

A World That Works For All: Awakening the Sleeping Giant of Religion

From Judy Carman, [Peace To All Beings](#)

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This is a brief summary of the wonders and joys of The Awesome VeganSpirituality Forum and Retreat at Unity Village, Missouri facilitated by Lisa Levinson, Judy Carman and Reverend Carol Saunders took place at Unity Village, Missouri, October 1 through 3, 2021. Stay tuned for the next one!

THURSDAY, September 30: We started off with deliciousness on Thursday evening, September 30, for all those who arrived early. [Gigi the Vegan](#) brought Kale Yeah Wraps from her [Wellness Cafe](#) for us to eat while she performed a food demo and told us about her vegan journey from cancer to healing.



The hall leading into the Fillmore Chapel, where we had most of our activities, was adorned with the beautiful traveling Animals and World Religions Exhibit, curated by Dr. Lisa Kemmerer.

The panels, in various forms, have travelled to the Parliament of World Religions and many other events, enlightening people about the deep connection between world religions' highest values and doing no harm to animals.







After attendees introduced and shared about themselves, Dr. Will Tuttle blessed us with a heart opening piano concert, and Madeleine Tuttle accompanied him with her beautiful flute.

FRIDAY, October 1: After Meditations led by Dr. Will Tuttle and his concert piano, as well as Gentle Movement led by Lisa Levinson, Friday morning began with an inspirational welcome from Reverend Carol Saunders. She explained that the early 1900 revolutionary founders of Unity Village, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, were adamant about the need to do no harm to animals, to not eat them or use leather on their bibles. They established a vegetarian restaurant in Kansas City, a city devoted to its slaughterhouses and bar-b-q's.

As we had hoped, many ministers, activists and deep thinkers came to this landmark event to explore how we can awaken the sleeping giant of all religions. The animals and Mother Earth need the help of these billions of spiritual seekers to deepen their commitment to being caretakers and partners in love with all life, rather than dominators and exploiters of nature and innocent beings.

Following Reverend Carol, we were astonished to hear from the Executive Director of Unity Worldwide Ministries, Shad Groverland. We expected to hear the usual "welcome and enjoy your stay." Instead we heard Reverend Shad speak out about the need for Unity churches to raise the bar to the heights to which the Fillmores aspired and taught, reinstate the wisdom of vegan living and recognize that this is not about spiritual comfort alone, but about spiritual growth and the discipline that it requires. He shared his perspective that Unity ministries have lowered the bar of spiritual consciousness and lost the beauty of the Fillmores' original and transformative teachings. This applies to every religion where its members have forgotten that the universal Golden Rule applies to all living beings, not just the human ones.

This awakening and enlivening talk by Reverend Shad was quickly followed by more guidance on how we are going to do this when [Dr. Will Tuttle](#) took the stage. He is the author of the award winning book *The World Peace Diet*, among many others. He has presented over 4,000 talks around the world, accompanied by his Swiss visionary artist wife, Madeleine.



Unity Village's own chef created a scrumptious series of vegan lunches and dinners that had everyone raving about the beauty and taste, as well as the enthusiasm with which this pre-vegan chef created them.



After lunch, we were given some wonderful tools that can help us introduce vegan values and love and appreciation for animals into religious rituals. [Reverend Sarah Bowen](#) and [Reverend Erika Allison](#) of the [Compassion Consortium](#) introduced some very inspiring interspecies spiritual practices and rituals. We continued to receive more tools to help bring vegan values to people of faith when we listened to Keith Akers, author of [The Lost Religion of Jesus](#) and *Disciples*. Keith showed how the five precepts of Buddhism closely match many of Jesus' teachings, and lead us to understand that we are not here to harm other beings but rather to care for and have reverence for all life.

The ever sparkling [Charlotte Cressey](#) then helped us to understand how the labyrinth can be a "tool in transformation." She also encouraged us that the "Vegan Paradigm Shift" is coming soon as long as we are here to make it happen. Her "Embodiment Love" courses offer even more assistance with this transformation toward which we are all moving.



After another amazing vegan meal, we were treated to "Veganism, Ahimsa, and the Spiritual Life" offering by Victoria Moran, founder of [Main Street Vegan](#) and co-founder of the [Compassion Consortium](#). Victoria's podcasts are essential to hear and to share with others, as they always nudge the listener closer to a vegan lifestyle of kindness and ahimsa (Sanskrit for non-harm). Victoria's talk was followed by a viewing of the film "[A Prayer for Compassion](#)," by Thomas Jackson. This film is truly one of the most important tools we have for bringing the message of vegan living and love to the faithful.

