

Dear Friends,

May 25, 2003, will mark the bicentennial of the birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson. In a religious association distinguished by so many prominent leaders, thinkers and reformers in American history, Emerson's legacy to Unitarian Universalism is unparalleled. Even today, two hundred years after his birth, Emerson is the most widely recognized and revered figure in our movement and continues to attract many to our congregations. Through his career as minister, lecturer, writer, reformer and public citizen, Emerson was instrumental in shaping both American culture and Unitarian Universalist theology.

The Emerson Bicentennial Committee, formed three years ago by the UUA's Board of Trustees, believes that the two hundredth anniversary of Emerson's birth provides a valuable opportunity for us to recognize and celebrate Emerson's contribution to Unitarian Universalism. The Committee has planned programs and published materials we believe will stimulate a reassessment and new appreciation of Emerson's living legacy. This packet of educational materials and worship resources is part of that effort. In this packet you will find:

- "The Living Legacy of Ralph Waldo Emerson: An Adult Curriculum" by Joan W. Goodwin and Nancy Craig Simmons (also for sale from the UUA Bookstore)
- "Waldo Free and True: A Kid's Fun Book About Ralph Waldo Emerson" by Betsy Hill Williams (also for sale from UUA Bookstore)
- "Worship Resources" by the Rev. Frank Schulman
- "An Emerson Garland: Poems and Hymns by Ralph Waldo Emerson" ed. by Leo Collins
- "Emerson Speaks" by the Rev. Frank Schulman, a UUA pamphlet
- Post-General Assembly Conference brochure and registration form
- An Emerson Bicentennial commemorative poster

The Committee encourages you to use the enclosed materials and resources to offer religious education programming and worship services in your own congregation during this bicentennial year.

A remarkable exhibit on "The Living Legacy of Ralph Waldo Emerson" by Bonnie Hurd Smith was unveiled on March 7 at First and Second Church in Boston with a program featuring addresses by Emerson scholars David Robinson and Wesley Mott and the premier performance of an anthem by William Bolcom commissioned for the Emerson bicentennial. Beginning in early April, the exhibit will be on display at 25 Beacon Street.

The Emerson bicentennial website (www.uua.org/emerson) contains information on upcoming events in honor of Emerson's bicentennial, most notably "Celebrating the Living Legacy of Ralph Waldo Emerson," a major program at the upcoming General Assembly featuring several speakers, singing from "An Emerson Garland," and a performance of the new Emerson anthem. The UU Historical Society and the UU Women's Heritage Society will also sponsor Emerson programs at General Assembly.

In addition to the educational materials and worship resources included in this mailing, other books and publications will be published in coming months and available for purchase through the UUA Bookstore. These include *The Spiritual Emerson*, by David Robinson (published by Beacon Press) and *Emerson as Spiritual Guide* and *A Dream Too Wild*, by Barry Andrews (published by Skinner House Books). Also forthcoming is *The Living Legacy of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, a copy of the Emerson exhibit in book form by Bonnie Hurd Smith (with assistance from Robert D. Richardson, Jr., and Rev. Frank Schulman). Addresses from the various programs sponsored by the EBC will be available on the www.uua.org/emerson website and published in an anniversary edition of the UU Historical Society Journal.

It has been the intention of the Emerson Bicentennial Committee to highlight Emerson's prominence in our movement and to stimulate a new generation of Unitarian Universalists, clergy and laity alike, to examine his enduring significance in our spiritual and religious life. We are not suggesting that Emerson be placed on a pedestal or elevated to sainthood, only that we owe it to ourselves to consider the nature and contemporary relevance of Emerson's message on the occasion of the bicentennial of his birth.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the generous financial support of the UUA Board of Trustees, the Fund for Unitarian Universalism, the UU Historical Society, the Unitarian Sunday School Society, the GA Planning Committee and First Parish, Concord, without which none of these programs and resources would be possible.

Sincerely,

The Emerson Bicentennial Committee

The Reverend Barry M. Andrews, Chair

Joan Goodwin

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