are on different pages – but overall his book echoed my own reflections about the nature of wealth.

On the material level our transactions are this for that – four dollars and a molto vente caffe latte. On the emotional level the molto vente caffe latte may bring us a moments warmth, energy, and some pleasure. If I buy from a small

businessman it will contribute directly to his financial well-being. Here the layers get wider – his well-being is involved in my choice to buy my coffee there and not at a mega chain – and that will touch the world on a spiritual level. That means that I choose to make my four dollars mean more than it will mean at a huge chain that where my four dollars will be four of millions. The good will that I offer along with my money may go unspoken – but it is experienced by the businessman who knows exactly what he is up against. I have included a moral perspective in my choice of where to spend my four dollars. Let’s say that I ask the owner about fairly traded coffee and ask if he might be willing to sell some. I offer that I would be willing to pay more to benefit more people and to buy my bulk coffee from him. We commiserate over the risks of small businesses. No matter what he does I am expanding the circle of moral and spiritual awareness by asking him about it. The final layer of the transaction may take place out of my sight – he may choose to offer fair trade coffee – he may choose not to do that for years or ever. The eventual ripples of the transaction happen out of my sight – and perhaps, even, after my lifetime. But they exist whether I see them or not.

...Nilton Bonder says – “the world is, for conscientious human beings, a world of ever more intricate systems of livelihood – our family feeling is larger, wider, and our perception of hospitality is sharper.” Hospitality – as though we all share one home and make our stay in that home sweeter, more wonderful, if we live in hospitality toward one another. I feel a strong sense of hospitality when our share of the organic farm co-op comes in each week. I feel pleasure that the land is being loved and that small farmers are making a living. The circles of hospitality are very wide – as food comes to me and I’m nourished both by the food and the interactions with the other co-op members. It’s food I’m easy with. I know where it came from, who it benefits. Ultimately, I am investing in the well-being of my family, the farmer, the other people in the co-op, and the future of the earth and that is priceless in the long run – the layer of transaction which is out of my sight. We’re making our home more hospitable.

...The Rabbis call this *yishuv olam* – settling the world. It’s acting and living justly so that the household account of the world is settled...It means being ...willing to see beyond the superficial level of money to the deeper layers where the world is balanced or out of balance. It means knowing ourselves well enough to know what it is we really want – or what’s needed to make the world a better place. One of Islam’s Five Pillars is giving to charity, spreading wealth. It recognizes that we belong to each other – as people in a household do – we’re here in relationship.

To settle the world, to make of the world a hospitable place with enough for everyone – this requires a sense of our relationship with one another and the rearrangement of our desires into something that connects each person back to the common wealth. So that each person sees themselves as in partnership with the world.

So much of what we desire – what we really hunger for – is priceless. Still we set the conditions for those things by settling the world – by making the world more fair – more just. Not simply in our own corner but for all creatures...

“A Crowd At The Table: A Thanksgiving Sermon” (excerpts), by Rev. Lilli Nye  
Minister, Theodore Parker Church (Unitarian Universalist) Nov. 23, 2003

...There is something that I have noticed about Unitarian Universalist food culture. In spite of our great love of sharing food together, it is rare that such feasting in fellowship is preceded by the sharing of a grace or blessing before a meal. This could be for any number of reasons: Perhaps saying grace evokes a general discomfort with prayer amongst UUs. It suggests a tone of righteous piety that feels stilted in our very informal religious culture.

Or, perhaps knowing that our companions come from many points along the theological spectrum—from atheist to agnostic to earth-centered pagan to Buddhist to believer in a personal God—we do not know how to gather all those points together for a simple blessing without addressing our thanks “To whom it may concern...”

Or maybe, with our humanistic, independent orientation, we imagine ourselves to be self-sustaining. The food is on the table because we, ourselves, paid for it at the grocery store, with the money we earned, and we prepared it. If it’s a potluck feast, we have each other to thank for the abundance. But how meaningful is it to thank some vague “Spirit of Life” for what seems to be the fruit of our own effort?...

Unlike our forbears, few of us today are acquainted with the vegetables or creatures we consume in their pre-harvested

state. Few of us are blessed with knowing the beauty of the growing plants in the dewy first light of morning, or the memory of the calf in the pasture.

More often, food comes to us packaged in plastic. So, it takes a little extra intention to remember that eating remains—as much today as it ever was—the medium of our most profound connection with the world.

Some of you know that I am vegetarian—of sorts, if you can call someone who eats sea critters, eggs and dairy a vegetarian. And believe me, that choice has nothing to do with a distaste for meat. One of the most delicious of aromas in the world to me is barbeque.

Nor do I mean to present myself as some kind of bodhisattva of compassion. However, in my better moments—at least in my more conscious moments—while I'm eating, I do try to imagine the lives and even the deaths of the creatures who nourish me.

