

THE NATURAL MANDALA TOUR

October, November, December 2008 and January

GARDEN PARK UNITY CHURCH



I can't imagine a more simple yet attractive setting for The Natural Mandala to be exhibited than in this understated yet quaintly elegant sanctuary. As you can see, the stained glass window alone sets the scene for quite an invitation to come forward and to become united within the loving embrace of the equally beautiful people of the [Garden Park Unity Church](#). Never before have I experienced a group of people with such love and affection for one another. It was my pleasure and honor that this congregation of warm and friendly people invited The Natural Mandala to become a part of them; from the middle of October of 2008 to the end of January 2009, it basked in the glow of their gratitude and admiration, summarily becoming a welcomed part of their Sunday morning services. I attended all but one of these Sunday services and was also welcomed in to the fold, being made to feel as if I had always been a part of them; so quickly and so easily.

This fifth venue of The Natural Mandala Exhibition Tour offered another "first time experience" of being invited to exhibit in a church setting. I have thought for quite some time that it would eventually be exhibited in a church, somewhere, but I wasn't expecting it to be this soon in the tour and was definitely not expecting it to happen in the Cincinnati area. The reason for this is mainly due to my own ignorance for not being familiar with the diversity of churches that Cincinnati offers. But as in all things, these are in God's time, regardless of how much or how little I know; things can, and do, and will happen.

I mentioned in the Angelic Whispers Holistic Center Tour Page, it was Vivian Hurley who introduced The Natural Mandala to Rev. Keene of Garden Park Unity Church by giving her a small photo-flyer that I was using as a calling card. She took one to give to Rev. Keene and told her about the work I am doing. It wasn't too long afterward that I received a phone call from her. She expressed her interest for having the mandala at her church and so we set an appointment to meet in late September.

Rev. Keene and I had such an easy-going meeting, I was excited about exchanging ideas for how The Natural Mandala could be used in the church setting. I felt a hearty excitement the idea from her at the very beginning, as she kept staring into the large fine art print that I brought for her to see. Since she had not yet seen the mandala in person, I thought it would be good for her to at least see the print – as it perfectly illustrates the intricate details of The Natural Mandala. I'll never forget the way that Rev. Keene kept looking at the image the whole time I was there. In fact, we seldom ever really looked eye to eye. Although I looked at her when I talked to convey my ideas for the exhibition, she was totally involved and present with The Natural Mandala Fine Art Print image. It started nearly from the moment she entered the room; she walked in and sat on a couch that was angled to the chair I sat in – which faced the large mandala print. She got out a few introductory sentences and then asked about the print. I pointed to it across the room and it took her by surprise. She gave out a very audible, "Oh, how beautiful!" and immediately sat back onto the couch in a gentle recline that would rival any painted pose from the Mannerism Period. I could see and feel her immediately let go of her body and become rested and at peace within the image.

One of the most treasured experiences I have had with The Natural Mandala Tour has become the church venue. This allows me the unique experience for being with people as they view this organic image. I have had so many people come to me, both before and after services, compelled to freely offer insight into their impressions and feelings for The Natural Mandala. Many of the members of Garden Park Unity Church have regularly spoken to me before and after services, telling me of their admiration for The Natural Mandala. It has been an ongoing affirmation for the divine inspiration that I had originally received that directed me toward creating this mandala and in this way. In addition to the church members, there have been a noticeable number of people that have come to the church just to see this work of art. Of course, the first Sunday that it was there, the energy encompassing it within the church was the most effervescent of all but even subsequent Sunday services provided a constant flow of affirmations for how its energy was touching the hearts and souls of those who open up to it or were otherwise opened up by it. Of all of these, one of the most common and prevalent occurrences when people spoke to me – that highlights and underscores their expression – was their overt display of emotion. I'd have to say that at Garden Park Unity Church, this was the most reoccurring theme from some very tenderhearted and spiritually receptive people. To give you an example, I would like to share two episodes that illustrate this ongoing trend.

