



Interfaith Inspirer

An Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth News Publication



Love Across Species

by Linda Gilchrist

Have you ever considered how profound it is that we humans can form such deep bonds with our pets but have such conflict and discord among ourselves? Your pet, after all, is a totally different non-human species, and if dropped to earth from outer space, we would be calling it an alien! Some years ago, several months after my husband died, my sister thought it would be good for me to get a pet. I worked long hours and didn't want the responsibility that would require. But one day, while she and I were out to lunch, she spotted a pet shop and insisted we stop in. "Just to look," she said. Yeah, right, I thought, but I'm not getting one! Then I saw my Lucy. My eyes locked with hers, this tiny, kind of strange-looking puppy (a Chiweenie, I found out), and I saw my soulmate! I picked her up and refused to let her out of my arms until she was safely home with me. It was a deep, profound, instantaneous love bond. I truly felt that she was my soulmate. Lucy crossed the rainbow bridge some years ago, but I now have my fur daughter, Sabrina, and my flock of feather sister hens.

Domestication has led to friendships between species that would not naturally exist together, including unlikely pairings in which one member of the pair would typically be the prey of the other! In the U.S., 60% of us live with a pet we consider a family member. Because of this, there has been increasing recognition of multispecies families.

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Love

by Röb Fagerlund

I believe Love is not an emotion, but a state of being. Emotions are transitory biochemical states. Well, I'm sure they are more than that, but I am not able to say exactly what else they are. I do know, however, that they are not facts. They are not Truth.

Love is a state of being. As such, Love is the attitude and decisions I bring to my relationship with who and what I love.

Who and what do I love? In no particular order, God, Bonnie, Nature, 20th-century American traditional music, chocolate, the Maple Tree in my backyard, cats, my parents, kindness, my ancestors, my friends, the Center, the people at the Center, you, Duck Soup starring the Marx Brothers, a good book, and a good night's sleep. I'm sure there is much more, but that's all I can think of right now.

I am sure that all of those things I mentioned cannot be the same definition of Love. So, if Love is a state of being, it is also a relationship. For example, my Love of the Maple Tree in my backyard is a relationship between the Tree and me. My relationship to the music of Louis Armstrong is different because Tree and Louis Armstrong are not the same. My relationships with the people of the Center are all different because while we are all One, we are all different from each other.

The attitudes of Love tend to be, to a greater or lesser degree and in different ways, made up of things like affection, caring, compassion, respect, and yes, emotions.

Ultimately, Love is not about who or what we love. Well, yes, it is, to some degree. But it's also about the state of being, the attitudes we have, and the decisions we make as we relate to the other. And that is something about which we have a choice.

Love Across ... continued from p. 1

There are both scientific and spiritually based explanations for these deep connections between different species. Scientific theories include mutualism (reciprocal benefits) and social needs (seeking companionship to alleviate loneliness and stress). A prime example of both of these is the human-dog bond. Dogs provided hunting and protection, while humans provided shelter and food. Each gave companionship. This relationship fostered co-evolution.

Exploring human-animal bonding theories offers important insights into human-human interactions as well. Simply put, humans can love their pets more easily than they can get along with other human beings! Pets offer unconditional love, are perceived as innocent and vulnerable, and meet our core needs for affection and purpose without the potential for conflict, judgment, or emotional baggage. Human relationships are often conditional and transactional, and they involve complex emotions, including fears and expectations.

Spiritual beliefs regarding interspecies love include a belief system rooted in universal interconnectedness and the recognition of the divinity in all creatures. Many faiths recognize interspecies love, including Franciscanism (animals are siblings), Hinduism (all life is sacred), and many others. The core concepts include a belief that all life is part of one universal web, that divinity is shared, that all living beings are reflections of God, and that there is a spiritual bond beyond the physical form.

There is just so much to learn from all this, but perhaps the most important is to look at your human-human relationships. We all crave unconditional love. We all need companionship, affection, approval, and fear rejection and judgment. Perhaps we need to be kinder to each other and ourselves. Maybe we can learn a few things from our non-human loves.



