2014 Conference Workshops

Teaching Cosmic Education Through Storytelling—Jennifer Morgan, Keynote Speaker Workshop

Dr. Montessori and her son Mario understood the importance of storytelling for introducing the Great Lessons: The Story of the Universe, The Story of Life, The Story of Humans, The Story of Communicating in Signs, and The Story of Math. Each lesson can be taught through stories that ignite the imagination of all students spurring them on to study on their own. Ms. Morgan will model ways of telling universe stories and teachers will be encouraged to discover their own unique ways of storytelling inside of Cosmic Education.

Jennifer Morgan is an award-winning author, educator, lecturer, storyteller, and retreat leader. She has been inspired by the work of Dr. Maria Montessori as well as by the noted cosmologist (and AMS 2012 Conference Keynote Speaker) Brian Swimme, the beloved “ecospirituality” scholar Thomas Berry, and Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, co-founders of the Yale University Forum on Religion and Ecology. Ms. Morgan’s books and programs are scientifically-based, as well as nourished by wisdom traditions—that is, the core or mystic aspects of spirituality. Her books—Born With a Bang (Winner of Learning Magazine’s Teachers Choice Award), From Lava to Life, and Mammals Who Morph—are used in classrooms around the world and have been endorsed by, among many others, Jane Goodall and the experimental physicist and Nobel Laureate Leon Lederman. Ms. Morgan received a BA in Theology from the University of San Francisco and an MBA from Rutgers University.

Adapting Spirit Play for a UU Summer Camp—Debbie Atkins

Christian churches have Vacation Bible School that brings their kids and neighborhood kids together for a week of activities. Some UU churches have designed summer camps as an alternative to VBS. In this workshop, I’ll talk about how I have planned summer camps at our church and give some lessons learned. As a group, we’ll discuss the Spirit Play method and how we can use that as a basis for our summer camp structure. We will also brainstorm ideas for advertising and working with volunteers. You’ll leave this workshop with a list of ideas to help you get started planning your own Spirit Play-inspired UU Summer Camp.

Debbie Atkins has been in the training and development field for over 25 years and is a member of the training class. She started out as a high school and community college math and computer programming teacher. After several years there, she returned to school to pursue a degree in instructional design, and has worked in that field for the last 15 years designing and delivering training in a variety of industries. For the past six years, Debbie has used her training skills in teaching Spirit Play at Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church in Jacksonville, Florida.

After the Wondering—Offering Meaningful Work—Rev. Emily Manvel Leite

What choices do we offer our Spirit Play participants after the story circle is done? This workshop will discuss options for work including art supplies, spiritual practices, activity sheets, Spirit Play in Motion, and other options. Bring all of your most brilliant ideas to share! We will then use two or three stories to jump start our thinking as we create plans for related work for each of them. This thinking will include considerations of different intelligences and learning styles as well as low cost and ease of creation.
Reverend Emily Manvel Leite is a minister and storyteller and a member of the training class. She has been a religious educator since 1986, when she began work in a tiny congregation in Providence, RI. She has since worked for five congregations of various sizes, learning about the needs and challenges of many different programs and is currently in the Training of Trainers program. As a credentialed Minister of Religious Education, Emily has supported the spiritual development of all ages since 1995, but she's a relative newcomer to Spirit Play, having launched her congregation's Spirit Play programs for Preschoolers-Adults in 2013. She believes deeply in the transformative power of story for all ages, and appreciates the intergenerational opportunities that Spirit Play provides.

**Spirit Play for Older Children--Kathy Keleher**
This workshop will give tips on programming for children beyond 3rd grade classes. We will discuss the specific needs of older children in Spirit Play and ways to integrate those changes into the classroom, and how to use drama with this age group. There will be a presentation about Passages Portfolios, a way to document the work that older children do in the classroom and provide them with a meaningful religious ceremony to celebrate their achievements.

Kathy Keleher, M.A.T., M.S.W. has taught RE for nine years using Spirit Play to Kindergarteners through fifth graders, currently to a class of 3rd and 4th graders. In this time she has prepared innumerable story baskets and written many stories, and for RE Sunday at the end of our year, her class has always presented a dramatization of one of the Spirit Play lessons. She has also given Spirit Play training to my fellow RE volunteer teachers so that our church could offer Spirit Play in three classrooms, Preschool, Kindergarten - Second Grade, and Third - Fifth Grade.

This workshop will help make the connection between the direct experience of wonder in the classroom and how children and adults integrate that experience into their understanding and articulation of the Holy. In our society and often in our churches, there is a temptation to jump to defining meaning before giving enough time for silent contemplation. And then what happens if the contemplation doesn’t seem to find place to land in Unitarian Universalism? Included in this conversation will be the layers of theological experience outlined by Rev. Jerome Berryman, ways to engage in those layers through James Luther Adams’ Five Smooth Stones of liberal religion, and the personal reflection of workshop participants.

Rev. Jennifer Innis is a Trainer of Trainers in Spirit Play. This wonderful method has been part of her ministry since 2004. Her background includes seven years in religious education ministries in addition to her service in parish ministry. She worked with congregations in the Northeast, the South, and the Midwest before settling in Texas. She currently serves in both the education and parish ministries as the Consulting Minister with First Jefferson Unitarian Universalist Church in Fort Worth, TX. She and her spouse, the Rev. Patrick Price of Community Unitarian Universalist Church in Plano, TX are on an adventure of the spirit with their children ages 5 and 2.