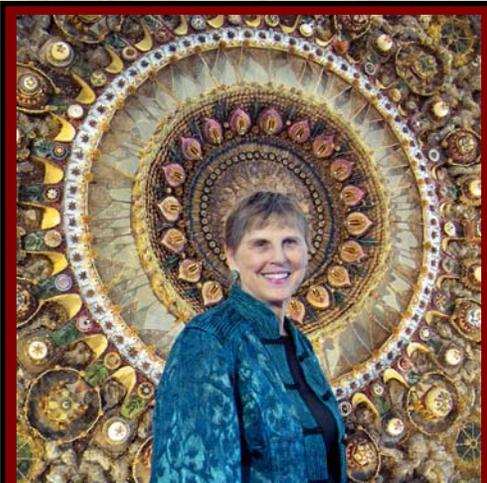
One Sunday morning, I stood up during the service and turned around to greet the people behind me during the "Welcome and Greeting" time within the service. There was a fine couple standing there, and the forty-something gentlemen offered out his hand to greet me. Just prior to this portion of the service were a number of announcements, several of which mentioned The Natural Mandala and I was asked to stand. Now, as I began to greet them they both started by saying, "So *you* are the artist that created that mandala?" and I acknowledged that I was. They said that they had never been to the church before but were told about the mandala being here and wanted to come to see it for themselves. The woman looked at me with a look that I can't really describe other than to say it was expressing deeply felt emotion. She started to talk to me about what she felt when she first saw it as they entered into the church and then walked up to look at it closer. Then, as she began to give me the details of what she experienced, the tears flowed into her eyes and she just broke down and began to quietly weep. She wasn't able to talk for being so choked up. He said, "actually, we are both very touched by this work of art, and we'll never forget it."

In another episode, I had just arrived at the church and was hanging up my coat when I overheard Rev. Keene speaking to a woman with whom I was not familiar. They were standing near the threshold of the sanctuary where the mandala was being exhibited. Rev. Keene seemed to be answering a question that the woman had asked. Then, as I stepped out from the coatroom, she motioned toward me and said, "Well there is the artist that created it, he will tell you all that you'd like to know." The woman turned and looked at me with a rather unique expression on her face, it was as if she was surprised that "the artist" was actually there. She walked toward me and we began to talk. She told me that she first heard about my mandala from a minister in Florida. "In Florida?" I exclaimed. "Yes, in Florida" she affirmed. She began to explain that she had returned a week ago from having been down there visiting her son. While there, he had taken her to the Unity church that he attended and she said that the minister of that church had spoken about The Natural Mandala during the service and encouraged the congregates to visit my website. I asked if she knew how that minister learned of my work and she said that she didn't know, and even to this day, neither do I. She said that her son told her that the original was actually on exhibit just a few blocks from where she lived and he encouraged her to come to the church to look at it in person. So, there she was.

There was still some time before the service was to begin and I asked if she had yet seen the mandala up close. She said that she hadn't but that she wanted to look at it from a distance for a while and would save that for after church. Then she and her husband entered the sanctuary and took their place within one of the pews. After the service there were several people that approached me with questions and comments but I noticed the woman and her husband slowly approaching the front of the church. Not long after the brief conversations passed and I decided to join them, to see if they had questions for me. I got to that first pew and somehow knew I should wait. I stood there for several minutes with their backs to me and I waited. They didn't move around much, just stood there quietly looking. I made certain to not give any indication that I was there because I didn't want to disturb any particular space in to which they may have shifted. I thought that I would just stay there and wait until they moved and surely when they were finished looking, they would see me and then I could speak with them. It was with that thought that she slowly took a step back from the mandala and then turned around, as if she was going to look at it from a little more distance.

When she looked up from her stepping off the stage, she saw me and then we were face to face. She looked at me, once again surprised that I was *there*. Her eyes were slightly red and full but her face was serene with wide, long trails of tears that had traced several paths down her cheeks. We stood there a moment and looked into one another's eyes. Then she looked at the mandala and back at me, then over my head up toward the ceiling. When she finally looked at me again she lifted her shoulders slightly and tried to say something to me in a broken line of speech. "It's...it's...it's...just...so...so...beau—ti—ful. I...can't... think...well...it's just so...beautiful," was all that she could get out. I put my hand on her hand and said, "That's okay, you don't have to say anything more...I understand what you want to say," and I did. It was all too familiar to me and yet, her overt emotions penetrated and enriched me so much. When the trembling had left her voice, she looked at me as said again, "This is a true work of art, but what *is* a mandala?"