March 29 1-3 pm
Annual Meeting, Board Elections
and QCC Meeting

Please contact Delyth Balmer or Lance Clark if you are interested in serving on the board.

Board Communications

Board of Trustees Meeting Summary

January 18

Attendees: board members Lance Clark (chair), Don Digirolamo, Peggy Lubahn (secretary), Marian Orihel, and Dawn Swartz; and staff Delyth Balmer (administrator/associate minister) and Annie Kopko (associate minister).

In addition to the standard committee/team reports, the following topics were discussed:

- Nominating Committee for the 2026–2028 roster of Board of Trustees candidates for the Annual Meeting (which includes the Quarterly Conversation in Community) on March 29, 1–3 pm. We need a member-at-large from our community to serve on the Nominating Committee, along with Lance Clark and Delyth Balmer.
- There will be four positions open this year, as terms for Lance Clark, Dawn Swartz, and Cristo Bowers come to an end, along with a vacant seat that was not filled at last year's election. Lance and Dawn expressed interest in running for another term.
- Dates were also set for the next two QCCs this year: June 28 and September 27. Rather than meeting in December, a date in January 2027 will be set.
- The Fire Marshall came by unannounced and did an inspection while Connie Snow was cleaning at the Center. He reported that he was very pleased with the changes made after his last visit. [Note from Delyth: items included new and refurbished fire extinguishers, backup batteries in the emergency exit lights, and the opening of the second exterior double door exit from the sanctuary, with a new crash bar installed for emergency opening of the doorway.]
- It has been observed that various building lockup procedures are sometimes overlooked, including leaving lights on, failing to reset thermostats, and leaving coffee pots plugged in. Delyth will re-post a highly visible procedural checklist at the door for closing the building and turning everything off after each class and event.
- Continued discussion of considerations for restarting a youth ed program, including the costs of paying teacher(s).
- Also discussed providing monthly feedback to the community on income and expenses to increase awareness.

The next meeting is scheduled for Sunday, February 15, at 1 pm.

Love Actually?

by Susan Slack



There's just something about the passion of the changing seasons that really speaks of love, at least in my mind. Writing this during a thaw, I hear Fleming Creek flow over rocks, giggling like a teenager running to meet their first love, as if there were no tomorrow.

A grand oak tree, the mother of all those young children growing around her, feeds them through the unseen micro trails under the soil. She nurses them through droughts and sends them warnings through chemical signals about dangers like insects and diseases. That's love, isn't it? You may not hear Céline Dion singing as the credits roll up at the end. First of all, because there is no end. But second of all, this is a universal caring kind of love, isn't it?

A Sufi might refer to this as *Ishq*, the love that is the connecting energy, the moving force that binds us together. Some folks think of gravity as the Earth sucking us down. In actuality, as our home planet moves through space, the universe presses us, hugs us humans and Mother Earth together, compelling an embrace as a mother hen enfolds her baby chicks under her wings.

The monarch butterfly looks for a milkweed plant. But not just any milkweed plant. Preferably, it would be one hosting, or rather being eaten by, a somewhat comical white caterpillar with bad hair and a red clown nose. As the caterpillar munches, the plant feels "Yikes" and responds by producing even more of the toxic poison it already produces. So, when the monarch 'sees' a white caterpillar on a milkweed, s/he chooses that one to land on. The monarch's main defense is its toxicity, and a highly juiced-up butterfly is fortified. Few predators will take a chance and consume it. And there are copycat-patterned butterflies with similar wings who know that predators will not eat them because they look like monarchs. Is this cooperation, this symbiotic system, love?

How about we call it the 'order of things'. The ancient Egyptians might have referred to this as Ma'at, depicted as a goddess who keeps a feather on her head, sitting with her knees cuddled in. She measures a person's transitioning heart on the scales against her feather and makes the Judgement Day call: Did this one follow the order of things? There are rules in nature that may not be broken, like when the temperature is 32°, the water must choose to freeze. Can we call this surrender of control love?

