

Trading terror for real hope

Sept. 11 aftermath prompts rethinking of how to face future

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Special to The Journal News

Unitarians in Rockland discussed the horrors of Sept. 11 and shared their strategies for coping yesterday.

About 30 members of the First Unitarian Society of Rockland County, a Unitarian Universalist congregation, met for worship, fellowship and to speak of how they could find hope in challenging times.

Seated in a circle, each talked for about a minute about dealing with depression and anxiety, as society members Connie Barlow and her husband, Michael Dowd, led the discussion.

While some members mentioned personal problems and others shared more general concerns, many comments focused on the terror attacks of Sept. 11.

Blauvelt resident Charlotte Gross, a Unitarian since 1956, said she took comfort in her belief that life would go on no matter what tomorrow brought. She remains in close communion with nature and takes joy in living.

"Trees will still grow ... everything continues on the schedule it has always had no matter what we humans do to it," she said.

But, while Gross can accept life's difficulties, she is concerned for the future of her 3- and 5-year-old grandsons.

"That's the hardest part for me — to accept the fact that this is the kind of world they're living in," she said.

Bill Chase, a member of the society's Board of Worship, agreed, noting that he, too, was concerned for children's sense of security since the attacks and the resulting media focus on terrorism.

"It's hard for adults to maintain that the world is a positive place (where) things work out," he said, when children "go to sleep with this memory."

Despite the recent sorrow, people's vision of the future should be filled with hope, Barlow said.

Arthur Aldrich, a Unitarian since 1968, said that many times tragedy could bring unexpected triumphs.



Connie Barlow of New City, above, tells a seasonal story, "We are Stardust," at the First Unitarian Society service yesterday.

Photos by Kathy Gardner/The Journal News

"You take a look at the World Trade Center — which was a terrible disaster — look what it did to the country," the Airmont man said.

"It took us away from our focus on materialism ... and took us back to basic human values."

During the brief service, members took turns lighting candles of hope, caring and concern for friends and loved ones and sang songs of praise.

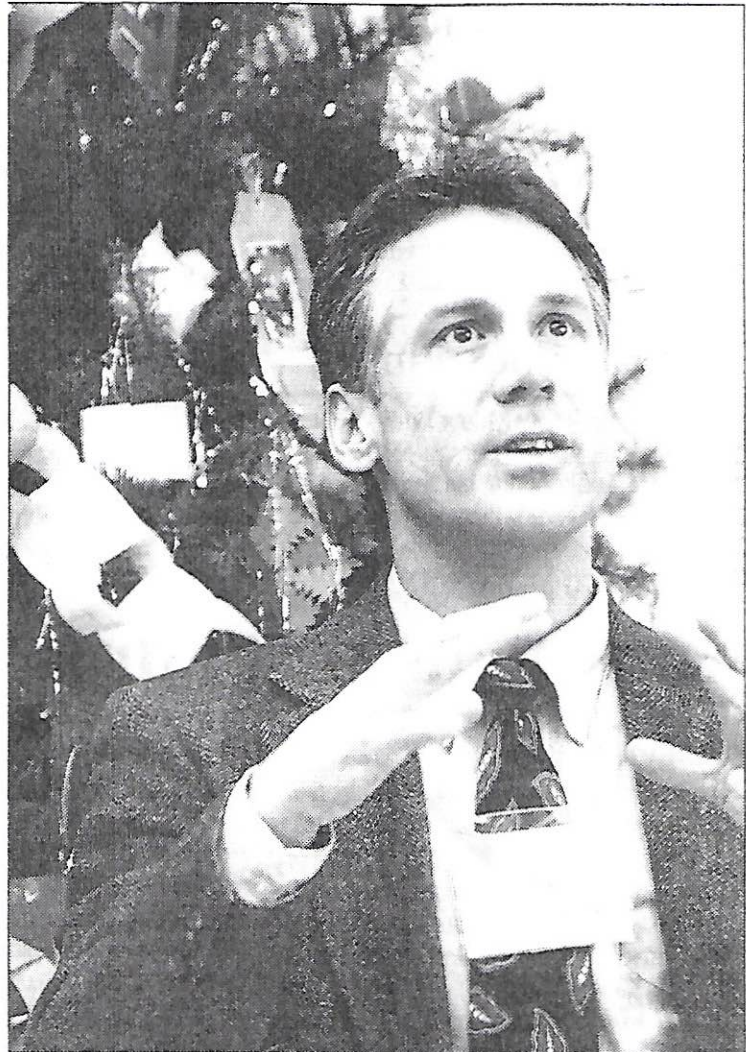
Barlow told a simplified and dramatized story of how the earth and the elements were formed. She ended by telling her fellow Unitarians that each was made from "stardust."

Dowd said the beauty of Unitarian Universalism was that it gave consideration to all beliefs.

"Just as there's no one true flower ... each has its own fragrance and its own beauty," so does each religion have its unique beliefs and contributions, said Dowd, a former United Church of Christ minister.

Unitarian Universalism is a liberal religion with roots in the Christian and Jewish faiths. It recognizes the validity of many religions and beliefs and encourages personal experience, conscience, reason and pursuit of truth. Many Unitarians come from different religious backgrounds. There are more than 1,000 Unitarian Universalist congregations across the United States.

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Michael Dowd of New City speaks yesterday of finding hope in challenging times. Dowd is a former United Church of Christ minister and a member of the First Unitarian Society of Rockland