



The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist
Fellowship of Waynesboro

Let Freedom Ring

By George F. Thompson

Reverend Paul in his fabulous sermon on February 9 got me to thinking about freedom, and on the drive home to Staunton I kept recalling a childhood memory of singing, along with the entire student body at weekly assembly, the patriotic song “America” (1831) by Samuel Francis Smith and its famous opening lines:

My country ‘tis of Thee
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing.
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrim’s pride,
From every mountainside
Let freedom ring.

And later, in high school and again in college, I learned that Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. used these very same lines in his passionate call for the end of racial inequality and injustice in America and for the immediate acceleration of liberty, equal opportunities, and justice for **all** Americans (of every race, creed, background, origin of country, and religion or lack thereof) during his famous “I Have a Dream” speech on the Washington Mall (August 28, 1963). This was more than a century after President Abraham Lincoln issued the seminal document, the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves on January 1, 1863.

So where are we today as Americans continue to define/redefine and expand/limit the meanings, context, and extent of our personal

and public freedoms? How do we reconcile the recent banning of more than 10,000 books in the United States during 2023-2024 alone, even as the majority who oppose the book banning and the minority who ban the books may sing together “My country ‘tis of Thee sweet land of liberty...”?

For an answer, I offer the following observation about the banning of books by Joe Wood, an old friend, Vietnam vet and author of *The New England Village*.

“Supporting libraries financially and with donations of books is an important form of non-violent resistance these days, especially here in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where several townships and boroughs have taken the political move to cut their usual annual financial contributions to the Lancaster County Library (over drag-queen storytelling), even as the library continues to serve **all** residents, including especially people who are marginalized, need access to the Internet, have inadequate incomes, are homeless, do not speak English as a first language or seek information about their legal status in the country.”

As Joe shows us in his new role in retirement as a 78-year-old member of the “Non-Violent Resistance Force” in Lancaster, the one thing citizens cannot do is lack courage and be silent or inactive. Otherwise, we will be subject to additional restrictions on our personal and public freedoms from those in positions of power: from local library and school boards to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Personally, there are too many days when it feels as if episodes from “Star Trek” may be coming true, that we UUs are in the 24th Century on the Starship “Enterprise” under the command of Jean-Luc Picard trying our best to outwit the collective Borg (“Resistance is futile.”), which increasingly feels like one political party—the former party of Abraham Lincoln—in which any dissent (and even the freedom to dissent) is disallowed and disqualifying and occasionally life-threatening.

But whenever I get the feeling that resistance might be futile, I consider the rise of book banning in America by a fringe minority and its multiple threats to personal and public freedoms, as Joe mentions above. I also remember what it felt like when I first saw the original film, “Fahrenheit 451” (November 14, 1966) and how scary human behavior can be. You may remember that 451 degrees Fahrenheit is the temperature at which a book burns. Shudder at the thought that this could be our America and the America of our grandchildren if we do nothing but ride quietly into the good night and allow the Borg to rule and reign like a collective bully.

The Founding of UUFW

By Sylvia Woodworth

2025 marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of our Fellowship. In 1955, less than a year after a couple with four children from New Jersey ran an ad in *The News Virginian* seeking others interested in establishing a Unitarian church, the Unitarian Fellowship of Waynesboro was accepted as a member of the American Unitarian Association.

Among the challenges in the early years were having a place to meet, obtaining help with “lectures,” worship services and children’s

religious education programming, loss of leadership through professional transfers and death, finances, and sustaining membership. Meetings were first held in homes, a hotel and then Waynesboro High School before “the Hall Property,” now Chalice House, was purchased for \$32,000 sixty years ago. Excellent advice was



provided by many generous people. These included the then minister of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Unitarian Church in

Charlottesville and a retired Congregational minister, also from that church. James Reeb, who was later murdered at Selma, AL, and his fellow assistant Unitarian ministers at All Souls Church in Washington, D.C., took turns voluntarily conducting Sunday services. The women arranged a consultation and visit at the Fellowship with Sophia Fahs, a religious activist who edited many Unitarian religious education materials. Money and exceptional leadership seemed to come along at crucial times.

And so, through the highs and the lows, our UUFW pioneers laid the foundation for the UUFW we know, love and support today. We are fortunate to have *Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Waynesboro: The First Thirty Years*, written by Marion Brown. A copy is available in Chalice House next to the mailboxes, if you would like to read a detailed history of that period. You will learn that coffee hour and potlucks were popular from the beginning, and that Barbro “Taylor” now Hansson, Lorain and Bill Harouff, Lee and Ken Patterson, and Glen and Pat Patterson are among those we can thank for us having this thriving spiritual community, where we can embrace liberal religion and find inspiration and strength to live our values.