In winter, the energy in nature, like sap in the trees and signs of life in plants, withdraws for a rest, to strengthen and renew. Like Egyptian god Osiris, who dwells forever in the Earth, but can never return to his lover Isis. Yet she searches, yearning. Alas, he is destined to remain apart to nourish the crops. At least Persephone, the Greek maiden, gets to join her lover, Hades, for a while every winter down there in the depths. Her mother needs help above in the spring to maintain the cycle. Is this persistence love?

If one wanted to, one could substitute the word love for the word life. Or, to take it one step further, one could substitute the word God for the word love: that which holds us in deep embrace and follows ebb and flow. It is the way of things.

Susan Slack, author and musician, is an Interfaith Center member and leads the Dances of Universal Peace there. Website: <https://slacksusan.wixsite.com/susan-j-slack>

Haikus Honoring Marilynn

by Al Carter



Marilynn Thomas & Al Carter
March 2024

*Suffering showed up
What feelings would honor her?
Marilynn was here.*



*Once she couldn't paint
Forgetting she was much more
Paintings reflect her.*





Ministerial Miscellany Changes and More Changes

by Rev. Annie Kopko

This month, I thought it would be great (well, maybe not great, but necessary) to be thinking about the changes likely to come this year and get a start on emotionally processing the resistance I feel, not to mention the frustration and complaining I see happening within myself. It's not my fault I became a widow. Well, it is my responsibility to embrace all subsequent opportunities as positively as I can. It is not anybody's fault, "things happen". Often life seems to happen by chance, but I do not believe it ever does.

I think we keep attracting the events that will help us grow the most. This is very positive, I believe, but not always happy or easy. We can choose to respond positively or not. These are the lessons that, when responded to well, help us the most. Each of us can reach inside and find the faith that will support what we believe to be true. Each of us can trust that conscious understanding that will carry us through.

This is what I used to say to my son in response to his challenges: "You never know", meaning that we can't know the outcome ahead of time, but we can affirm what we want and what we intend.

Each of us has the responsibility to find the most positive path through the quagmire and complexities of life. Each of us is better off not blaming anyone for anything that shows up in our experience or thoughts in any present moment. We are meant to know that making our way through struggle, both easy and hard, makes us stronger.

I like this quote from Anatole France: "All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy, for what we leave behind is a part of ourselves. We must die to one life before we can enter another."

Many Blessings,

Annie



Feb 07 - Jean Wilson
Feb 08 - Janis Beard
Feb 11 - Delyth Balmer
Feb 11 - Mark Charles
Feb 11 - Claire Groshans
Feb 16 - Carol Bardenstein
Feb 16 - Sandya Shears
Feb 20 - Curtis Glatter
Feb 22 - Steve Schultz
Feb 28 - Melissa Whitney



Haiku from Dexter

by Barb Fisher, Sandy Hill,
and Cooper Holland



Volunteer Corner

By Annemarie Howse



The Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth thrives because of the generosity and dedication of its volunteers, who support and sustain a variety of activities.

Zoom Social Hours Update

During the pandemic, volunteers created a lifeline of connection by hosting Zoom social hours on Wednesdays and Fridays. These gatherings offered a safe, welcoming space for community members to stay connected during an uncertain time. As in-person events gradually resumed, Zoom participation naturally declined, and the Friday social hour was eventually discontinued. Peggy Lubahn continued hosting Wednesday socials until she stepped down from this role at the end of 2025.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Peggy and to all our past hosts for their time, care, and commitment to keeping our community connected. Although these virtual social hours have now ended, those who would like to stay connected online are encouraged to join our email group. More information is available on the website:
<https://interfaithspirit.org/communications>.

The Interfaith Center's Library

As the colder temperatures creep into our bones, many of us long to simply curl up with a good book. With that in mind, it seems like the perfect time to recognize Bonnie Dede and Röb Fagerlund for their longstanding stewardship of the Center's library and bookstore. For more than a decade, they have lovingly maintained a well-organized collection of spiritual literature, including works by established authors as well as a dedicated section for Interfaith writers.