SATURDAY, October 2--Gandhi's Birthday, dawned with more valuable gifts for us all to share. After Meditations and music led by Dr. Will Tuttle and Gentle Movement led by Lisa Levinson, [Dr. Milton Mills](#) presented "What the Bible Has to Say About Plant-based Diets and Animal Rights." Dr. Milton Mills, an emergency physician and Seventh Day Adventist, gave us some superb tools to help us reach those who believe that God is fine with us killing and eating animals.

Dr. Mills is famous for explaining how our bodies are not designed by God to eat animals, and that eating them leads directly to poor physical and spiritual health. He makes it crystal clear that God's highest goal for us is to do no harm and to live in a joyful Eden at peace with all God's creation. We are here, he said, to be a shining light, and vegans are working with God to return us to a vegan world. Robbie Schiff, a frequent speaker on vegan spirituality, shared some vegan treats and words of wisdom.



Dr. Mills' great offering was followed by our entire group walking the Unity Village labyrinth, led inspiringly by Charlotte Cressey. We ended the walk by forming a circle around the labyrinth and repeating the [worldwide circle of compassion prayer](#) "Compassion encircles the Earth for all beings everywhere."



After another satisfying and beautiful lunch we heard from [Sara Eifler, Program Director of Jewish Veg](#) speaking on "Faith-Based vegan advocacy in your community." She guided us in a workshop so that we could work in small groups to choose a typical religious ritual and veganize it.

[Dr. Sailesh Rao](#), founder of [Climate Healers](#) and author of [Carbon Dharma](#) and *Carbon Yoga*, followed Sara and explained to us "How to Get to a Vegan World by 2026" and why we must. We are running out of time. He explained that the world is controlled by only a few giant and wealthy elite entities that benefit from sick people and addictive behavior. It is a Ponzi scheme, but we do not have to play their game. Going vegan is a powerful step to live without them and create an entirely new system based on love, not fear, and understand that we and the animals are all one family. Dr. Rao's information can help us build a fire under the various religious groups and motivate them to help literally save the world. The time is now, and we need all people of faith to help.



A gourmet dinner was followed by [Dr. Lisa Kemmerer's](#) "Religions of the World and the Vegan Moral Imperative." Dr. Kemmerer is also the curator of [the "Animals and World Religions" traveling exhibit](#) which graced the hallway outside the Fillmore Chapel that I referred to at the beginning of the article. She is also a professor, the author of many books, including *Animals and World Religions*, and a world expert on animals (as she refers to them as a way to raise our perception and respect for them) and world religions.

Thomas Jackson capped off a day of awe and wonder with a sneak peak at his inspiring new film "Compassion in Action--Bringing the Elixir Home." As a fiery vegangelist, he gifted us with his unique style of veganizing the world and creating heaven on earth.

SUNDAY, October 3. The sun rose on a beautiful day in spite of predictions of rain. So with gratitude we were able to have our outdoor Interfaith Contemplative service and our Animal Blessing ceremony at the Lowell Terrace Garden, which is an outdoor church tucked in among the trees and flowers of Unity Village. With Madeleine Tuttle's beautiful flute music nurturing us, we blessed the animals with various rituals that celebrate vegan ideals of harmony, compassion, gratitude, and prayer. To receive a copy of the Blessing Ceremony, please email interfaith@idausa.org. All the rituals can be used in any religious setting or ethical tradition.



This forum and retreat was organized by Judy Carman and Lisa Levinson of [Vegan Spirituality](#) and the [Interfaith Vegan Coalition](#) and Reverend Carol Saunders of [The Spiritual Forum](#). VS and IVC are groups designed to help you bring vegan values to your religious communities, friends, spiritual leaders and family. There are [Faith Based Advocacy Kits](#) at the Interfaith Vegan Coalition website as well as [helpful brochures that you can download or order](#). Vegan Spirituality hosts retreats, animal blessings, vegan ceremonies and [online interviews](#) of vegan spiritual leaders. VS is an online and in-person community that explores veganism as a spiritual practice while IVC helps bring vegan values to your religious communities, friends, spiritual leaders and family. Reverend Carol Saunders' popular and brilliant podcasts and other essential offerings can be found at her [The Spiritual Forum](#).