VISITING PROF JOHN BUEHRENS MENTORS THE NEXT GENERATION AT SKSM

The Rev. Dr. John Buehrens says the best part of his transition from eight years as the Unitarian Universalist Association's president to Starr King School's visiting professor of ministry is the "opportunity to sit quietly and wait for the teachable moment."

"Teaching at Starr King," said Buehrens, "feels more like face-to-face ministry than the meetings, decision-making, ceremonial events and public statements I was used to. I've found my most satisfying work in mentoring the next generation of the movement."

This fall semester he's teaching "Ministry Through Preaching" and "Leadership Skills for Effective Public Ministry." In his leadership skills course, Buehrens advocates for a more public voice in religious leadership, including media training for ministers.

"I've been concerned for years," he said, "by what might be described as the privatization of religion. Much of what people speak of as spirituality has no adequate ethical or public dimension. Religious leaders need concrete skills for speaking in response to public events, building congregational support for public witness, organizing and writing around public issues, and dealing with the media."

In his public ministry class, students learn how to develop relationships with the press, form a message and encourage more coverage thanks to media instruction Buehrens has set up with the Unitarian Universalist Association's pro bono trainer.

A 1973 graduate of Harvard Divinity School, Buehrens served parishes in Knoxville, Tenn.; Dallas, Texas; and New York City, where he also advocated for the homeless and mentally ill, civil liberties, low-income communities and interfaith cooperation. In 1990 Starr King awarded him an honorary doctorate in theology. And, in 1995 Meadville/Lombard Theological School gave him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree.

GRAD MINISTERS TO GROUND ZERO WORKERS

Danita Noland's hard hat labeled "Chaplain" signals compassionate support for workers who struggle with overwhelming grief as they sift through the rubble of what once was the World Trade Center.

Since Sept. 11, Noland ('00), a Starr King graduate and associate minister at the Unitarian Society of New Haven, Conn., has spent several shifts, some more than 36 hours, ministering to firefighters, police, cleanup crews, welders, steelworkers and others searching and dismantling wreckage at "Ground Zero" in Manhattan. She joins ministers from a variety of denominations who are offering direct crisis counseling to those who must cope with tasks more grim than most of us can imagine.

Noland arrived in New York City on the Saturday following the tragedy because of an e-mail appeal for chaplains from a minister she didn't know. With only a cell phone number for a contact, she caught the train from New Haven.

She never found that minister but managed to talk her way onto the site, where she connected with a group of clergy from Oklahoma who had served in the aftermath of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. They took Noland under their wing and helped her get a security pass, hard hat and respirator.

"Everywhere you walk, everywhere you look," Noland said, "there are men and women who need someone to talk to. There's lots of grief and suffering down there. They've seen some pretty horrific stuff. They're scared and they know it's not over yet."

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BALÁZS SCHOLAR CARRIES ON WORK OF NOTED MINISTER AND GRADUATE

From the Transylvanian village where Starr King graduate Francis Balázs established his ministry came Maria Zszusanna Bartha, this year's Balázs Scholar, who is following in his footsteps.

Bartha, known at SKSM as "Zszusza" (Zhu-za), 28, graduated from the Kolozsvár seminary in 1996 and served the historic 13th-century church in Mészko for 2-1/2 years. She's married to Karoly Bartha (Bar-ta), a veterinary student who finished his studies in October, then joined her in Berkeley.

According to Zszusza, the villagers in Mészko have never forgotten Balázs, a writer, scholar, minister and social reformer who returned to his native country in the 1920s with an American wife he met while studying at Starr King. In 1931, Balázs died at age 39 of tuberculosis.

The scholarship, started in 1994, brings a Transylvanian Unitarian minister to SKSM for a year of study.

"There are still living people who knew and remembered him," Zszusza said. "There is building up a mythology around him and his wife Christine. Christine and their daughter Eniko have come back to visit."

Zszusza serves a parish of 140 ethnic Hungarian Unitarians who live among 510 Romanian Orthodox villagers. While there are a few tensions between the two groups, she said, Unitarians enjoy generally good relations with their neighbors.

"They have a wonderful Orthodox minister," said Zszusza. "This helps a lot, to have a good leader."

In fact, the two groups have discussed economic collaboration to raise the standard of living for all. That's one of Zszusza's primary goals in coming to Starr King.

"I want to learn with purpose and make as many connections as possible, to apply when I get back home," she said. "That will make it possible to start an economic development foundation in the area, something like Project Harvest Hope [a development model operating in another part of Transylvania with leadership from SKSM graduates David Keyes and Janne and Rob Eller-Isaacs]. We have lots of resources—vegetable fields and an alabaster mine for handicrafts. I want to start a credit union and develop tourism with a bed and breakfast, using empty houses in the village. Our interest is not a wealthy foundation, but for people to make a better living."