I try to think of the freedom and exhilaration of the wild Atlantic salmon leaping up a frigid mountain stream. I try to imagine its distress as it is pulled from the water and slowly suffocates in the air. I try to imagine the big soft eyes of the dairy cow hooked up to the milking machine and wonder if her udders are sore or if her legs ache as they support her enormous body on the cement floor all day. I try to imagine the bright red-gold eye of the hen who produced the beautiful brown eggs I'm breaking into my cast iron pan, and remember that her laying days will be numbered.

Such thoughts may seem perverse, but simply remembering these beings seems to be one of the few ways that I can express my indebtedness to them. Wendell Berry mentions that the thought of the calf contentedly grazing in the good pasture flavors the steak, that such knowledge calms, and relieves, and the frees the eater.

But knowledge of the factory farm also flavors the meat, in a different way. Imagining the lives of the animals steers me away from meat and eggs produced in the cruel and grotesque conditions that are typical of industrial livestock farming. The thought of the animals' suffering curbs my appetite. It guides me, according to my conscience and financial capacity, to spend the extra money it costs to support humane farming practices.

But since I cannot always be the purist I might like to be, I try to integrate even the awareness of suffering into my eating meditation. It is part of the energy that I am ingesting, and I feel some responsibility to recognize it.

Of course, eating not only places us in debt to plants and animals and the forces of nature. There is a vast human element to this as well. Now, this may not be the most appetizing of meditations, but please allow me to suggest another train of thought:

Let us imagine that we are going to eat something that we've prepared at home using a number of ingredients, including some prepared foods that come in bottles or cans or boxes. Imagine all of the hands that have participated in bringing to food to the table for this one meal:

Who are the faceless hundreds who planted and harvested, who cleaned and packaged and canned, who shipped and stocked, who perhaps combined and repackaged, and shipped a second or third time, then stocked the supermarket, ran the cash register, and bagged our groceries? If we also imagine the extended network of relationships that sustain the farming, factory, and freight industries, that web of connections reaches out indefinitely in our global economy. So many hands, so many faces, so many stories, now connected to your own because you decided to use raisins, or bananas, or salmon, a European cheese, or coffee or soy sauce (although, I hope to God, not in the same dish!).

Consider the migrant workers who harvest so many of our table fruits and vegetables. Their labor is indispensable to the farming industry, yet they are some of poorest, most powerless, and most exploited people living within the borders of our nation. That they are often denied fair compensation for their work is a factor behind the moderate prices we enjoy.

Imagine all those faces, those hand, those stories. When we eat mushrooms, or apples, grapes or tomatoes, we are, in a sense, ingesting their labor, their life, their deferred dreams and lack of choice...

We cannot escape our interdependence. And although we must try to practice some discipline of consumer awareness

and ethics, it is unlikely we will be able to escape our complicity in a food economy that includes cruel, unjust, and unsustainable practices.

Yet, these truths need not ruin our dinner. They need not bring gloom to our Thanksgiving table. Part of being spiritually open is simply understanding that our lives, our blood, our beating hearts, live because we are sustained by other lives. The great life force flows without interruption through everything. Being conscious of these realities deepens our thanksgiving... would that we could live without taking or using life, but we cannot. Therefore let our eating be an act of worship. Let our table stand like an altar.

This is the meaning of saying grace, of saying a blessing before a meal. This is the meaning of the feast of Thanksgiving. It is an expression of awe and indebtedness to the forces and fabric of life and death. Remembering all those lives makes our gratitude real, deepens our compassion, and strengthens our commitment to do what is right for the beings who sustain our being...

“Doing Food Justice” (excerpts), by Rev. LoraKim Joyner, D.V.M.  
Minister, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Gainesville, Florida, 2006 December 3

A meat eater comes up to a vegan: “Did you hear about the new study saying vegans are more likely to go blind? I guess it’s because you don’t get the proper nutrition.” The vegan replied, “Nah, it’s just from reading all of those tiny ingredient lists.”

Vegans (vegetarians who don’t consume any animal products, such as milk, cheese and eggs), aren’t the only ones watching carefully what they are consuming. The amount of choice before the modern omnivore is bewildering. We’re not like Koala bears who only eat eucalyptus leaves. Omnivores always have had to balance trying new foods and loving food with the potential that they could hurt you. These days with agribusiness, globalization, science and socioeconomic analysis, we know that the food we eat can hurt others.

Especially in the U.S. under the barrage of food fads and choices, our anxiety builds with every passing year. There are so many kinds of food we can buy: Bioregional food, Local Food, Seasonal Food, Slow Food, Green Food (Green Cuisine), Humane Food, Fair trade Food, Smithsonian Bird Friendly Food, Health Food, Sustainable food, Good Food, Organic Food, Macrobiotic Food, Non Genetically-modified Food, Raw Food.

How do we achieve the right diet that is just for all beings and the earth? It seems impossible, and it may be. For instance, let’s say you are vegetarian or vegan. Even though more fish are off the hook, you still aren’t. Soy comes from monoculture, a form of intense agribusiness that uses pesticides, reduces biodiversity, causes great pollution and moves people off land as agribusiness moves in. One billion folks are without adequate food because monocultures rob them of livelihood.

