

Reflections

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE RIVER OF GRASS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

DAVIE, FLORIDA

APRIL 2016

APRIL FOOLS

Rev. Amy Carol Webb



They can be pretty subtle in these parts, the signs of spring. I mean, this place isn't called "land of flowers" for no reason. In South Florida we don't much witness the Autumnal and Winter cycles of life that give way to Spring and Summer. The trees outside our windows don't go to sleep and wait for the sun to wake them again. While our northern friends post the first crocus pushing up through melting snow, we in South Florida herald Springtime with photos of flowers blooming in one part of our yard instead of another. Heck, this year, I never even needed to bring my orchids in from the porch.



Not that I'm complaining. But it set me to wondering: if we find it harder to see the signs of Spring in the landscape surrounding us in these parts, how challenging can it be, sometimes, to recognize the signs of Spring within ourselves -- the portents of change, the clues that one part of our lives, or ourselves, is coming to a close and another beginning? How do we know whether the struggle we feel in the moment is a dare to fight on, or to begin again? If the battle to hang on means we should hold tighter, or let go? If the pain we may feel comes of death, or birth, or both?

On Earth, Spring awakens with the Vernal Equinox, when night and day are virtually equal in length as we head toward the long days of Summer. Throughout known history, cultures the world over fete the coming of Spring with celebrations of renewal and rebirth -- from the festival of Ostara, the German goddess of fertility; to Easter, the Christian celebration of Jesus' resurrection; to the Celt's Druid dances of the New Moon, and indigenous people's Spring planting rituals. This year's Spring celebrations will close with the Jewish Passover, another festival of the freedom to begin again.

Oh, and "Happy New Year!" In the ancient world, the Vernal Equinox was considered the beginning of the new year -- until Julius Caesar declared January 1st the official New Year's Day in 45 b.c.e. Those who continued to observe the new year through the beginning of April were called "April Fools."

The astrological year still begins with the sign of Aries in mid-March, and many cultures do still begin their year this season -- with days of purification through silence, fasting, prayer, and water cleansing. For the Hindu celebration of Nyepi in Bali, all businesses are closed, no one leaves their homes, and noise and entertainment are forbidden for a full day of prayer and meditation.

Imagine how our own lives might be different if we took just one such day each year. Perhaps then, we'd

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OUR SUNDAY LOCATION

11850 W. State Road 84, Suite 1, Davie, FL 33325

EVERY SUNDAY

Worship Service: 10:30 to 11:30 am. **Hospitality Hour:** 11:30 am to 12:30 pm.

Faith Development Classes: 11:00 am to 12:00 noon

FRIENDLY REMINDERS FOR OUR MEMBERS

There is plenty of parking outside the sanctuary, but please leave the closer parking spaces for our guests and physically challenged worshippers.

All meetings are held at 11850 W State Road 84, Suite 1 in Davie unless otherwise noted.



River of Grass

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& Open

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OUR PRINCIPLES

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

STAY CONNECTED!

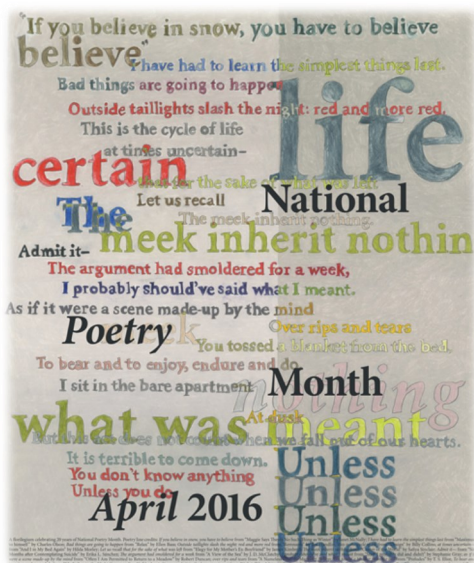
In between issues of *Reflections* you can stay connected to the River of Grass Congregation the following ways:

- ◆ Sign up for our **weekly email** with events and news that changes each week: send an email to office@riverofgrassuu.org
- ◆ Visit our **Facebook page**: www.facebook.com/riverofgrassuu
- ◆ Follow us on **Twitter**: [@RiverOfGrassUU](https://twitter.com/RiverOfGrassUU) or www.twitter.com/riverofgrassuu
- ◆ Visit our **calendar**: www.riverofgrassuu.org/calendar.html (or go to: www.riverofgrassuu.org – click on Events – Calendar.)



FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Zena Tucker



Dear Readers, In honor of [National Poetry Month](#), I share these writings from a workshop facilitated by our own Carolyn Sant-Angelo at the 2015 Southern Unitarian Universalist Summer Institute (SUUSI). SUUSI is a one-week long summer camp for UU's. For more information see: <http://www.suusi.org>. If you enjoy poetry and writing, see Carolyn's website devoted to UU Writing: [UU Writings and Illuminations](#). And furthermore, there will be a Worship Service on April 10th where members will share their favorite poems. Join us!

Tribal Gathering

*As we light this flame of faithful connection,
Acknowledging the vastness while our tribe gathers from afar
Holding close our beating hearts and spirits
Embracing the diversity, opening to our harmony
Providing a safe ground for the smile and sorrows to unfold
Where the fires of our welcoming camp,
Allow our humanity to glow.*

~ Carolyn Sant Angelo

A Chalice Lighting Dedicated to Love

*We light this chalice
To offer the hope of love
Love that abides within
- When we need it most
- When we expect it least
To allow us understanding and wisdom and acceptance
A love that is not romantic or sympathetic
But a love that sustains, often when we forget to show it.
Let it come to show us the way.*

~ Richard Tucker

Chalice Lighting Dedicated to Our Fear

*We light this chalice to face our fear
Recognizing anxiety may freeze us in despair
Let us own our troubled thoughts together
And place our calm flame in the center
Breathing in courage, connection and calm
Placing our fears in their proper place,
stepping forward and abiding in grace.*

~ Zena Tucker

Hope

*We do not know what is happening next.
Fear or worry takes hold.*

*Challenges happen. Fear prepares for decisions.
There lies the hope.*

*Struggling to learn. Failure is a memory, stops us flat slows momentum forward.
Outside our control lie forces that deter.*

*Belief there are positive forces, working guiding with hope.
Carrying us onward. There lies the hope.*

*Internal voices and unreasonable aversions.
Anxieties within and outside ourselves.*

*Love motivates us toward, plowing ahead. Hope is the best basis.
Hope comes from love.*

~ Collaboration from the UU Writers' Workshop SUUSI 2015

APRIL FOOLS

(Continued from page 1)

notice the signs of Spring are everywhere. Maybe then it wouldn't seem so difficult to understand what waits within us to be reborn, fought for, or let go. What if, this Spring, we could find just such a time for reflection and discernment. What if we *made* the time. What if we joined Earth's new life with our own? What if we became April Fools?



BOARD MATTERS

Toni Cattell, Board Secretary

The River of Grass Unitarian Universalist Congregation Board of Trustees approved Reverend Amy Carol Webb as signatory on the River of Grass Unitarian Universalist Congregation Benevolence Fund bank account. Rev. Amy replaces past president of the Board, Marjorie Loring, as signatory.



NEW CLASS STARTING: OUR PLACE IN THE WEB OF LIFE

Steve Jens-Rochow, Green Sanctuary Committee Chair

Join us as we explore *Our Place in the Web of Life: An Introduction to Environmental Justice* and what it means for River of Grass and our community. This highly-engaging, five-session class, created by the UU Ministry for Earth <http://uuministryforearth.org>, invites participants to look deeply at the consequences of their actions on people and the environment—at first, close to home and then further away in communities across the nation and world.

The intent of this environmental justice curriculum is to help congregations identify specific environmental injustice in their communities, with a focus on racism and economic privilege.

We will explore and bring to greater awareness our congregation's impact on our local community and beyond, by asking: "How is our behavior unwittingly affecting groups of people and entire communities, as well as fragile ecosystems?" Participants will wrestle with what it means to be part of the inter-connected web of life by utilizing film, music, participatory research, visual mapping, ethical reflection, meditation and ritual.

The Rev. Amy Carol Webb will facilitate the class. It will be offered from 1:30 to 4:30 on Saturday, April 02 [Session 1&2], Saturday, April 23 [Session 3&4] and Saturday, May 14 [Session 5]. Sign up for the class at GreenSanctuary@riverofgrassuu.org.