Bonnie and Röb are available to assist with book selections and recommendations. Most titles are available for borrowing. If you borrow a book, please record your name and checkout date in the library's notebook and return items promptly. Used books may be purchased. Donation envelopes and a drop box are furnished for this purpose.

We sincerely thank Bonnie and Röb for their ongoing dedication and service!



Röb Fagerlund & Bonnie Dede

Volunteer Opportunities

- Sign up to do a reading or meditation during the Sunday service. Contact Norah Reilly for more information at nkreilly58@gmail.com.
- Provide snacks or beverages for our weekly social time after the service or for our Cafe 704 on the second Saturday of the month.
- Help clean up after potlucks and other special events.
- Arrange chairs in the sanctuary before the Sunday service.
- Write an article for our monthly newsletter. Articles and other submissions are due on February 10 for consideration for our March newsletter. Please send to newsletter@interfaithspirit.org.
- Serve as a greeter on the fifth Sunday of the month. Contact Diane Gledhill at diane82103@yahoo.com.

For these and other volunteer opportunities, please contact Annemarie Howse, Volunteer Coordinator, at ahowse21@gmail.com or by text at 818-667-2815.



Ernestly Speaking

Recognizing That We Are Love and So Much More

by Janet Somalinog

February is as good as any other month to discuss Love as First Cause, those God qualities that are living inside each and every one of us. It's great that we dedicate a particular date for romance, puppy love, familial love, and all those wonderful human goings-on, but my deeper mind wants to talk about the ethereal essence of our very being; the very truth of who we are and all the other inherent, infinite, always supplied and available qualities that are born within us. Not just on our entry into human form, but it is the very raw material in the seed of Life that is embedded in us and will continue after we die. Hence, the label First Cause.

We are not only endowed with the energy of Love, but also of Peace, Balance, Beauty, Strength, Compassion... need I go on? The list of these God qualities is quite long. When I write about God, Love, The Universe, Spirit, the One Mind, etc., I capitalize the words because they indicate to the reader and to me their importance as aspects of God, the true essence of all Life. Capitalizing a word that is already insufficient to describe the infinite, unformed substance of All There Is is a bit of an oxymoron. I get it, but hey, we humans have to walk this physical, material, illusory world, and I want to give as much weight and credence to our Divine Nature whenever and wherever I can.

During my practitioner training, we had a class devoted to the presence of First Cause. We cannot be separated from these qualities. They might be dormant or covered up by shadows or erroneous beliefs, but they are there. This is why, in the Science of Mind treatment prayer, we declare that these qualities are being revealed from our deep inner realms. We don't pray to receive them because we have already received them through our Divine birthright. We do not have to work for them to deserve them. The only required work is to examine the barriers we might have in place that keep them from expressing through us.

Below is a partial list of God Qualities. As you read each word in this list, I invite you to breathe the feeling of that word into your being. Notice its size, weight, energy, and location in the body. I capitalize

each little word because each is God in expression within us, and by honoring It as such, we elevate it to an expansive element of Truth about us. If we can believe it, then we can build confidence to claim It and express It freely in ourselves, our community, and the world.

And so It is!!!

I have to add these words by Krishnamurti, which hint at similar ideas. I would have capitalized some of these words, lol.

"And where there is love, there is compassion. And where there is compassion, there is supreme intelligence. Not the artificial intelligence of a computer, nor the artificial intelligence or powerful intelligence of thought."

Qualities of God

Love
Harmony
Compassion
Joy
Peace
Infinite
Health/Wholeness
Beauty
Balance
Bliss
Goodness
Order
Power/Strength
Wisdom
Intelligence
Clarity
Abundance/Bounty

Saying I Love You

People don't always say:
I love you.