OK, let’s say you go organic. Organic farming is harder work than regular farming, is being done intensively like soy in some areas, and the people often earn nonliving wages.

What if you have companion animals? Dogs and cats eat meat. So their meat diet, like ours, harms the environment and other species. Pet food is considered a luxury item, and in 2004, 17 billion dollars were spent on dog and cat food in the U.S. and Europe. This would provide two billion people in the world with the education, sanitation and water they lack.

...So what’s a person to do? It is so difficult to eat justly that most of us, myself included, tend to give up, shut down, quit learning, refuse to talk to others about diet choices and won’t even come to a service of this kind. Giving up on learning and growing in compassion is a religious concern. It means we live in denial which disconnects us from the abundance of being in honest, open, caring and knowing relationship with the web of life. This leads to despair, unhappiness, depression, tension and fear. As a religious people, as Unitarian Universalists, what can we do? . . . We need an energizing sense of interconnection. To feel connected, we can think of all beings as guests at our table . . .

. . . .Ask the underpaid immigrants who worked in the fields or in the farms or slaughter houses how their lives are.

Maybe you'd change your food choices, maybe not. But your life would be more whole knowing how your food got to your table.

Let's mosey on to a more informal dining setting—perhaps a barn or picnic. Now imagine that the guest at your table is another species that helped bring you food. Ask how her life is. The cow's answer *mu* is quite instructive. In Buddhism it means that we are living under incorrect assumptions by thinking our lives are separate from any being, human or non-. If you don't understand animal-speak, research how that animal lived and died before parts of it came to be your dinner. Michael Pollan in the *Omnivore's Dilemma* suggests that all slaughterhouses and factory farms be built with glass walls. Seeing clearly what goes on we'd all use a lot less animal products and treat animals more humanely while they lived.

This will not be easy because unrestrained capitalism doesn't want us to see. President Bush signed into law the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act on November 12th. Under this law, civil disobedience becomes 'terrorism' and imposes severe penalties. It endangers free speech and assembly and interferes with investigation of animal enterprises that violate federal laws . . .

. . . I don't object to death. I object to how these animals live. They suffer greatly. We save a little money per meal while the agribusinesses pocket millions.

Big business had led to a schizophrenic quality in this country. Half of the dogs in the U.S. will receive a Christmas present. Pigs, as intelligent as dogs, as able to suffer as dogs, as socially complex as dogs, become Christmas hams. More to the point, during their lives, pigs are treated as unfeeling machines. [Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, p. 306]. If you haven't already, have a pig as a guest at your table. Maybe you'd make some changes. The important thing is to be in touch with the worth and dignity of every being.

Now imagine a dinner table the size of the solar system, and there's earth sitting at your table. We're all a bit concerned how we going to feed an entire planet. Ask Earth what her life is like: how are her rivers, her oceans, her trees and her hammocks? She's answering you fairly clearly with global climate change, pollution, soil degradation and extinction. Eating with the earth brings beauty to our lives. . . .

. . . Gratitude is so easy to forget. If we could just remember that we are part of the web of life and are therefore never alone, never without the earth's abundance, then maybe we'd have more energy and joyfulness to face life's difficulties.

But I, too, live in forgetfulness and want to withdraw from the fray some days, like the country preacher who decided to skip services one Sunday to spend the day hiking in the wilderness. Rounding a sharp bend in the trail, he collided with a bear and was sent tumbling down a steep grade into a dead end canyon. With the bear charging at him, the preacher prayed, "O Lord, I'm so sorry for skipping services today. Please forgive me and grant me just one wish: make a Christian out of that bear!" At that very instant, the bear skidded to a halt, fell to her knees, clasped her paws together and began to pray aloud at the preacher's feet: "Dear God, please bless this food I am about to receive."

Blessings are a great way to remember gratitude, and we UU's can draw on the world's traditions and our own to say a blessing before every meal. Here's a UU blessing that I often say: May my understanding of the worth and interdependence of all life comfort me and keep all beings from harm.

"Eating Ethically" (excerpts), by Rev. Alison Wohler  
Minister Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst (Massachusetts), April 22, 2007

. . . It matters because how we eat is not an isolated issue. While we would like to think, and often do think, with our independent human personalities, that what we eat is our own business, the truth is that what I eat, what you eat, has further reaching consequences than merely staying alive and being healthy. In this world of infinite connections, our interdependent web, there is no such thing as an isolated event, and because of that fact it matters what we do. It matters what we eat. It matters where our food comes from. It matters how it's grown. It matters how an animal is slaughtered. It matters that the earth is heating up and that eating food that has been transported long distances (the

average is said to be 1500 miles) is contributing to the greenhouse effect because of carbon dioxide emissions. It matters that raising livestock produces copious amounts of methane, another carbon compound, which is twenty-three times more harmful to the atmosphere than carbon dioxide. (The Cheeseburger Footprint, <[http://www.openthefuture.com/cheeseburger\\_CF.html](http://www.openthefuture.com/cheeseburger_CF.html)>) It matters if the food we are eating was harvested by people being paid less than a living wage. Nothing is an isolated act.