WORSHIP SERVICES

SUNDAY AT 10:30 AM
(AND AS OTHERWISE NOTED)

April 3, Rev. Amy Carol Webb, *Sing Justice*

April 10, Zena Tucker and Friends, *Poetry Service*

April 17, Rev. Amy Carol Webb, *Earth Day*
(6:00pm, *Neshamah* evening meditative service)

April 24, Rev. Amy Carol Webb, *Passover*

May 1, Rev. Amy Carol Webb, *Catching Some Rays*



IT'S SUMMERTIME, SUMMERTIME, SUM SUM SUMMERTIME

by Kathy Jens-Rochow, Worship Committee (Temporary) Chair



Well, it's almost summertime. And it's time to think about our Summer Sunday Services.

Rev. Amy takes a well-deserved break in the summertime, and she will not be in the pulpit from the beginning of June until the end of August. This is a great opportunity for some wonderful lay-led services.

What would you like to share with the River? Friendship, service, justice, life, work, play . . . Please consider leading a service for River of Grass this summer. We are more laid-back during the summer, and less formal services are the norm. We could do an entire meditation service, an entire singing service, or a service focused on an Indian ritual. We are open to your creative ideas.

If you have conducted a service before, thank you, and please consider leading another. If you have never served in this way, now is a great time to try it out. If there is a need, a tutoring session on how to lead a service can be scheduled prior to the start of summer services. To volunteer, or for more information, please contact Kathy Jens-Rochow at worship@riverofgrassuu.org.



UU BED AND BREAKFAST NETWORK

By Esther Sampol

Where do many UUs stay when they travel? With more than 133 hosts in 36 states, 116 cities, and 2 countries, many UUs prefer to stay with other UUs through the UU're Home Bed and Breakfast network.

However, when we take a look at the listings for South Florida, we are amazed that such an amazing and popular vacation destination lacks a significant presence in the network (there is only one listing, located in Boca Raton)!

Becoming a host location is a great way to raise funds for our congregation. Typically, stays can generate anywhere from \$60 - \$150 a night, depending on the amenities that are offered (private entrance, shared entrance, private bathroom, shared bathroom, bed type/size, number of rooms offered, number of guests, etc.).

For a preview of the UU B&B network, click [here](#) or go to www.uurehome.com and click on *Preview Directory*, then *Browse All Listings*. If you become a member of the network (only \$10 a year), you will have access to all the listings, pictures, details, and contact information for each host.

We are looking into the best way for our congregation to participate. Some congregations do a congregational listing where interested parties call the office to find out if there is an opening for their specific timeframe with one of the host families; others list the hosts individually and the hosts are contacted directly.

Since we first need to determine if there is an interest to go forward, please let us know if you might consider being a part of this program that generates funds for our beloved community. Please send an email to Esther Sampol at vicepresident@riverofgrassuu.org.

We hope you'll consider being part of this UU network!

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Leana Bresnahan, Membership Committee Co-Chair



The Membership Team* has been busy this past month with the task of welcoming our guests and helping them and new members find ways to become integrated into the life of this vibrant congregation.

We offer many, many, MANY thanks to those members who have volunteered to be part of our new River Navigator Program**. All of the new members who joined in November 2015 and February 2016 (Vernon Allen; Chris and Keli Bell; Melissa Buehler and Debbie Ely; Rita Cherubini; Pat Fier; Tanya Gustafson; Marla Hannah; Linda Lathroum; Carolyn Moore; Valerie Pellegrini; and Alex Pobiner) have agreed to take part. Our first River Navigators are Kristine Barkley, Elyse Brunt, Toni and

Sheryl Cattell, Riley Cothran, Diane Diaz, Jon Kitner, Marjie Loring and Esther Sampol, Lynn O'Brien, Pat Tinker, Zena and Rick Tucker, and Pixie Wright. River of Grass is so blessed by the love and dedication of all of you.

We will be looking for more people to become River Navigators in the near future, so please let any member of the Membership Team know if you are interested!

Thank you as well to Wendell Abern, for interviewing some of our new members and writing about their stories, so that you can get to know them as well. You'll see his article elsewhere in this newsletter. And watch this space for more such articles in the future!

We are looking for hosts and attendees for Circle Dinners. Circle Dinners are a wonderful way to get to know other River of Grass members on a deeper level. These dinners are held in members' home and are usually groups of 6-10. The host provides the main course and the guests provide the side dishes. These dinners are always filled with fun, laughter, great conversation and delicious food. Please see Debbie Kitner for more information and to sign up.

