FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF LOUISVILLE

~ A member congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association ~

CELEBRATION OF LIFE

February 13, 2005

Let us love in deed and in truth rather than in word and tongue.

CALL TO WORSHIP by Marianne Hachten Cotter Rev. Norm Stewart

Welcome to this place of possibility!
This love's hearth, the home of hope,
a refuge for minds in search of truth unfolding,
ever beautiful, ever strange.
Here, compassion is our shelter,
Freedom our protection from the storms of bigotry and hate.
In this sanctuary, may we find comfort and courage.
Here may our sight become vision to see the unseen,
to glimpse the good that is yet to be.
Let us celebrate life as we worship together.

CHALICE LIGHTING Ryan & Colin Curtis and Carol Edelen

May this light of love shine deep within your spirit
May this torch of mercy clear the path and show the way
May the Horn of Plenty sound so everyone can it
May this light of love be with you every day
~ adap. from David Roth

* SINGING *What Wondrous Love* – # 18 All sing

RESPONSIVE READING *Affirmation* – # 470

CHORAL ANTHEM *Come to Me, O My Love* by Allan Robert Petker

READING FOR REFLECTION *Valentines* by Gary A. Kowalski
from *Green Mountain Spring and Other Leaps of Faith*

I have a piano in my house that I rarely play. When I practice, which is usually twenty minutes a week, I feel a mixture of frustration and enjoyment. Although I tell myself that I'd like to play better, I don't give music an important place in my life. Sometimes I wish I didn't even own a piano. Whenever I have fantasies about living in a rustic cabin in the woods, the piano feels like an anchor and impediment to my freedom. But a piano is a nice piece of furniture. Owning it gives me a sense of settledness and solidity.

Many of us have relationships that are like pianos. They become part of the furniture of our existence. We may have purchased our pianos or begun our relationships with a sense of high ambition and excitement. We dreamed of making beautiful music together. Now we've settled into a routine of plodding mediocrity.

Becoming a better lover is like becoming a better piano player. It's partly in the fingers and partly in the soul, but there is one principle common to both–to give it a place of priority in our lives. Twenty minutes a week is not enough time to become a Horowitz or Scott Joplin, nor is it enough time to build intimacy, trust, and camaraderie with another person. Whether you aim to make it to Carnegie Hall or to have a good relationship, the rule is the same. You need more than passion. The art of loving, like mastering the keyboard, takes practice, practice, practice.

SILENCE FOR REFLECTION

RESPONSE *We Live Not For Ourselves Alone* by Ed Schell

OFFERTORY *Not While I'm Around* by Stephen Sondheim Pat Allison

HOMILY *Love and Commitment* Rev. Norm Stewart

We all know that tomorrow is Valentine's Day — a day when some people think about things like love and commitment — which is the theme or our service this morning. If you were to believe all of the advertising on radio and TV, and in newspapers and magazines it would make you think that love is just about buying candy, flowers or jewelry for someone else. I wish it were that simple.

For many of us, trying to understand what love is is a lifelong quest. Of course for most of us there is love for your parents or perhaps for your children And there is love for a new puppy like Josey Uebelhoer has. That's called puppy love.

But I think there is more to love than that.

Of course if it was easy to really know what love is, people wouldn't have to keep writing all those books and songs about love.

Most of you probably know that I don't believe everything I read in the Bible, However, I think the Apostle Paul set a very high standard for love. Almost two thousand years ago, in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13, he wrote:

1 [Though I may] speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.
4 Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful;
5 it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;
6 it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.
7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
8 Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.
9 For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect;
10 but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.
11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became [an adult], I gave up childish ways.
12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.
13 So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

The greatest of these is love. Paul's letter to the Corinthians was written about 1500 years before the modern ideas of romantic love that we find everywhere in our popular culture today. And yet the hope that it attached to the transformational power of love feels about as close as anything I know to describing what love at least ought to be like.

Unlike most modern attempts to capture the love on film or in song, I especially like the fact that Paul's letter is clearly not just about the one person loving another person. Paul's letter is about our efforts to be more loving with everyone we know. Our partners, our families, our friends in church, our friends in school, our co-workers..., the poor and the needy . . . everyone.

His letter raises the bar to a level we can all aspire to for our whole life and beyond.

What is it then that keeps us from going to that level of love that Paul wrote about and that modern songwriters have been trying to capture at least since the days that poetic giants the likes of Andrew Marvel and William Shakespeare roamed this earth?

If I could answer that question I would be the Messiah of interpersonal relationships that

everyone is waiting for.

Nevertheless, Paul has given us a standard to seek and it is worth reflecting upon his description of love on a regular basis.

When I think about commitment I jump forward to the present and the work of dr. michael ryce. When michael and his wife, marijo, first started dating they came to a point in their relationship where they were ready to make an initial commitment.

Not wanting to jump in too deep too quickly the initial commitment was something like, “we’ll stick together until the going gets rough and then we’ll split.”

It didn’t take long for them to realize that really wasn’t much of a commitment. So they took the next small step for their relationship. Here’s what they came up with, “We’ll stick together until the going gets rough, and then we’ll talk about things before we split.”

According to michael, at that point their talking took the form of turning their backs to one another and saying, “O.K. let’s talk.”

Well, it took them awhile but their commitment to one another evolved until in 1996 this is what it said. It is entitled, *My Commitment.*

My Commitment

♡ I promise to TRUST you enough to tell you the truth and to treat you LOVINGLY, Gently and with Respect.
I will do this in my thoughts, words and actions, whether in your presence or not.

