

## **Jan Hus and the Flaming Chalice: Looking at Adult RE**

*From Erica Shadowsong, Consulting Director of Religious Education*

May I tell you a story?

*This story starts with a little boy named Jan (Yahn) Hus (Hoos). The children with which he grew up used to make fun of him because his name sounded like the word for goose. They used to call him "Hus the goose."*

*But as much as they made fun of him Jan knew he was going to do something important and when he grew up he became a minister. And as a minister he taught some pretty important things. For these reasons and because he really spoke to their lives the people loved Jan Hus. For those same reasons many officials in the religion, people in charge, didn't like Jan Hus or what he had to say. The church officials who were in charge were so upset that they had Jan Hus thrown in jail.*

*Jail was a lonely place. When Jan Hus refused to take back the things he said or to do things differently, he was killed by being burned at the stake. Before he died Jan Hus said,*

*"You burn me this day a Goose but one-hundred years hence I shall rise from these flames a swan."*

*And one hundred years later a religious movement of change called the Protestant Reformation began. This movement was led by people who held Hus's views about communion, church government and the Bible.*

*Those who followed Jan Hus used the symbol of the flaming chalice to mark the places where they would meet and worship. We use that symbol today in our church.*

When I tell this story, written by Ralph Roberts and edited by Dr. Nita Penfold, founder of the *Spirit Play* RE model of which I am so fond, I usually tell it with a very special visual. It's a wooden puzzle; the pieces are parts of the story: a bird that looks like a goose, the church officials, Jan Hus's followers, the jail, and the flames of the stake. When the puzzle is put together during the telling, the final image is of a flaming chalice, with a flame in the shape of a swan.

That's also the way I first experienced this story. And because I learned it this way, and not in writing from a tired text full of dates, I have never forgotten it.

This week, a member of this church with many more years of experience and Unitarian Universalism approached me and asked if our children were learning about UU history in the RE curriculum. "History is identity," he pointed out wisely.

As an educator, I have often been asked this kind of question. Parents of various cultural backgrounds, orientations or abilities have wanted to know their children will learn about important contributions from individuals in their communities, of whom they themselves have only heard the barest hint. I have asked this question myself whenever I have personally made a discovery about history that has, or should have, shaped my identity. And I have thus come to understand that this question, and the anxiety behind it, stems from the fact that when it comes to religious education, our children and youth are often far ahead of us, and we long to catch up.

In UU religious education for children and youth, stories such as the one I share above are shared with our children. The *Tapestry of Faith* curricula, which can be found online in the UUA website in its entirety, is built on stories.

What if we gave ourselves the gift of the same carefully crafted, spiritual, creative, and intellectually stimulating experiences that we have spent so long developing for our children?

I would like to get this conversation going.

What kind of meaningful, spiritually edifying programming exists for adults? It *is* out there, actually. There *is* a *Tapestry of Faith* curricula. Just yesterday, I received a notice about a course focusing on UU spiritual matters and practices related to money and finances that's being field tested. What about Our Whole Lives, the sexuality education program that many families and volunteers make a strong commitment to for our middle and high schoolers? This also spans all the age groups.

I've been asked questions about where adult RE is at UUCA this year, and I wanted to take a moment to let you know I'm thinking about it, and I'm interested in what you want to see. In thinking about this, I would encourage you to find the spiritual thread that runs through them, because ultimately, just as for our children and youth, this should be a place where we grow and learn in ways we cannot anywhere else. Especially if you would like to give the gift of teaching or facilitating, think about what you would like to explore that meets a need. And as for things we already doing that fall under adult faith development, perhaps I can help put the word out!

In the coming months, I invite you to check the Adult Faith Development of the RE website, which – not quite yet, but soon – I expect to begin budding, here and there, flowering into opportunities for deep engagement in learning and spiritual development for adults. Our children deserve the best from us, but we also deserve to give ourselves the best. If you would like to talk more about adult education at UUCA, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. Let's talk.

Erica Shadowsong