

Second Life: Connecting the Global Fellowship in Cyberspace



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Monday, February 16, 2009

These are your speakers,

If you look at the “Subject Index” in the GA program book, you’ll see that this is the only workshop that deals with Denominational Growth. Not to say other speakers want to talk about growing the denomination. But today we want to talk about a new way to spread our wonderful message.

When I was coming up with the title of this presentation last year, “cyberspace,” as dated a term as some of us might think it is, is the best description of the reality of where this interaction is taking place.



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It's a fine, cool day.
The sky is blue
The breeze is soft

You have magically arrived at the peak of a small hill.
In the distance, you see small green islands, separated from you by blue glistening leads of water
You're inside a small wooden gazebo with a plate glass dome and mosaic floor
Ahead there is a paved path leading through a cut in the hills

Signboards giving information on Unitarian-Universalism are tastefully mounted along the path.

Candles light your way. You pass under an ornate wooden arch. An eternally-lit flaming chalice is erected at the foot of a waterfall. The signboard says, "Is God Keeping You From Church?"

To the right, a larger gazebo whose ceiling is inset with colorful stained glass windows. Within the gazebo, there's a meeting area where interesting looking, colorful individuals sit on pillows around a cheery campfire, apparently engaged in an intense discussion.

Through a fringe of tall purple foxgloves, you see a large open-air cupola, held up by now-familiar wooden pillars, whose canopy is made up of magnificent stained glass windows.

Tall majestic trees sway in the breeze lending an air of serenity to the landscape. You can hear birds calling in the trees and the roar of ocean waves nearby.

The under the floating canopy of stained-glass windows, the sanctuary seating area has three rows of pillows, ranked in a semi-circle. In front of the seats, a blue pond with ripples, and across the pond, a simple wooden pulpit flanked by a video-screen and a large flaming chalice.

Blooming flowers are all around and a waterfall plunges down a steep rocky peak behind the pulpit. You can see the ocean waves behind the peak. A grand piano and harp, ready for use, are exposed to the elements, to the left of the seating area.

You take a seat and greet fellow members and say hello to visitors. We welcome people of a races, genders and species. Dragons and kitty-cats sit down next to punk rockers and ordinary looking people. It's time for the regular Thursday night service (or Saturday morning service) of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Second Life.

Agenda

- What is Second Life
- The First UU Church of Second Life
- Accomplishments
- Challenges, Plans, and Options
- Your Ideas

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What we're going to talk about:

For those unfamiliar with online environments, a few words on this “next generation of internet browsing technology”. For those already familiar with other environments, what makes SL unique.

Cathy will talk about the new fellowship in particular. Maybe in a way not much different than other newly-starting congregations, though the environment is very different.

Next is what has been accomplished so far, and where we might be going.

One of my goals during GA is to connect with some people here in the UUA, and see how many others in this organization are as excited about this starting fellowship as we already are. And I know a few people here have heard about this and may have some insight here.

What is Second Life?

- A Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG) – MMO Role Playing Game
- Unique that it allows the users to generate all the content. Largest of the user-defined worlds.
- Free! (for basic accounts; all that is required to fully participate in the Fellowship). Newer computers will work much better, plus high-speed internet access.
- No Government ID Checks.
- <http://secondlife.com>

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“No Government ID Checks”: At GA this year, the Department of Homeland Security will be protecting us from ourselves.



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A quick tour of some of the places in Second Life:

New York – Washington Square and CBGB's



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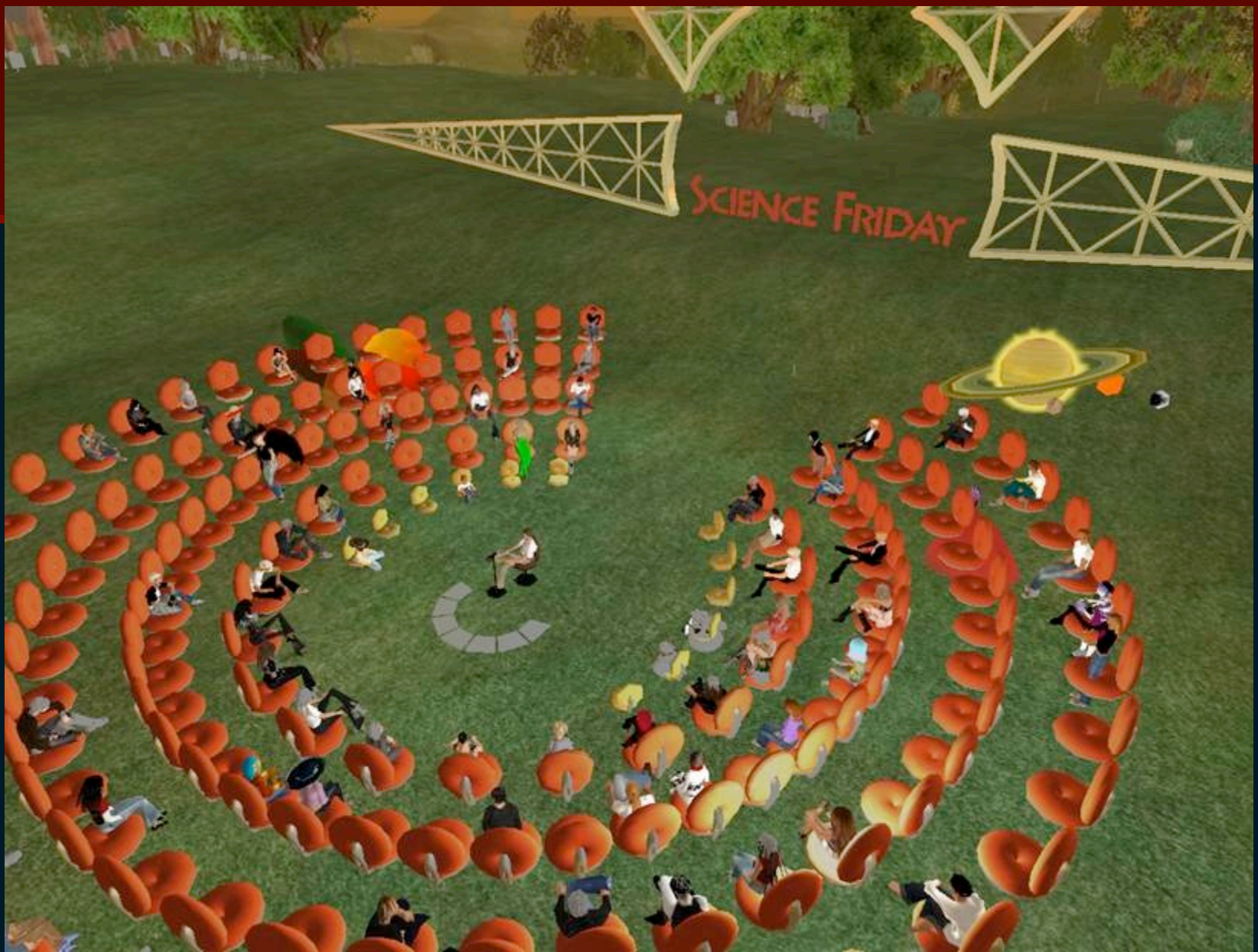
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Boston Lighthouse (Et standing just to the left of the light)



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Dublin. The Bank of Ireland re-created on the left-center, University of Dublin, Trinity College recreated on the right. The Blarney Stone on the far left. Inset: dancing at “Fibber McGee’s”—note the dancers in the air!



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Anyone here listen to NPR?

Science Friday (Eric is there—the planet Saturn avatar!). Broadcasts from SL into NPR every Friday afternoon. Ira Flatow, the host, is sitting in the middle. You can call in questions to his guests from an 800 number, or “chat” them from this area in SL. Your avatar can be a person, animal, robot...or even celestial body. Other shows, including the Cambridge Forum, originate from SL.

Speaking of NPR: Ken Stern, the former CEO of NPR, was forced out of his job recently. He clashed with the leaders of NPR, all radio station operators, about the introduction of internet distribution of NPR content.



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Other worship spaces in SL: Temple of Shiva in the UU residential area; Friend's church built by Otenth.



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Graceland. The sound on this parcel is a 24/7 Elvis-only internet radio station. There are video screens inside where you can see concert footage. A re-creation of the zebra room, music room, and dining room is inside. There's a re-creation of the memorial garden out back, of course.



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Gaia Rising; Temple of Isis. – New Age temples in SL.



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Corporations in Second Life. Several have been set up to have a presence inside SL, though the commercial possibilities are still a little bit in the future. Ben and Jerry's features many games one can play. In the Circuit City store you can browse their catalog and it will send you to their web site to order the things you want. IBM is investing millions of dollars into SL this year...IBM has someone in SL 24 hours a day, 5 days a week—it is possible to order million dollar computer systems, and IBM will mock up your computer room in Second Life. Playboy is there also....note the pink bunny tracks running down the sign.



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That's Cathy's brother (RL picture and avatar). This is his attempt to set up a proof-of-concept training area. When this picture was taken, he was very new to SL. The environment is moderately easy to set up to handle any existing content you may have.



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Caledon – A “steampunk” continent—think Victorian England with brass gear computers. This is Ordinal Malaprop’s weapons shop. Note the airship one may sit in and tour the island. Lovelace island is part of this continent