Sometimes it sounds like:
Be safe.
Did you eat?
Call me when you get home.
I made you this.
I saved you the last piece.
Let me know if you need anything.
I was just thinking about you.
I noticed you were quiet. Is everything OK?
You don't have to go through this alone.

author unknown



Cupid, Draw Back Your Bow...

by Peggy River Singer



*Cupid, draw back your bow and let your arrow go
Straight to my lover's heart for me, for me
Cupid, please, hear my cry and let your arrow fly
Straight to my lover's heart, for me*

Sam Cooke, 1961

Cupid's name comes from a Latin word meaning "desire"; to the ancient Romans, Cupid was the god of love in all its permutations. He is considered to be perhaps as old as Earth Herself. He is usually portrayed as a handsome winged young man (or boy or baby) carrying a bow and some arrows. But Cupid is much more than a charming decoration on a heart-shaped box of chocolates: he is as vibrantly alive today as he has been for thousands of years. His sacred calling is to shoot golden Arrows of Desire into the hearts of mortals to help keep humanity full of love, with each person in love with themselves, and **in love with life itself**. And, in case you're wondering, Cupid is perfectly happy to help men find other men to love, and the same for women looking for other women to love. He says, "All that matters is that we love. Love makes the details fade away."

Cupid is assisted in his mission by **erotes**, miniature duplicates of Cupid himself. Francis Melville, an Australian mystic and writer, calls erotes "angelic fairies," unique beings who share the qualities of both angels (very loving and helpful) and fae (playful and spontaneous). At one time, legends say there were only three erotes, but you could hardly expect these messengers of love to renounce romance in their own lives! There are so many of them now that they have branched out into careers related to their ancient vocation. For example, after inspiring the birth of a child, many erotes act as a guardian spirit to that child and accompany him or her through life, then guide their soul in the afterlife. And some erotes "adopt" a human household and act as guardians to the family and the home, occasionally doing good deeds like finding a wedding ring that has rolled under a dresser.

Here in the states, we like to think of Cupid as a symbol of romantic love, and for a long time now, he has been associated with St. Valentinus on February 14 celebrating loving relationships. This year, Cupid tells me he is excited about working with us to help broaden our loving relationships to include everyone and everything around us, including, of course, our beautiful Mother Earth, by honoring this very special being and what she stands for.

At this point, you might be wondering: So, is it Cupid or an erote who is on the front of the Valentine's card I want to give to my special someone? And my suggestion is: Why not go with whichever answer feels best to you? After all, Cupid and his friends are all about **feelings!**

Peggy River Singer is a Pleiadian Starseed, Lightworker, all-beings communicator, faerie ally, and lifelong writer. More of her articles and channelings are posted on angelsfairiesandlife.wordpress.com. To request a session, please call 734-548-0194.

In the End

By Dawn Swartz

In the end
We must admit
that every religious building
every steeple every cross
Every Portico, every bit of stained glass, every
human symbol, pushing upward reaching
sunlight
or not-
Is just an expression of the age-old need for
that which is
Beyond us
Beyond our skill
Beyond our best
love.
Amen

03/24/24

February Special Events

Community Sing with Matt Watroba

Wednesday, February 11 7-8:30 pm

Many know Matt as the voice of folk music in Michigan for his work with WDET Detroit Public Radio... he is committed to inspiring the world to sing... one town at a time.

\$5.00 - \$10.00 suggested donation
Your donations allow us to continue to host this event



Cafe 704 presents ... Peter Madcat Ruth & John Churchville

Saturday, February 10 7-9 pm



Peter Madcat Ruth and John Churchville weave Americana, Blues, and World Music rhythms into captivating sound.

Tickets: \$10.00-\$20.00 (sliding scale)
If attending in person—pay at the door (cash or check only)
Doors open at 6:30 pm.
If attending on Zoom—please purchase tickets at
<https://interfaithspirit.org/cafe-704-coffeehouse/>

Sunday, February 15 3-5 pm

Presented by Friends for Justice
Edith Lewis, Amelia Hefferlin, and Layla Ananda
Co-Sponsored by Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice
for more info: layla.ananda@gmail.com, 734-646-7405

This is a **free** event

RESISTANCE SONGS SING-ALONG



Drummunity Drum Circle with Lori Fithian

Saturday, February 21 7-8:30 pm

Lori brings her collection of hand drums and percussion toys so everyone attending has something to choose from. Children of all ages, including those well into their 90's, enjoy the energy that is produced when they join the Drummunity experience.

Donations to the Center are appreciated