A more personal goal, she said, is to deepen her knowledge of bioethics.

"I wanted wholeness and I find it in ministry."

"My main interest is bioethics or environmental ethics from the theological point of view," said Zszusza, who's the daughter of two doctors.

These kinds of broad concerns brought Zszusza to the ministry, a place she believes can accommodate her variety of interests.

"I wanted wholeness," she said, "and I find it in ministry. I want to understand people, to help and create a better life. As a medical doctor, I'm only with people who have physical pain. If I'm a teacher, I'm only with children. As a minister, I have the opportunity to see all kinds of people, all kinds of lives. I have lots of places to work and ways to work."

This year Starr King would be especially appreciative of donations to the Balázs Scholarship Program, as both the scholar and her spouse were brought to Berkeley. Please write your check to SKSM and mark it "Balázs." You can send it directly to the school. Zszusza Bartha is available for speaking engagements and Sunday services. Please contact Gayle Reynolds at 510-652-9686.

PARKER AND FISCHER TRAVEL TO OXFORD

International Unitarian Universalism was the focus of two Oxford conferences this past summer for Starr King president Rebecca Parker and Reinhardt Professor Clare Benedicks Fischer.

The first conference, "Theology and the 21st Century," ran June 25-28 at Oxford's Manchester College, an historic Unitarian institution, and was sponsored by the International Council of Unitarian Universalists. Participants came from Poland, Romania, Hungary, Russia, South Africa, Ireland, India and other countries to take part in panel discussions, plenary sessions and liturgies. These meetings covered national histories of Unitarianism, social witnessing, and Unitarian practice and organization around the world.

Parker delivered an address on the meaning of three American poems that expressed the theme of the traveler. She spoke of the mood and meaning conveyed by Walt Whitman, T.S. Eliot and Angela Jackson, especially regarding the vulnerability of life.

Parker, Fischer and Starr King graduate Scott Prinster ('95) created one of the conference's liturgical programs, using music and sign language.
At 73, Dwight Brown ('58) has been fully retired for the past eight years. In his last position he served as an executive for the Southwest District in Dallas. Nowadays he takes a pottery class with his wife Mary, and enjoys the meaning of his life and what motivated him to choose the ministry. "The Hindu," he said, "has a concept of three phases. The third phase is to sit in a cave and figure out what it all meant. That's where I am. The nature of the ministry business is that you don't know what you accomplished." He said his greatest pride is that he earned the trust of the clergy in his area because of his willingness to listen. "If I were to do my life over again, I would go back to Starr King. The school opened to me the possibilities of so many different points of view."

Jerry De Jong ('57) reports that he was ordained in August of 1998 and in September of 2000 accepted a call to pastor the Suisun/Fairfield Congregational Church in Suisun City, Calif. "It has truly been an experience of grace happening," said Jerry. His partner Art is a first-year student at the New College School of Law in San Francisco and is working as a paralegal. They recently celebrated their fifth anniversary with their cat Buddha and dog Gracie. As a member of the Suisun congregation said, "Let me get this straight, you live with Art, Grace and Buddha." Jerry said, "I feel very blessed."

Audette Fullbright ('00) celebrated her Nov. 25 ordination/installation as the full-time parish minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Roanoke, Va. After graduating Starr King, she spent a year as a community minister and as executive director of Stewards of the Earth, a non-profit, ecumenical environmental organization.

Nancy Miller ('83) retired a year ago from Trinity Congregational Church (United Church of Christ) in Weaverville, Calif., after 16-1/2 years of service. She also recently celebrated a first-year anniversary with her partner Dorothy Franklin. She and Dorothy enjoy their garden, although chopping firewood, she said, "is getting to be a big deal at my age." Retirement is something Nancy said she "thoroughly enjoys" as well as her studio, where she writes poetry and short fiction.

Until last spring, Roy Ohert ('67) worked as the secretary and organizer of the Unitarian Universalist Retired Ministers and Partners Association, West section. Now he's taking a break from duties that included organizing conferences. In January he traveled to Starr King to participate in the FULLBAC discussions and wrote a paper included in the proceedings publication now available at SKSM (see "Briefs"). Roy enjoys his garden and small orchard in Salem, Ore., where he grows apples, pears, plums, cherries, grapes as well as various berries, sharing his abundance with a local food bank.