But, it also matters that eating is one of the most intimate and pleasurable of human experiences. The food we eat becomes a living part of us. We are literally what we eat. It is ethically important to feed ourselves and our loved ones food that makes us healthy and happy. Yes, I think enjoying our eating matters, too. Why would our taste buds have survived evolution if tasting and enjoying our food were not beneficial to our survival in some way? And, it matters very much that eating with friends is fun and a way to get to know each other better. These kinds of things may all play into our decisions about how, when and what we eat.

The cost of buying food involves more than dollars and cents. [And] the benefits of food involve more than protein and carbohydrates. . . .

“Food for Thought: Unitarian Universalist Values and Sustainable Food” (excerpts), by Vicky Talbert  
Bradford Community Church Unitarian Universalist, June 22, 2007

I expect that some of you can remember back to the 50's and 60's when, once a week, your mother would don her shirtwaist, climb into the family car, and make her way to the A and P. How did she choose her groceries then? In our family, in New England and a long way from the fertile, productive valleys of California, proximity was a huge factor and choices were limited. I don't believe I had an avocado until I was 20 and certainly not a mango. Cost counted when our parents made out the grocery list, as did cultural and family habits and, perhaps religious practices. Some parents were ahead of their time, so nutrition may have been in the equation, too.

How things have changed!! Today, it's not just that food is abundant. We can get almost any food, from almost anywhere, in any season. We have a cornucopia of choices. It truly seems a grocery shopper's paradise, the land of plenty.

But at what cost? People are beginning to recognize that the true cost of food is far greater than what we pay at check out. For many of us, what and how we eat is part of our spiritual practice, a moral or religious act. As we've learned that the current model of industrialized agriculture is not sustainable, a movement toward ethical, compassionate and sustainable food consumption is growing. Theologians and environmentalists, scientists and sociologists, ethicists, and people like you and me are beginning to ask hard questions about how we choose our food. The questions can be difficult - the answers may be confusing.

Throughout developed countries, people want to know where their food comes from and how it is produced. Is the food grown with pesticides or herbicides? What about the polluting runoff from fertilizer and manure? What is the contribution of corporate agriculture to the degradation of our planet and what are the best food choices to protect our environment? Are the farm workers paid a fair wage? What are their living conditions? How are the animals involved treated? In what conditions are they raised and do they suffer? How does a meat-based diet compare with one that is plant-based - when we look at land and water use, human cost, animal suffering, and degradation of Earth's resources?

These fundamental questions lead to more specific eco-social justice issues. Is water being diverted from local usage to irrigate crops to feed food animals? If the food was grown in another country, were local people displaced from their land. How have their lives and culture been disrupted so that food could be raised to feed us? If we have an ethical obligation to reduce emissions that contribute to climate change, is locally produced food better, is organic? What about fair trade and workers' rights? What are the justice issues related to corporate agriculture's use of the land of indigenous peoples? And the biggest question – how will we feed the world if we continue our unsustainable eating patterns?

Choosing our food may not be so easy – if we want to live in right relationship with Earth and all its inhabitants. The

grocery store may not be that glorious paradise after all.

So ... how do we choose? ... Of course!! ... Our principles will guide us. We are fortunate, as religious people, as Unitarian Universalists, to have a superb framework to help us navigate between the rows of cereal and fruits and vegetables. . . .

. . . Much attention has been given to our 7th principle. We know that industrialized agriculture as it now exists flies in the face of this principle and threatens the interdependent web. It causes massive pollution, reduces biodiversity, and destroys land integrity at an alarming rate

But, let's not overlook how our other principles fit into the equation of ethical compassionate and sustainable food choices. When we consider the inherent worth and dignity of every person, how can we ignore the family in a poor village in Asia whose culture has been degraded with their land when it was taken over by a multinational corporation to produce wheat for snacks for us? What about the migrant workers here in our own country who are exposed regularly to dangerous pesticides and then can't get decent medical care? Don't these people have worth and dignity equal to ours? Recent research confirms what many people know instinctively - that animals think, feel, and have complex social relationships - and suggests that the worth and dignity of those beings is as inherent as they are for human beings. Should we not extend this principle to them?...