Both couples had a number of things they wanted to express about what they saw in and felt from The Natural Mandala. It was obvious to me that from a deep place within them, they wanted to say a lot more than what they were able to communicate. What I will always remember is the uncontrollable, emotional way that people tend to respond to this intuitive work of sacred art and how, through their emotions, their body is brought to bear upon the attempt to express the ineffable and that is, whether they actually know about and understand what this is that they are seeing, or not.



Reverend Julie Keene

"We are very fortunate to have an exquisite piece of art on exhibition at the front of our sanctuary. Artist Rex Oxley has committed his time and resources to create something beautiful, spiritual and extremely unusual. Made of natural organic materials, this mandala opens the hearts of those who behold it. The first response is usually a "jaw-dropping" one. People are simply awed by its magnificence.

Although the photo you see here on our website is beautiful, nothing compares to first hand observation of the original art. . . .

The word mandala has its roots in ancient Tibetan Sanskrit. It means 'containing' or circle completion. One can gaze at this art and enter into an open-eyed meditation and reach a higher state of spiritual awareness. The sun, the moon, stars and galaxies are circular. The tiny atom is circular. We speak about being "centered" in Spirit, "centered" in the Christ Mind and from this center love and life flows outward in every direction. When we are coming from our heart, centered in our heart, beautiful patterns of love, light, and life extend outward in all directions. We are in the center of the circle.

This mandala at church has a small blank and open space at the very center. I believe this symbolizes the void out of which all is created, flowing forth in all directions and dimensions."

--- Rev. Keene

In her Sunday morning talk of November 23, 2008 entitled: "Our Life as Sacred Mandala," Rev. Keene used symbolism of the mandala to help her to illustrate how our lives are inner-connected with one another. She spoke about the center void and used the concept of mandala to give perspective of the individual microcosm (the details within the mandala) to the macrocosm (the connection of all details leading to God) as being the Unity of One. This talk spoke of the "unification" of people also working as a whole toward a single goal or commonality.



If you would like to read the entire talk; click below to download the PDF file:

"OUR LIFE AS SACRED MANDALA"
By: Rev. Julie Keene



Photo: Don Lemastus

Armand & Angelina

When I was designing the logistical and structural components for this exhibition, I created a display frame that incorporated a self-contained illumination feature. Within the structure of the frame are four banks of lights mounted just within its facing side. These lights offer different lighting effects depending upon the quality and color of the house lights and the natural, ambient light where it is being exhibited. There were two occasions at Garden Park where The Natural Mandala was viewed during services for the first time where the house lights were either off or otherwise really dim – which created a more intimate effect that was very appealing.

The first of these events was **Armand & Angelina's "Posi World P'opera Concert"** of November 7th, 2008. In this event, the house lights were off except for several spotlights that were directed down onto the stage. The entire concert was performed in front of The Natural Mandala where Armand used several forms of organic, acoustical instruments during his performance; these included a variety of drums and Native American flutes. Since I attended this concert, I got to see first hand how The Natural Mandala relates to a wide variety of events and people and in many different contexts. For most concert goers, the mandala was perhaps just a backdrop for the concert, yet, as it turned out, I discovered that it had meant so much more to the audience and especially to Armand and Angelina.

It was just after the second half of the concert that Armand had sat down in the first pew, allowing Angelina to have the stage to perform one of her pop/opera solos. Armand was taking in her performance, that I'm sure he's seen and heard many times before, but I can only imagine that this time may have been different. Obviously, The Natural Mandala had made an impact upon him because when he returned to the stage he began to talk about it specifically. He commented on how beautiful he felt it was to him and how inspiring it was to be able to perform his music within its presence. In this way, he highlighted and elevated its energy by giving it his own.