Ken Reeves ('84) has completed a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the Pacific Graduate School of Psychology in Palo Alto, Calif., and is now working as a psychology fellow at the Labey Clinic in Burlington, Mass. For his dissertation he studied patients' experience of bereavement therapy. He remains active in the Unitarian Universalist ministry, preaching, officiating at weddings and memorials, leading continuing education programs for ministers, and training lay leaders. "I hope," Ken said, "to bring psychological insights and interventions to congregational leaders and spirituality to psychotherapy." After driving a U-Haul and towing his car across the country, he said he has a "new respect for long-haul truckers."

In September John Rex ('95) began his new job as senior minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Palm Beach County in Florida.

Jane Rzepka ('76) has published "Thematic Preaching," a book that includes sample sermons by Rebecca Parker and former SKSM trustee Rosemary Bray McNatt. John Ruebrenes is using the book this fall for his "Ministry Through Preaching" class at Starr King. It's available for purchase through the UUA and Graduate Theological Union bookstores as well as Amazon.com.

Don Southworth ('00) moved to Georgia to begin his ministry at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Atlanta.

For the last 22 years, Edgar Van Buren ('67) has worked as a commercial fisherman out of Mount Pleasant, S.C. Using a technique he developed, he grows clams and oysters on 18 acres of marshland he leases from the federal government. Last year Edgar raised 1.4 million of these edible creatures. Occasionally, he still teaches stop smoking classes using a program he created during his last church ministry in Beverly, Mass.

Sydney Wilde ('80) has entered her 10th year of co-ministry with partner Dennis Daniel. After eight years in Paramus, N.J., and interim church placements in Chicago and Sacramento, they've been settled at the First Unitarian Universalist Church in Reston, Va., for the past year. A recent congregational vote launched a $1.2 million capital campaign to double the size of the church facility. Sydney and Dennis are also enjoying their first grandchild, born Sept. 11.

UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

"Many attendees spoke of their appreciation for this chapel," said Fischer. "They were especially inspired by Scott's language of gesture."

Another SKSM graduate, Robert Bowler ('93), who formerly worked in England with the International Association for Religious Freedom, attended the conference.

Following the Oxford gathering, the International Council of Unitarian Universalists' Task Force on International Education met. This group includes representatives from Starr King, Meadville/Lombard, the University of Manchester Unitarian School and Manchester College of Oxford. They discussed religious leaders who have little access to education on liberal religious life and Unitarian Universalism. Then the task force drafted a preliminary plan that emphasized collaboration between schools in the U.S. and abroad. "Rebecca Parker and I returned from this meeting with a strong sense of global educational needs," said Fischer. "The Unitarian Universalist movement will be strengthened as leadership is identified and encouraged throughout the world."

not alone from the number of objects with which we are in communion, but from depth. — THOMAS STARR KING
Like a family, Starr King has rallied around Melissa Mummert as she takes on one of the biggest challenges of her life. This SKSM third-year student and co-president of the student body is producing a documentary, “Guilt by Association,” on federal prisoners incarcerated for nonviolent drug offences.

Often these conspiracy convictions come from minimal association with drug dealers. Simply translating a phone call, spending drug profits on new shoes for the kids or giving dealers a car ride can land someone in prison—in some cases for life.

Mummert, 28, spent the summer of 2000 at the Federal Correctional Institution in Dublin, Calif., where she worked in a clinical pastoral education program. There she met prisoners incarcerated because either they knew no information that would satisfy prosecutors or they refused to testify in drug cases against family, friends or acquaintances.

“So many prisoners I talked to had no idea about what was happening. They couldn’t believe they were so heavily implicated that they had to go to trial with all the drug kingpins.”

In her film, she’ll profile three women caught in this legal trap, including Hamedah Hasan, who fled an abusive relationship in Portland, Ore., and moved in with her drug-dealing Nebraska cousins. She babysat their children, helped with household and occasionally wired money, at their request. Many months later, after she had moved back to Portland and started a welfare-to-work program, she was convicted and sentenced to two life sentences, two 20-year sentences, a five-year sentence and a four-year sentence. Her home for the past seven years has been a federal prison in Spokane, Wash., far away from her three children.

Struck by the bleak situation of these prisoners, Mummert turned to a familiar medium. She had learned on-the-job skills at Channel One in Los Angeles, which produces television news programs for high schools across the country.

“I thought I had enough access to the tools, technology and support from Starr King to tell this story,” she said.

Mummert applied for and won a prestigious San Francisco Film Arts Foundation grant for her digital video production, along with grants from the Ristad Foundation and the Unitarian Universalist Funding Program.

Then, in a fateful confluence of place, time and people, her Starr King family stepped in to help. She connected with second-year student Jacqueline Luck, whose son, Jeff Roberts, is a professional cinematographer. Mummert hired Roberts as her cameraman.