“Ethical Eating” (excerpts), by Meri Gibb  
Open Circle Unitarian Universalist, Boulder, CO, November 9, 2008

There is an old saying, “Some people eat to live, others live to eat.” Whether you live to eat or eat to live is decided largely by chance. If you are among the 852 million people in the world who are suffering from malnutrition, you eat to live. If you are among the more affluent classes, you live to eat. For both groups, lives center around food. For the hungry, staying alive and healthy, having the energy to provide for the basic necessities and care for others is a challenge. For the affluent, sitting down to a dinner derived from perhaps twenty-five different food sources is taken for granted. A salad of several kinds of lettuce, tomatoes, avocados, cucumbers, sprouts, carrots, olive oil, rice vinegar, salt, and pepper. A main course of meat, potatoes, peas, catsup, butter, lemonade, seven grain bread. A fruit salad dessert with pineapple, apples, grapes, strawberries and raspberry sorbet. Such choice, such abundance. Filling the plate and eating and drinking to fullness is a social event, an opportunity to admire the art before you, to pay your respects by consuming it. For those suffering from malnutrition, if they are lucky, powdered milk and a cup of cereal, provided by an international aid organization, may be all they can look forward to, meal after meal. And perhaps, clean water to drink with it.

In the US, we waste 3,044 pounds of food per second. Per second! All the imperfect food that is culled from the fields and the food that is left in the fields after mechanical harvest, the blemished and bruised food that comes to the grocery store, the food that doesn't get purchased and begins to decay on the shelves. The edible by-products of the production of foods are discarded. Food that is over produced and cannot be sold is discarded. The food on our plates that doesn't get eaten that goes down the disposal or to the landfill. If we believe that providing adequate food is a human rights issue, then we must understand the imbalances of food delivery, acquisition, and consumption and the damage that is done to all living things by the industrialized growing and transporting of food and the raising of farm animals in unnatural circumstances.

Here are a few statistics from the USDA to munch on: In 2006, 35.5 million Americans lived in households considered to be food insecure. Of these people, 22.9 million were adults (that is, 10% of all adults) and 12.6 million were children (17% of all children.) Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans on some reservations experienced “food insecurity” at rates higher than the national average. Now, with so many out of work and faced with economic disaster, the demand at food banks has grown.

Recently, Frances Moore Lappe, author of “Diet for A Small Planet” writes in an article, “A Shortage of Democracy,” “Our worsening democracy deficit has continued to set the world up for disaster, undermining production and access to food worldwide.” The democracy deficit that she refers to is the lack of responsibility of governments that do not

have the health and sustainability of the environment and humanity as their main concern in the growing and distribution of food. In the same article she notes that one third of the grain and soy grown in the world goes to feed livestock along with one third of the global fish catch. To those astounding figures add the environmental cost of raising livestock on a factory farm and you can't help but think that by bypassing industrial livestock production, there would be enough high quality food in the world for people to eat.

Okay. At this point you are probably expecting that I am going to tell you to stop eating meat. You can relax. I'm not going to say that. But what I am going to talk about here is how you can contribute to rebalancing the availability of food and reclaiming a healthy environment through the choices that you make.

In 2008, the General Assembly of Unitarian Universalists, adopted the study action issue: "Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice, 2008-2012." A 73 page resource guide for congregations went up on the UUA website a few days ago. Congregations are invited to study the complex issues, to make recommendations toward the crafting of a resolution that will be approved by the whole body, and to personally make changes which will positively affect the interconnected web of life. Once this resolution is passed by UUs, it will become part of the fabric of our environmental justice actions not only in our congregations but throughout the world...

...it may surprise you that it is estimated up to 37% of greenhouse gases are produced in the production of food...If we believe that we live in the interconnected web, that life is of value, that our environment is worth saving, that the disappearance of species in record numbers is unacceptable, then we have choices to make. You hear a lot about driving less, turning the heat down, using less hot water and insulating your house. Did you know that by making choices about what you eat, you can change the course of the environmental and human degradation that we are now experiencing?

I'll make a few suggestions here and then open up to discussion...

Buy organic and natural. I've heard folks claim that because organic products cost more, buying organic is unaffordable and elitist. I've read articles in which the writer claims that organic foods don't taste any better than commercially grown food and you should save your money. I believe that, as people who care about the world outside of ourselves, when we look at the toll that commercially grown foods take on the environment and the health of the people who do the work in the fields, we can't afford not to buy organic foods...

Eat less meat. If you are worried about getting enough protein in your diet, educate yourself about how to combine grains and legumes and dairy products to create complete proteins. Use meat as flavoring rather than as the main dish. Seek out meat that has been grass fed and finished and humanely raised...You could even go vegan if you learn to eat the proper foods needed for a balanced diet.

Become a food activist. Educate yourself about food production and distribution. Talk to your government representatives when farm bills and aid bills are being considered. Tell them to think democratically and environmentally when considering food subsidies and aid to foreign countries. Ask them to help people who are at risk to develop ways to produce their own food. Ask them to provide...incentives for growing food crops for human consumption, rather than the destructive raising of cattle and plant materials for ethanol and cattle feed....

Consider packaging when you have the choice to purchase food or drinks packed in plastic or not...

Educate yourself by reading food labels, choose nutritious foods over over-processed, over- sweetened and over- salted foods. They are healthier for you and, from a public health standpoint, reduce the pressure on our health care system to treat illnesses that could be avoided by choosing wisely.

