

# We all worship the same God, don't we?

By KIT KETCHUM  
For The Daily Astorian

“We all worship the same God, don't we?” As a Unitarian Universalist minister, I've frequently been asked this question by those whose religious affiliation is more traditional.

It's hard to know how to answer in this changing religious climate, when the “nones” are beginning to outnumber those who attend religious services regularly.

Unitarian Universalism is a different kind of religious faith in many respects. Instead of a doctrine, we agree to live by seven principles of behavior toward each other and the world we live in. We



Kit Ketcham

affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person (our First Principle) and our culminating seventh affirms the interdependent web of exis-



tence, of which we are one part.

Unitarian Universalists do not require belief in a deity. In

my congregation, the Pacific UU Fellowship, we have agnostics, theists and nontheists, all looking for a sense of con-

***‘We are respectful of other religious views.’***

Kit Ketcham  
minister, Unitarian Universalist

nection with each other and with the mysteries of human life, striving to live in ways that bring love and justice to our world.

The concept of God has changed rapidly as we've learned more about our ever-expanding, beautiful and fierce universe. Some of us believe only in Natural Law, not a God. Some have a personal definition of God that is unique to themselves. Some do not view Jesus as a God but as a wise prophet. Some

see all of creation as God. Some don't feel a need to believe in a God. Some see God as Love.

Even though we have different beliefs about God, we are respectful of other religious views and enjoy working with other faiths toward common societal goals.

*Kit Ketcham is minister emerita, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Whidbey Island, Wash., and currently serves the Pacific UU Fellowship of Astoria.*

# Seaside students give back to the ecosystem

Fifth-graders  
release steelhead  
into China Creek

By KATHERINE LACAZE  
EO Media Group

SEASIDE — “To freedom!” That was the rallying cry bellowed repeatedly by Seaside Heights Elementary School fifth-graders as they enthusiastically released about 500 steelhead trout into the wild at China Creek April 15.

To start the activity, fifth-grade teacher John Meyer led his class on a short hike to the creek. From two locations, each student got to scoop a cup of the baby fish from a communal bucket, make a toast to their impending liberation and then carefully pour the creatures into their new habitat, which was ripe with the promise of shade, clean water and the minimal presence of predators.

Meyer has worked with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for four years to give students this opportunity, which he's incorporated into the science unit about life cycles. The topic is one of many, including ecosystems, adaptation and watersheds, addressed by state goals for science.

As part of the department's classroom egg incubation project, an aspect of the Salmon Trout Enhancement Program, the school receives approximately 500 fish eggs from a hatchery. The eggs are kept in tanks at the school as they hatch and enter their alevin stage. The



A group of Seaside Heights Elementary School fifth-graders peer into China Creek from atop a bridge after releasing a few hundred steelhead trout into the water during a science activity led by teacher John Meyer (not pictured).

alevin stay hidden among the gravel and are nourished by their own yolk sacs. Once the yolk sacs are absorbed, the young fish need a new food source, so it's at that stage — classified as fry — the students must release them into the wild.

The activity, said Meyer, has been “hugely successful on an educational level.”

The batch released in April was the second this year. In January, Meyer and

his class released 500 steelhead trout in Coho Creek.

Necanicum Watershed Council Coordinator Melyssa Graeper, who often will accompany the students on their trips, said it's too early to tell if releasing the fish is having any positive effect.

“It really can't hurt,” she said.

**Crossing the culvert**

After the fish were successfully delivered to their

new home, the class continued on the path until they reached the Coho Creek culvert that runs beneath Spruce Loop Road near the school.

The Necanicum Watershed Counsel partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife about three years ago to replace the old culvert with a new one, which allows for easier fish passage.

Since replacing the culvert, fish having been returning, which is a good thing, Meyer said. For several years, coho in the area were unable to spawn.

This past winter, he and students saw a couple pairs of coho salmon moving through the stream, as well as a few carcasses.

At the culvert, Meyer told the students about the work done and money spent to help give the fish better

access throughout the creek, while encouraging them to show the same respect for the natural world by not littering, fishing for endangered species or disturbing sensitive streams.

“We want to respect the fish and wildlife around us,” he said to his fifth-graders. “We want to keep it nice and keep it friendly and keep it real.”

*See STUDENTS, Page 4C*

# Audits Division working to make reports accessible

By STEVE FORRESTER  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Significant investigations are underway in the Audits Division.

Gary Blackmer, director of the division, said the topics of those audits are the Oregon State Hospital, the Oregon State Police forensics laboratory, the Fish and Wildlife Department, the Oregon Youth Authority and community colleges.

Blackmer aims to make his department's output more accessible. “We don't like our website,” he says. “We're going to develop a blog. We want to write for the public.”

Scott Learn — one of two former journalists Blackmer



has hired — will help in that process. Learn, who has a degree in accounting, came to the Audits Division from The Oregonian, where he was Portland City Hall reporter.

Blackmer identifies an August 2014 audit of the Department of Human Services as a model of the kind of

presentation the department is aiming for. “This is our gold standard,” he says of the report: “Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: High Expectations, Stronger Partnerships and Better Data Could Help More Parents Find Work.” The report uses graphs, charts and subheads

to make the data more accessible.

The Audits Division's FTE is 70 and its annual budget is \$13 million. The division's funding comes through assessments to state agencies. Its fifth-floor offices are in the Public Service Building, northeast of the Capitol.

One of the division's alumni is freshman Rep. Kathleen Taylor, D-Milwaukie. Another is Multnomah County Auditor Steve March, who was also a state legislator.

The Oregon State Hospital audit, due in June, will focus on “how are they're doing at becoming a new model of mental health recovery.” The OSP Forensics Lab audit will look at how it is handling the increasing workload from police agencies around the state. Fish and Wildlife's audit will look at matching resources to workload. The Audits Division's report on OYA is a regular (every four or five years) inspection of that agency.

With a late May release

date, the audit of Oregon's community colleges will look at degree completion rates.

Secretary of State Jeanne Atkins says there is “good support” among legislators for her budget request for three additional auditors. Audit topics are chosen by the division and in response to requests by legislators and the governor. They are also based on what the audit staff has seen out in the field. News stories are another factor for topics. The secretary of state inspects the list of projects.

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