Another SKSM student, Julia Older, introduced Mummert to her daughter, Susan Older, a professional film editor. Susan helped create a nine-minute trailer Mummert is using to raise the $50,000 she’ll need to complete her documentary.

To keep Mummert on track both emotionally and financially through this demanding process, Jacqueline Luck has formed a support group.

“For a first-time project,” said Mummert, “I’ve needed a lot of help from the Starr King community. There’s no way I could be doing this without their encouragement and support.”

She hopes to finish the documentary by summer of next year, after filming trips to Dublin, Calif., New Orleans and perhaps Omaha, all of which require further investment of time and money. Eventually, she would like to show the completed hour-long film on PBS television.

“When it gets really hard and I think I can’t do it,” said Mummert, “I remember Eliyahu [Parajale], preaching a sermon about Esther in which she said, ‘If I perish, I perish!’ All the theology, all the personal development work and all the work to counter oppressions that goes on at Starr King—I think that is my imperfect attempt to realize that.”

To contribute to Mummert’s film fund, send a check to the Bay Area Video Coalition, attn: Fiscal Sponsorship Department, 2727 Mariposa St., Second Floor, San Francisco, CA 94110, and write on it “Guilt by Association” and “Melissa Mummert.”
More than 100 years ago, imaginative and energized people committed their time and resources to starting a progressive school for liberal religious ministry on the West Coast. Starr King School was the result.

People like Earle Morse Wilbur, Francis and Sarah Abbie Cutting, Horace and Edith King Davis, and Thomas Eliot joyfully promoted the possibility of a "new institution inspired with that indefinable but potent spirit of freedom and progress."

What our forebears initiated in gladness is carried forth today by hundreds of supporters across the continent and the world. We at Starr King School want to honor this legacy of leadership and generosity by naming our many friends.

If you're a contributor to the school who prefers your name NOT appear in these pages or in future donor lists, please e-mail me at RevFlood@aol.com.

In the fall of 2000, Dr. Lee Lawrence, a lifelong Unitarian Universalist, made a $100,000 initial challenge pledge to Starr King in honor of the Rev. Dr. Til Evans' 30 years of service at the school. That pledged gift was also dedicated to advancing the school's practice of educating to counter oppression.

Evans, beloved educator, Unitarian Universalist minister, longtime professor and former interim president of Starr King, is known throughout our movement for her pioneering approach to religion and education—one emphasizing that the church teaches, and learns, by what it does.

We've matched the initial challenge pledge with contributions from Art and Arliss Ungar, Pam and Di Allen-Thompson, Kay Pauling, Jean Gillett, Barbara Gordon, Barden and Caroline Finch, Harold and Lena Hance, David and Beverly Boritin, Forrest Gilmore, the St. Lawrence Foundation, and the Starr King graduating class of 2001, as well as the congregations of Davis, Hayward and Palo Alto, Calif., in honor of the Reverends Darcy Laine, Michelle Favreau and Elizabeth Banes.

Starr King School will establish a professorship when we reach the first $500,000 and a fully endowed chair when we raise a total of $1.5 million. Currently, we've raised $271,000. Here are all those who've made inaugural gifts or pledges to this professorship:

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A fire in the soul. A celebration of the spirit.
PARKER RELEASES BOOK
EXPLORING CHRISTIAN VIEW
OF VIOLENCE AND SACRIFICE

How can life be restored to wholeness in the aftermath of devastating violence? This is the central question explored in a dual memoir written by Starr King President Rebecca Ann Parker and award-winning feminist theologian Rita Nakashima Brock.

"Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us" was released Oct. 22 by Beacon Press. In the book, Parker and Brock, a research associate at the Harvard Divinity School, explore family abuse, sexual violence, racism and war. They also grapple with the way in which Christian tradition has interpreted the violence Jesus endured. For Parker, this interpretation led to an unjustified impulse toward self-sacrifice in the face of abuse; for Brock, it sanctified the silent suffering of devastating racism and the disruptions caused by war.

"When Rita and I wrote 'Proverbs of Ashes,'" said Parker, "we knew it would be relevant to the many issues of violence that confront our society. None of us imagined we would be facing as anguishing a time as we are now. We witness in this book that life can be saved through compassionate communities, journeys of transformation and sustained justice-making—not redemptive sacrifice or vindictive punishment."

To order "Proverbs of Ashes," contact www.beacon.org.

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A publication of Starr King School for the Ministry, an education center to prepare women and men for liberal religious leadership, especially Unitarian Universalist ministry.

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