... Compost your food waste. Rotting food waste in landfills creates methane – a greenhouse gas 22 times more potent than carbon emissions...

Eating ethically and sustainably sends a message to food growers and producers. You vote with your bucks. Not too long ago, you couldn't find organic or sustainably-raised animal foods in the marketplace. Now, [many supermarkets have] choices available. The market for this food is booming because consumers have shown their concern through their purchasing power and the market listens.

You are what you eat. We are what you eat and you are what we eat. And in the words of those famous philosophers known as the Beatles, “I am me and you are you and we are all together.” Amen, blessed be and goo-goo-ga-jub.

“Mind the Mules: Theology and Justice in the Food Chain” (excerpts), by Dr. David Breeden  
First Unitarian Church of Alton, Illinois, March 30, 2008

. . . I grew up on my family farm in the southern part of Illinois. . . .

There was nothing about it that was a golden age. And I’m NOT nostalgic about the good old days.

I don’t like carrying water from the well out back.

I don’t like going to an outhouse at 4am in the snow.

I don’t like the wasps that always seem to build nests in the outhouse in summer.

I don’t like living in close proximity to snakes.

I don’t like the suffering of animals. (Those of you who grew up on farms know that it’s the kid’s job to kill the chickens, because it takes some energy to catch ‘em.) I really don’t like killing chickens. Or hogs or cows. I don’t even like hunting. I hate the smell of hot blood. As far as farming is concerned I—as my grandmother would say—turned up in the wrong turnip patch.

The fact is, in the 1970s I could see the handwriting on the wall. Either I would have to become an industrial farmer, or I would have to insist on a type of “primitive” farming of the sort farmer and agricultural activist Wendell Berry pursued. Frankly, didn’t have the will or the imagination to pursue such a course. I wanted a job where I could be in the air conditioning. So, I left the farm. And I broke a chain of agricultural life that goes all the way back to whenever it was human beings began to farm. And in many ways I regret that, because—despite the snakes and the blood—there’s nothing like freeing the hooves of a newborn colt from its mother; there’s nothing like helping a newborn calf struggling to its feet; there’s nothing like watching a newborn lamb struggle to find its voice and bleat for the first time. There is nothing like the wise stare of an old sheep. There is nothing like the power of a good mule. We human beings evolved with the animals we kept, and something is lost when that bond is broken. And there is something extraordinarily sad about living in a cocoon, for the most part unaware of where my food even comes from.

The sad fact is that, for the most part, our society does not know where its food comes from; nor do we know the true cost of that food. . . .

. . . Fact is the way we produce our food has caused irreversible environmental damage; has created an insupportable food chain; and has destroyed a way of life. And. . . it doesn’t have to be that way. . . . Let’s look at just once cause of this problem.

The National Labor Relations Act of 1935, the law that provided most US workers with the right to collective bargaining, excluded domestic workers and agricultural workers, and by implication small farmers. This was an instance of *realpolitik* for the Roosevelt administration, since it needed to keep southern, plantation-owning Democrats in the coalition. But that compromise had a couple of disastrous consequences.

First, since in the 1930s a sizable number of African Americans were domestic servants, agricultural laborers, or small farmers, the compromise postponed the civil rights movement for another generation. It also insured the suffering of millions of migrant workers to this day, despite the best efforts of people like Caesar Chavez.

Second, the compromise insured that farm workers and small farmers would have no voice in government policy concerning agriculture. The consequences of THAT killed the family farm, damaged the environment, and is now killing the US population with bad food laced with corn derivatives. The farm subsidies that made a real difference in the problem of over-production during the Depression Era turned into guarantees of profitability for factory farming after the Second World War, due to the political power of large farmers and corporations.

Western European farmers, on the other hand, and now all farmers in the European Union, have the right to collective bargaining. This means that small farms, with free range animals, are the norm rather than the exception in most EU nations, though the World Trade Organization has begun to damage this system, with factory farming of the US type spreading in Poland, the Czech Republic, and some other parts of Eastern Europe. The WTO requires each nation to pass its own agricultural regulations, and it further requires that, within certain limits, nations not ban imports from other nations based on agricultural practices. This is one of the reasons we see the world's peasant farmers standing in the streets alongside bomb-throwing anarchists at WTO meetings. . . .

. . . I vividly remember the last time I saw my grandfather alive. He was sitting on his front porch, an old scraggly chicken resting between his feet. My grandfather was rubbing the chicken's head with his cane. He respected living things—because they kept him and his family alive. . . . I learned that when I had to do harm or kill I should do it without hesitation because that is the kindest, quickest way. I learned to see the interdependent web and to live in it as lightly as I could. . . .

. . . When it comes to agriculture, no magic occurs: everything we eat is part of the soil and the sun. There is no free lunch. When we eat, we consume life, and the life we consume becomes part of us. We consume plants and animals. . . and the labor of the human beings who raised the plants and animals, processed the plants and animals, hauled the plants and animals, and served the plants and animals to us.