♡ In every interaction I will look for and acknowledge the Highest and Best in you as I surrender to LOVE, our true nature.
My connection to the Divine as I understand it (~~my Source~~) and nurturing my relationship with you is always more important than any issue.

♡ If anything unlike LOVE comes up, I will hold us in my heart and listen as I learn to speak, experience and be RESPONSIBLE for my own realities.
I am here for and with you,
I will keep communication open and keep LOVE Conscious, Active and Present as we HEAL and as we CELEBRATE LIFE!

— michael & marijo ryce

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I think that is a pretty high standard of commitment for anyone.

Back in 1996, when I first met michael and his wife marijo, they were repeating that commitment to each other every day.

About now, I suspect that some of you may be thinking that you don't have a partner at the moment and may be quite content not to have one, so this doesn't really apply to you.

I think however, that it may be just as valid as a commitment let's say to your church or to a best friend or a family member or . . . . to yourself. Choose a different object for your commitment and listen as I read it again.

♡ I promise to TRUST you enough to tell you the truth and to treat you LOVINGLY, Gently and with Respect.
I will do this in my thoughts, words and actions, whether in your presence or not.

♡ In every interaction I will look for and acknowledge the Highest and Best in you as I surrender to LOVE, our true nature.
My connection to the Divine as I understand it (~~my Source~~) and nurturing my relationship with you is always more important than any issue.

♡ If anything unlike LOVE comes up, I will hold us in my heart and listen as I learn to speak, experience and be RESPONSIBLE for my own realities.
I am here for and with you,
I will keep communication open and keep LOVE Conscious, Active and Present as we HEAL and as we CELEBRATE LIFE! - michael & marijo ryce

I believe that is a commitment or at least the beginnings of a commitment that sets the bar up where Paul set it for love. It certainly is a beginning from which we can develop our own commitment statement without necessarily having to begin with something like, "we'll stick together until the going gets rough and then we'll split."

If you are interested there are copies of michael and marijo's *Commitment* on the table in the

back of the church. Take one, ask yourself if it is something you can say to a partner, a friend, a church, a child and if not what would your personal commitment be?

In closing, remember that this business of *love and commitment* is not easy. It takes practice, practice, practice.

Blessed be . . . Amen . . . and Asé

SPECIAL MUSIC *The Gift of Love* Ron & Kathie Johnson
Terry White

COMMUNION

The sharing of a meal or something to eat is an important part of many religious traditions and practices. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition from which Unitarian Universalism evolved, the Passover Seder and its descendent, the Christian Communion have been celebrated for thousands of years. At the Last Supper, Jesus shared ordinary bread and wine with his disciples. He said, "do this in remembrance of me." Since Jesus represents the "highest and best" of which one should be mindful in the Christian community, we could say that communion is something a community does in remembrance of its "highest and best."

Our communion today, for those who choose to partake of it, is a simple ritual intended to take something that is a common and ordinary part of our everyday life and lift it up in our hearts and minds as a reminder of what it is we value. In doing this, our routine encounters with the communion element in the days and weeks to come can repeatedly serve as a gentle reminder of our own "highest and best," – that which we hold most important in our lives.

In that spirit of mindfulness — during this Valentine's week — that I want to share with you a Chocolate Heart Communion. During this week when chocolate is everywhere, I have chosen chocolate hearts as our communion element to remind us of our highest and best. During the coming week, every time you see, taste, touch, smell or hear about chocolate, do it in remembrance of that which is "highest and best" in our church and your life.

The ushers will pass the communion element among you. Given how much some of you probably love chocolate, I know this may difficult but when you receive your chocolate heart please hold it until all have been served. While you are holding it and waiting, I invite you to think about what really matters in your life.

What is really important to you?
Who and what do you love and care about?

Let us pray,

I now invite that Spirit which is greater than all of us yet present in each of us, to shine upon this gathering and our Heart Communion —

We bring these hearts of chocolate, which so many truly believe to be one of the
greatest gifts of the Gods and Goddesses, and lift them up as a reminder of
the highest and best that is in our hearts and minds.
May this chocolate be blessed with the spirit of love . . .
may it and all chocolate serve as a delicious reminder of what really matters
to each of us in the inter-connected web of our relationships with one another.
All gatherings when people meet and touch, celebrate life. [1]
The friendship and love we share this day is sacred.
Blessed be and Amen.

And, now I invite you to join in the sharing of this chocolate – remembering the "highest and best" in your life. And I invite you to also remember in your heart this community that we are all a part of — and to be mindful of the support we give to each other within this community. Especially in challenging times. And especially when any of us may feel less than a whole, complete person. For many of us, it is through this community that many of the empty spaces in our own spirits are filled.

After the service today, if there is any left, please take a piece of chocolate, to share with someone who was not able to be with us today.

* CLOSING SONG *Magic Penny* by Malvina Reynolds

CLOSING WORDS [Prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi]

Where hate rules, let us bring love; where sorrow, joy.
Let us strive more to comfort others than to be comforted,
to understand others, than to be understood,
to love others more than to be loved.
For it is in giving that we receive,
and in pardoning that we are pardoned. – Amen

Our service has ended, may your service begin . . .

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1. Rudolph Nemser, Singing the Living Tradition, No. 727