Armand said, "I understand that the artist that created this is supposed to be here this evening," and then with his hand, he eclipsed the light from his eyes and looked out into the audience, "are you out there anywhere?" At that point about half of the audience members, knowing who I was, all pointed at me, and coming from all directions of the room. Gracious and selfless, Armand became very complimentary and gave me a spot-light of time, within his concert, which clearly stopped and took the lime-light away from his performance and placed it upon the mandala. He asked me to stand and I received a fervent applause from the audience. When finally the room went silent again, he began to speak more about it in terms of the rapport, unity and spiritual connection that he had already developed with it in a short time. In one of his most dramatic gestures of the evening, Armand stood fully to the side of The Natural Mandala and stepped off the stage from it, looked back and with his arm fully extend he pointed toward it, looked to the audience and said, "I don't know about you, but for me, God Is There." His comment was confirmed by another round of applause, which was not for the sake of acclamations, but was in a much deeper sense, a symbolic gesture to acknowledge a truth that he put into words and was felt as another unification and affirmation by the audience. It was a highly charged, intensely intimate and enriching moment for me and I will always be grateful to Armand and Angelina for giving of their energy so willingly, unashamedly and unabashed.

There was a second occasion where The Natural Mandala, although was not a focal point of the service, but was a silent source of focused illuminating energy during the service. Again, with the house lights nearly off, it was during the Garden Park Christmas Eve Candlelight service that it became a glowing jewel. The interesting thing for me was to see and experience the warmth of the mandala glow in the context of Christmas. I did not have "Christmas" on my mind at all when I was creating The Natural Mandala but as I gazed into it during the service, the many circles and concentric rings seemed to speak of the concept; radiating peace and joy and "Goodwill to all men."

At the end of the service, everyone created a circle around the perimeter of the sanctuary. Then, one by one, each of us lit our respective candles, taking from and passing on the light to the next person. It doesn't take much thought to connect with the symbolism of this ritual as you felt the connection with both people on either side of you. You had the receiving on one side of you and the giving on the other. Once all the candles were lit, and the talking was finished, and the special music concluded, we were all left with a few rare moments of united silence. Since I was a child, I observed the intensity of ambient energy when a large group of people created silence. In a circle of illumination, our points of light were bound to one another in a large ring that emulated and harmonized with those of The Natural Mandala. Its glow resonated with each of our own points of light, our own symbolic center of illumination. I could have stood there for hours; watching my flame sway and flicker within the subtle movement of air, the candle slowly melt and then one by one, I could look into the face of each person around the large circle. I could have felt that Unity, that very large mandala all night long and well into Christmas Day. Needless to say, it was the best Christmas Eve I remember having since my very early childhood. I am grateful to Garden Park Unity Church members for allowing me to participate in such a simple yet moving service and I hope that my work helped to make it special.

For me, The Christmas Eve service was even more enhanced by learning about several families that I met that evening. A woman approached me after the service, followed by her husband and their three teen-agers. She told me the story of how they came to be there that evening. They had decided that they wanted to attend a church that was having a Christmas Eve service and because they did not attend church regularly, they actually went online to find one to visit that evening. They had narrowed their search to several churches, but as she explained, they came across Garden Park Unity Church and went to look at their website. There they saw the image of The Natural Mandala on the main page and that caught their eye, so then they surfed over to my website to learn more about it. She told me that Garden Park was likely to have been the last choice for them to attend since it was the furthest from where they lived. She said, "It is because of the mandala being here, that we all wanted to see it in person and that was what made us choose to come here tonight." For reasons of spirit moving throughout, this kind of connection to the mandala has become the most significant and continuous of trends. It's stories like this that really begin to affirm the work that The Natural Mandala is meant to do, because simply, I have heard too many stories of synchronicity to disregard the energy surrounding it.



**THE AURA OF LOVE'S UNIFICATION
MERGING TWO SOULS INTO THE ONE**

Jennifer Buhrlage and Kevin Rientjes

Photo: Harry deBruyn, StudioDPhoto.com



**CONGRATULATIONS TO:
MR. & MRS. RIENTJES**

Photo: Harry deBruyn, StudioDPhoto.com



A PICTURE PAINTS A THOUSAND WORDS

It is said that, "A picture paints a thousand words." That being the case – which I have personally never disputed and have rather always agreed with – wish that I could come up with at least a thousand or more words to describe how I felt when I realized that The Natural Mandala was, in fact, going to be positioned in the place as it is pictured here. Not only is this a beautiful image that these two works of art create in their contrast of one another but as I have meditated on this image I begin to think about the symbolism that it ignites within me. The visual is a striking commentary that Jesus is in some way *presenting*, or *offering* The Natural Mandala to those who approach.