There's nothing magic about our food, no matter the wonders of the advertising or the packaging. Though economies of scale and the welter of advertising obscure the reality, eating is a sacrificial act; a holy act: for us to eat, even when we are vegetarian, living things suffer and die.

Next time you sit down for a meal, consider praying an old Buddhist prayer that my teacher, the poet Allen Ginsberg, taught me:

We take this food

The labor of many people,

The suffering of many forms of life.

We wish to be worthy. . . .

Finding Meaning In The Mundane (excerpts) by Brian Ferguson  
First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco, July 3, 2005

It is dangerous to give a sermon called Finding Meaning in the Mundane. While it is my hope to emphasize the deep meaning in our lives, it is my great fear that I may just demonstrate the mundane.

For many of us this Sunday service is where we come together to examine what gives our lives worth and to make sense of the seemingly incomprehensible events around us. Our time in this sanctuary is not mundane, it is a special time where we wrestle with many of the fundamental questions about life.

Now the mundane aspects of our lives are the making of breakfasts which we ate this morning, how we traveled here, and the writing of checks for the bills we'll pay tonight. Our lives are made up of these ordinary but necessary tasks of living but I believe with a deeper understanding we can find greater meaning from these seemingly unfulfilling tasks. As Stephen said earlier we must create the value that gives meaning to our lives.

For me, religion is about connectedness, about our relationships with ourselves, our local community and the world at large. It is these relationships that give my life worth and I explore these relationships by taking a deeper view of my everyday actions and how these are driven by my values...

John Marsh our former minister had a wonderful blessing which captures this sentiment: "As we sit down to enjoy this food, let us remember that this food is brought to us through the labors and struggles of our brothers and sisters

throughout the world, may we wish the same for them as we ourselves have today.”

This brings a connection on the global scale to people we will never know but we depend upon daily. This gives us such a greater appreciation for the meal we often eat while absorbed in some other activity. Just by having this awareness of the origins of our food already provides a human connection and a wonder for our existence...

This is a great untapped area of financial influence we all have. Even if only a small percentage of our purchases buy products resulting in improvement in our society this would have a profound impact. Our religious society has taken steps in this direction with the Fair Trade coffee we drink after the service in our coffee hour. Now coffee may be just one product but it is the second biggest import to the U.S. after oil therefore the Fair Trade of coffee is already having a significant positive impact on a global scale...

If we think in greater depth about these purchases beyond the price, quality and style of the product to the conditions of the workers involved, the environmental impact, and the ethics of the company involved this gives far greater meaning to many of our simplest actions.

A friend of mine once said “I like paying my taxes because I feel I’m contributing to a civilized society.” Now I don’t think he represents a typical view but I really like the idea. Can you imagine if every time we bought something we felt we were contributing to a better world?

This socially responsible buying is only possible because we have choices in our product decisions. There are wonderful organizations such as COOP America and San Francisco-based Global Exchange who provides plenty of information about socially responsible products. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility is an organization of many religious groups, including our own, and is one of the most important resources for activism today. It is involved on such issues as access to health care, opposing sweat-shops, human rights, environmental justice, violence in our society and global poverty...just our presence is all that is required to make a difference in this world whether it is to correct an injustice, to comfort a friend or inspire others. It is often the most mundane act that can have the most profound effects.

...I firmly believe to truly find meaning in the mundane we need to open our mind to the wonder and depth of the world around us and take creative actions consistent with our highest values. Even our most ordinary actions can have an impact both on ourselves and our community far beyond what we can ever imagine. Being alive is a gift from nature but living a meaningful life is a gift to [ourselves]. Amen and may it be so.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP SERVICES**

### **Websites**

The Earth Charter Document is a beautiful statement celebrating ethical eating and environmental justice. The Preamble affirms the need for “a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.” <<http://www.earthcharter.org>>

The National Farmworker Ministry website has an extensive library of worship materials in English and Spanish <<http://www.nfwm.org/worshipresources/wrshpmain.shtml>>. Particularly appropriate for Labor Day and Thanksgiving.

UU Ministry for Earth (UUMFE) <[http://uuministryforearth.org/res\\_worship.htm](http://uuministryforearth.org/res_worship.htm)>. This website offers a broad array of environmentally-themed worship resources, including material appropriate for intergenerational worship.

UUs for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (UFETA) <[www.uua.org/ufeta](http://www.uua.org/ufeta)> Sermons, quotations, and readings for worship, and even a “Blessings of the Animals Resource Packet.”

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights” is the statement of human rights identified with the United Nations. <<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>>

Worship Web, “Dedicated to Deepening Worship in Unitarian Universalist Congregations,” has an extensive collection of readings, chalice lightings, and other service materials. <<http://www.uua.org/spirituallife/worshipweb/>>

## Holidays

Earth Day (April 22) celebrations began in 1970. Labor Day, the first Monday in September, honors “the strength and esprit de corps of the trade and labor organizations,” according to first U.S. proposal of the holiday in the 1800s.