We held an Explorer Session on March 13th, for those who are beginning explore Unitarian Universalism and wanted to learn a little more about River of Grass UUC. Thanks to all those who attended!

On April 17th, Rev. Amy will lead the next Pathway to Membership class. The class runs from noon-ish to 3:30 p.m. (ish) during which we have time to share our own spiritual journeys and also to learn about Unitarian Universalism and River of Grass. There is a sign-up sheet in the hospitality area. We welcome all who are coming to think of River of Grass as their spiritual home and want to learn more about officially joining this beloved community.

On May 1st, we will have our next New Member Sunday. Contact Rev. Amy (minister@riverofgrassuu.org), or Membership Co-Chairs, Debbie Kitner and Leana Bresnahan (membership@riverofgrassuu.org) if you feel ready to take that step or would like more information.

Blessings to all,

Your Membership Team

*Membership Team: Kip and Kristine Barkley; Leana and Ken Bresnahan; Melissa Buehler; Rita Cherubini; Marpessa de Moraes; Diane Diaz; Jody Dowgray; Kathy Jens-Rochow; Elly Keane; Debbie Kitner; Vickie Koutoulas; and Lynn O'Brien.

**River Navigators: This is a new program that was developed as a way of helping new members become active, happy and involved members of River of Grass. Navigators are mentors to new members, and their families, introducing them to all that River of Grass has to offer, including affinity groups, covenant groups, committees and just plain fun.



WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

By Wendell Abern

As many of you know, I have been introducing new members in this newsletter for many years. Sometimes, there are only a few to write about; sometimes three or four. This month, we have thirteen new members! Six are featured in this newsletter, and more will be featured in the months to come. By next year, our newsletter may be bigger than the Miramar phone book. Onward.



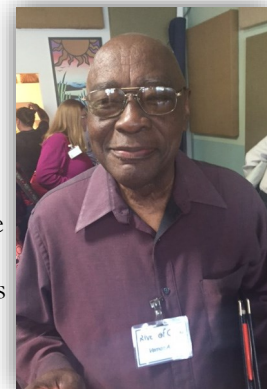
Linda Lathroum, a music therapist and music teacher, is from San Juan, Puerto Rico. Single, she studied at Florida State University and the University of Miami, lived in Miami for ten years, and moved to Coral Springs in 2015. It was then she sought a spiritual community to call “home,” and found *River of Grass*.

“From the time I attended my first service led by Rev. Amy, I recall her use of the word, ‘home,’ several times,” Linda states. “That was the word that most stood out for me that day. I truly felt that I had found my spiritual home. The members were very welcoming and kind. They too made me feel like part of their family.”

Linda is not merely at home, but *involved*: in social justice projects; at the meditation, “Flowing River Sangha;” at Game Night, with the Full Moon Daughters and the NAMI walk. Her favorite pastime? Walking on the beach. She also enjoys orchids, exercising, Latin music and – needless to say – loves the music and musicians at River of Grass.

Vernon Allen, born in Jamaica, was the last of seven siblings. He attended university in Kingston, the University College of the West Indies (at the time a branch of the College of the University of London), and graduated with an honors degree in Economics. After teaching high school for a few years, he joined the Civil Service, taking an early retirement in 1984.

“My then wife and teenage son migrated to the USA in 1986,” Vernon says. “We came here to give our son the opportunity to compete in swimming at the college level. He attended Cornell University and graduated with an M.Sc. degree in Electrical Engineering.” Since coming to Ft. Lauderdale, he has worked in several non-professional jobs and feels eminently grateful to his former UU church for encouraging him to “discover the River of Grass, and a great deal of peace and happiness.”



Vernon, a member of our choir, states that he has found singing to be a very satisfying pursuit. Those of us who heard his haunting solo version of “Ol’ Man River” during the Martin Luther King service consider “satisfying pursuit” to be a huge understatement. We wept copious tears.

