

First-ever Vegan Spirituality Forum & Retreat at Unity Village

Carol Saunders, The Wolf and the Lamb

November 2021

We hosted 50 people from around the nation -- a good turnout considering these uncertain times -- including spiritual vegans, vegetarians and a handful of curious omnivores. Many faith traditions were represented, including Unity, Episcopalian, Judaism, Hinduism, Unitarian Universalist, Interfaith, Earth religions, Seventh Day Adventist and United Church of Christ.



Nearly three years in the making, the first-ever [Vegan Spirituality Forum & Retreat](#) was held at Unity Village, Missouri in early October 2021. By all measures, it was a huge success. We hosted 50 people from around the nation -- a good turnout considering these uncertain times -- including spiritual vegans, vegetarians and a handful of curious omnivores. Many faith traditions were represented, including Unity, Episcopalian, Judaism, Hinduism, Unitarian Universalist, Interfaith, Earth religions, Seventh Day Adventist and United Church of Christ.

The omnivores attending were wonderfully open-minded and they were openly embraced by everyone there. When I welcomed everyone on the first day, I shared that we were seated in the heart of the Midwest, and our energy would reverberate outward and be profoundly felt throughout the nation. All of that was true. Our energy was indeed invigorating and inspiring, and palpable to the people who worked there.

Comments from participants:

“The energy was beyond powerful.”

“It was a smash success.”

“What a great retreat. Life will never be the same and the good vibes going out from the event will radiate on and on and on...”

“The retreat has given me so much to consider as I move along my path, deepen my spiritual practice and recognize my innate spirituality in thought, word and deed.”

“I will always remember the kindness of the people there.”

“The food was way beyond what I expected and the venue was way better than I could have imagined. It was a sensational and splendid retreat.”

“The presenters were amazing! The venue was amazing! I was inspired by the food.”



Photo of about half the group after the Interfaith service and blessing

Unity Village was the perfect place to hold this event. It is a magical-feeling place, which I attribute to the 24/7 Silent Unity prayer ministry that has taken place there for more than 125 years. The grounds are incredibly beautiful, inspiring and peaceful. Unity Village sits on 1,200 wooded acres and boasts a gorgeous fountain display, award-winning rose garden, and beautiful walking trails. If you haven't been there, it is bucket list worthy.

Unity also has a unique history of ethical living. Its founders, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, gave up meat eating in 1895, and taught and lived ethical veg living as a key part of their ministry. Charles wrote and spoke with clarity and conviction for 40 years about the connection between our relationship with animals and our ability to develop spiritually, manifest peace, express love and live ethically. Together Charles and Myrtle opened the first vegetarian restaurant in Kansas City (Unity Inn), started a food company to sell meat alternatives (Unity Pure Food Company), offered bibles bound in a leather alternative, and published this statement: “Unity opposes the use of any product that necessitates the taking of life, whether it’s food substance, wearing apparel, or general utility.” This was part of Unity's early identity -- when the movement most fervently thrived. For many years I have felt guided by the spirits of the Fillmores to bring their teachings back to life within the Unity movement and beyond. That guidance is what made this retreat happen.

Our schedule was packed with four keynote speakers, five workshops, spiritual practices, and a food demonstration. Dr. Will Tuttle spoke on *"Spirituality and Vegan Living - Trials, Progress and*

Challenges,” Victoria Moran shared her “*Life of Ahimsa*,” Dr. Milton Mills taught us “*What the Bible Has to Say About Plant-based Diets and Animal Rights*,” and Dr. Lisa Kemmerer spoke on “*Religions of the World and the Vegan Moral Imperative*.” The workshops included spiritual practices and animal rituals, ideas for faith-based vegan advocacy, and how to get to a vegan world by 2026. We also watched Thomas Jackson’s film, [*A Prayer for Compassion*](#), and previewed his current film project, [*Compassion in Action -- Bring the Elixir Home*](#). Dr. Kemmerer’s *Animals and World Religions* exhibit was on display for all to see. Each morning began with a meditation or gentle body movement exercise, and we concluded on Sunday with an animal-focused Interfaith service and an animal blessing ceremony.

A surprise to almost everyone was just how good the food was. Everyone raved about it! Each meal was delightfully colorful and included cooked and raw versions and delicious desserts. The chef – not vegan himself – took this on as a challenge, and he outdid himself. It was fun to see how excited the servers and staff were about the beauty of the food. They were eager to taste it themselves. There’s no better way to convert a person to plant-based eating than to create fabulous food!

The energy and success of this first event has inspired me to make it annual. Next year we will put into the schedule more time for reflection, collaboration and spiritual practice. We will incentivize the attendance of curious omnivores and provide a workshop track to support where they are. We will have practical workshops to help people hold conversations with friends, family and clergy. We will schedule time for sharing of best practices. I am sure each year we will learn and adjust the program. But the most important thing that happens here is the connection and inspiration. This is a great place to come if you are a spiritual vegan, vegetarian or curious omnivore. It’s like stepping into another dimension – one where we inspire each other to carry ourselves and our message powerfully into the world...and maybe get a little retreat time too.



The organizing team: Judy Carman, Carol Saunders and Lisa Levinson

I'd like to thank the hosts and sponsors who contributed to the event:

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