St. Francis Day (October 4) honors St. Francis of Assisi, Catholicism’s patron saint of animals and ecology.

The Feast of Booths (Sukkot) is the Jewish harvest festival.

Thanksgiving. In the Americas, the first harvest festivals were celebrated by native peoples long before the Europeans arrived. The Spanish, the French, the English, and others, brought new harvest traditions to the Americas during the 1500s. Modern Canadians celebrate Thanksgiving Day in October, which is a traditional time for harvest gatherings in the Northern Hemisphere. In the United States, Thanksgiving Day is delayed until late November. Although the American holiday is surrounded by myths and important controversies, it’s significant for Unitarian Universalists (and here’s a bit of trivia: organized in 1620, the Pilgrim congregation in Plymouth, Massachusetts, became a Unitarian congregation during the early 1800s). The Core Team recommends the following websites as resources to help congregations reflect more deeply on Thanksgiving:

Resources for deconstructing the myth of the first Thanksgiving from Oyate, a Native organization working to ensure that Native lives and histories are portrayed honestly <<http://www.oyate.org/resources.html>>

Teacher and student resources for *American Indian Perspectives on Thanksgiving* from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian <<http://www.nmai.si.edu/subpage.cfm?subpage=education&second=thanksgiving>>

University of California Los Angeles news video by Chiara Sottile (daughter of Ethical Eating Core Team member Robette Dias) on the 2008 National Day of Mourning on the island of Alcatraz, rejecting myths of Thanksgiving and honoring the heritage of native peoples. <<http://www.dailybruin.com/dbtv/2008/dec/03/713/>>

The *UUWorld* (Winter 2008) article “Dinner Dilemmas: Ethical Issues at the Thanksgiving Dinner Table” by John Gibb Millsbaugh <<http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/121289.shtml>>, available in unabridged form at <<http://tinyurl.com/dinnerdilemmas>>.

International Human Rights Day, established by the United Nations, is December 10. By a happy coincidence, it is also the day when the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded. Some congregations honor December 10th as one of their December holidays.

## Worship Tips for Service Leaders

Recognizing that Social Action committees, Green Sanctuary committees, and other groups of laypeople may lead worship services launching the “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice” CSAI in their congregations, the Ethical Eating Core Team scoured the web looking for a useful guide for lay service leaders. We found a resource written by Rev. Victoria Weinstein, Minister of the First Parish Unitarian Church of Norwell (Massachusetts), who teaches Unitarian Universalist Worship and Liturgy at Andover-Newton Theological School. Rev. Weinstein was happy to support this CSAI process, and provided the special updated version of the guide that follows.

**Why do we worship?** Before you lead a service, be sure you have your own understanding of this question. If you have no sense of deep purpose, neither will the congregation.

**Preparation equals love.** Leading worship should look easy and natural, but it is neither. Before you participate or preside, know every element of the service, be intimately familiar with “what goes next and WHY” and be extremely prepared. Your preparation will not guarantee perfection, and shouldn’t. It will guarantee your confidence in leading the congregation through a reverent worship experience.

**Energy equals love, hospitality and inclusion.** No matter what your personality type, you must bring a vitality and presence to worship with your body and voice that includes and embraces all who enter the worship space. Find your leadership persona and practice it until it feels authentic to you. This includes rehearsing with microphones, studying your reflection in the mirror, watching video of yourself, asking friends for feedback, or leading parts of worship for a few observers sitting in various parts of the worship space. P.S. Do not assume that because you have a “big voice” that you can be heard. Enunciation and pacing are at least as important as volume. Use microphones if they are available and learn to modulate your voice to get the best use of them. People using hearing-assisted devices will thank you for it.

**When leading worship, you are a conduit of the Holy, so get out of your own way.** Worship is no time for debilitating self-consciousness, excess self-deprecation, or sarcastic asides. Keep your own feelings pure and your actions focused as you preside or participate. This is a congregation, not an audience. They are not there to assess or judge you, but to share worship together. Avoid nervous commentary between elements, “whoopsie-daisie” confessions of error, and sarcastic asides.

**When leading an issues-oriented worship service, remember that the service should minister even to those who come with no acquaintance with, and no particular interest in, the topic.** Find places in the service that address the spiritual needs of all those in attendance and be sure that your sermon has more spiritual and religious relevance than a mere lecture.

## Quotations and Centering Thoughts

“Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love.” Reinhold Niebuhr

“Humans are part of the web of life. What we do to the planet, what we do to other species, and what we do to other people, we end up doing to ourselves.” John Robbins

“A person is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred, that of plants and animals as that of other men and women, and when one devotes oneself helpfully to all life that is in need of help.” Albert Schweitzer

Also see the quotations that begin each section of “Understanding the Stakes” in the *Resource Guide for CSAI “Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice*. Boston: UUA, 2008, available online at

<<http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issuesprocess/currentissues/ethicaleating/121903.shtml>> or  
<<http://tinyurl.com/eth-eat>>.