*



Tanya Gustafson and her husband, Bruce Ngo, have been married for twelve years, and have a six-year old son, Alexander. They moved here last year from Colorado, after Tanya finished her training in veterinary oncology. And prior to that, what a nomadic existence! Tanya grew up in Dallas, Bruce in Los Angeles. They met in college at Tufts University. Tanya then went to veterinary school at Texas A&M, while Bruce earned a Master’s Degree in physiology, and taught high school physics and chemistry for two years. While in Texas, they discovered Unitarian Universalism; since then, they have moved from Texas to New York, back to Texas, then to Florida, then to Michigan, then Colorado, and finally, to South Florida.

“We are happy to finally be somewhere that we don’t plan on leaving,” Tanya says. “Right now, I’m working at a specialty veterinary hospital in Ft. Lauderdale, treating pets with cancer; Bruce is pursuing his passion for bicycles, working as a mechanic in Boca. Right now, this takes him away from the church on Sundays, but he’s looking forward to this eventually changing.”



WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

(Continued from page 7)

Most of their free time is spent with Alex, an extremely bright and gifted first-grader who enjoys reading, bicycling and, most of all, video games. Tanya and Bruce apparently share a love of mythology. They have named their two Schipperkes Zeus and Apollo, and their Pomeranian, Phoenix.

Anyone who has ever experienced the soothing power of a massage may want to give a call to new member **Marla Hannah**, who has been a licensed massage therapist for more than 20 years. Born and raised in Queens, she has a BA degree in theatre/communications from Queens College in New York, in addition to graduating from the Educating Hands School of Massage. Marla moved to South Florida 22 years ago.

“My daughter Sarah and I now live in Davie,” she says. “Sarah is seventeen and attends AEF Schools at a special branch called Westham. Sarah loves school, culinary arts and also takes tae kwan do classes; she is currently a green belt.”

Currently, Marla works as a substitute teacher, a Macy’s sales associate, and also does market research. “I enjoy meditation, kickboxing, laughter yoga and would like to share this gift with other members,” she states. “I was born and raised Jewish, although we were not very religious. This is my first introduction to Unitarian Universalism, and I am delighted to be a part of the River of Grass family.”



We have Kip Barkley to thank (at least partially) for the addition of new members, **Melissa Buehler** and **Debbie Ely**. They first attended a River of Grass service in July of 2015, and, according to Debbie, “When Kip spoke about Margaret Meade, we were instantly hooked on this congregation and what it had to offer.”

Melissa and Debbie met in Jackson, Mississippi in 1995. “After traveling from Georgia to Florida to Indiana and back to Florida again, we settled here in 2010,” Debbie writes.

Melissa has a Ph.D. in Political Science/International Relations from Purdue University, and is a professor at Miami Dade College in Kendall. Debbie has a Bachelor’s Degree in Nursing, and a Master’s Degree in Nursing Education from FAU and Drexel University. She works as an RN in the neonatal ICU at Joe DiMaggio Children’s Hospital.

Melissa and Debbie have four-year old twins, Emme and Everett, who are currently in home school pre-school, and enjoy taking art classes at Young at Art.

“In our spare time,” Debbie writes, “we enjoy geocaching, cooking, photography, reading and beachcombing.”

RIVER OF GRASS PASSOVER SEDER, FRIDAY APRIL 29TH

by Judi Oltmans, SSJC Co-Chair

This year's River of Grass Passover Seder will be held on Friday, April 29th at 6:30pm at River of Grass and will be led by Rev. Amy Carol Webb. Come join us for a night of delicious dishes, traditional songs and a time to help out LifeNet4Families! We will be collecting canned food for LifeNet4Families and 50% of the Seder proceeds will go to LifeNet4Families. There is a charge of \$10 for adults and no charge for children. Contact Judi Oltmans at [seder@riverofgrassuu.org](mailto: seder@riverofgrassuu.org) to sign up for a dish to share or if you would like to help with setup!



JUSTICE SATURDAY 2016

Submitted by Steve Jens-Rochow



The SE UU Cluster will present **Justice Saturday 2016: #BlackLivesMatter and Environmental Justice: How Climate Change Adversely Affects Marginalized Communities**. Corey Shearer, President of the Broward County Democratic Black Caucus, will talk about #BlackLivesMatter. He will facilitate a stimulating discussion to help us understand the #BlackLivesMatter perspective.

What can Unitarian Universalists in SE Florida do about Climate Change and sea level rise [SLR]? Jan Booher will talk about how we can engage with vulnerable communities that are affected by SLR. UU Congregations in coastal Florida will partner with, and educate residents in exposed neighborhoods, about how to protect their health and adapt as sea levels rise. Jan Booher chairs the Climate Change Working Group at the UU Fellowship of Boca Raton. She is the Co-Founder of the Climate Action Coalition of South Florida.

Justice Saturday 2016 will be April 30, 2016 from 9:45 am to 4 pm at River of Grass UU Congregation, www.riverofgrassuu.org 11850 W. SR 84, Suite 1, Davie, FL 33325. Registration is \$15 per person and includes lunch and continental breakfast. Please mail your check payable to SE UU Cluster, with dietary preference and email address, to Kathy Jens-Rochow, Treasurer, 1420 SW 13 St., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33312. cluster@uufloida.org

THREE EASY THINGS YOU CAN DO TO GROW THE UU COMMUNITY

Sheryl Cattell, Community Awareness Chair

We all love it when we get tips and hints on things we can do that save us money, help a cause that we believe in or learn ways to make our lives easier. So here are three easy things you can do that will help build the UU Community and support UU social justice issues, and they aren't even very difficult or costly.

- UU're Home B&B:** We all take trips from time to time and love saving money by using AirBnB.com. But how about taking it a step further and using the Unitarian Universalist B&B network. You still pay the lower private rental rates, you help build the UU community and you get to stay with like-minded people who take more than an active interest in making your stay as fulfilling as possible. Better yet you can join the network as a host and widen your circle of UU friends from all over the world. Visit: <https://uurehome.com>. The cost for non-hosts is \$10/year but free for listing hosts.
- Facebook Events:** Get the word out about River of Grass by sharing the wealth of events and activities that are happening in our congregation on your timeline. It only takes a click and if you say you are going or interested in events at River of Grass your friends will see these events on your timeline and may even ask you to tag along. You only need to visit www.facebook.com/riverofgrassuu, go to the Events tab, subscribe one time and then each week when you get an event notice click that you are interested in or are going to an event. And it is very likely you will be bringing a few friends along to a future event.
- Amazon Shopping:** Shopping is part of daily life but did you know that if you use Amazon Smile, they will donate .5% of every purchase to the River. And it doesn't cost you a thing. You only need to subscribe once by clicking on the [River of Grass UU link](#) and signing in. Then every time you shop at Amazon, go to www.smile.amazon.com and log in. It is just that easy and even with only a few of us participating in this program we get checks for over a hundred periodically from purchases on Amazon that would have happened anyway. Easy peasy!



If you have other tips that you want to share to make our community stronger, please send an email to communityawareness@riverofgrassuu.org. Go ahead, reach out and shine on!



LIFeNET4FAMILIES MARCH 12TH VOLUNTEER DAY

Judi Oltmans, SSJC Co-Chair

Thank you so much to all of our River of Grass volunteers who helped at LifeNet4Families on Saturday, March 12th! It was a wonderful group: Rita and Ann, Ken, Kristine, Vernon, Diane, Joseph and Noah, Bev, Edgar and Pablo, Ryan and Judi. Most of the volunteers worked in the pantry stocking the shelves with food and some bagged up rice, pasta, and cabbage. Rita and Ann really enjoyed serving meals in the dining room and Ryan worked behind the scenes in the kitchen. When asked why she loves volunteering at LifeNet, Ann said this: "Giving to others who need help, witnessing their dignity and gratitude makes Rita and I feel closer to humanity. We walk away realizing we're all ONE!" Thank you all for your hard work and dedication! You all put our River of Grass Mission into action by making a difference and healing injustice in our community.

Join us at our next LifeNet4Families Saturday Volunteer day. We volunteer there once a month from 9:00-11:00am. What a great way to spend a Saturday morning! Upcoming dates are April 9th and May 14th. May 14th is our Extreme Volunteer Day with LifeNet4Families in the morning and the Postal Food Drive from 3:00-8:00pm at the Post Office. You can sign up at the SSJC corner at the back of the sanctuary or email us at ssjc@riverofgrassuu.org.

Can't make it to LifeNet? Every Sunday you can bring canned foods for LifeNet4Families to River of Grass and place them in the basket at the SSJC corner. They are always in need of peanut butter and canned meats such as tuna, chicken or beef.



AUCTION 2016

This year the ROG Annual Auction was held on February 27, and the theme was a Hawaiian Luau – Aloha!