I speak about affirmation a lot on these pages, affirmation that I receive from people who see the mandala and sit with it for several minutes up to exceeding several hours. In another vision, I have imagined a scenario where Jesus has affirmed this work by blessing it, and consecrating it, merely with his presence and countenance and certainly, that full-body gesture gives everyone an undeniable impression. There have been many thoughts about this that I have pondered since The Natural Mandala entered this venue, but the most penetrating of my "*streaming of conscious thought*" is; What would, or did, Christ say about the mandala form? I am not as concerned or interested to imagine His thoughts about "my" work, per se, as I am interested to know what His feelings for the concept of the circle might have been and what it might have meant to Him. I know that the circle did have great meaning even before and within Biblical times, and even later to the early Christian mystics, so this question will be something I shall be researching, and pondering, and imagining these things for a very long time.

Another featured first that Garden Park Unity offered The Natural Mandala Tour was that it became yet another kind of "energy showcase" for presiding over the solemnity of a several weddings. On the day that I first met with Rev. Keene at the church, she told me that there would be a wedding there three days following its arrival. The couple that was getting married wasn't aware that the mandala would be there for their wedding and I was a little reserved about that situation. Rev. Keene assured me that it would be fine and indeed it was. She told me later that they were surprised and really loved having the mandala a part of the ceremony.

During the three-and-a-half months that the mandala was there, I understand that there were three, maybe four weddings that took place within this sanctuary. Thankfully, I was able to locate one of the photographers that kindly gave me permission to use a few of his photos of the ceremony that he photographed. I have actually spent a goodly amount of time meditating on one of these photos. I have captioned it: "*The aura of love's unification, merging two souls into the One.*" Not having been given any way to contact this handsome couple, I can only imagine what it might have been like for them to be married before a mandala, this great symbol of unity and wholeness. From the classical language of ancient Sanskrit, the word '*mandala*' comes has two literal, derivative meanings; "essence" and "container". Over the centuries the word mandala has come to denote the "sacred circle" as it is used in religious ceremony and meditation.

When I look at The Natural Mandala in the context of various venues and events like this, I am drawn back to those earlier derivative meanings and I meditate on those words; 'essence' and 'container.' For me, looking at this photo I can imagine being there; the energy of witnessing the consecration of these two souls willfully binding their love for one another, to one another. The aura of love that will surround them throughout their marriage almost seems to be sealed by the containing properties of those concentric circles, enshrining them in the pure essence of joy, love, affection, trust, hope and commitment. With Rev. Keene facilitating their entrance into matrimony, it feels as if their bond is complete, whereas love brought them there, they join hands, they recite their deeply felt vows, they gaze into each other's eyes (soul) and the trine of merging energies are enclosed by the circle, the symbol for wholeness, continuity and to complete the initiation of all intensions. They have fully passed through the threshold of the higher energetic levels to All That Is. Congratulations to you; Mr. & Mrs. Rientjes!

Another unique first for this venue is something that I have begun to develop because it fits well with the church format. Every church that I have ever attended offers its members a bulletin for the Sunday morning service. Within it is the outline for the service, activities for the week, upcoming special events and various announcements. I thought that this would be a great forum to introduce and speak about aspects of The Natural Mandala and its components. There wasn't much time left in this tour venue to fully flesh out all the ideas I had for this tool but I did manage to get out four pieces of what I called: "Meditations from the Sacred Book of Nature." The first of these was: "[The Egg Shell Ornamented Ring](#)" followed by "[Sacred Void, Sacred Space](#)" and then came "[Cinnamon Branches Ring](#)" and the finally is the "[Ring of Medallions](#)." Since I never received any feedback from this series, I don't know how they were perceived by the church members. I don't know if anyone actually read them or if they had any impact at all. I offer them here for you to contemplate aspects of The Natural Mandala.

One of the many important goals for The Natural Mandala Tour is to disseminate information about the mandala form, using mandalas to create and maintain (or augment) one's meditation practice, to illustrate what a commissioned Natural Mandala could/would look like and to teach about the "open-eye mandala meditation methods" that I have developed to use with The Natural Mandala. I had the pleasure of conducting one of these workshops at Garden Park and it was well received by those that attended. The content of these workshops vary since I try to do them in a progressive series – building upon the work that I do with participants with each workshop going deeper into the imagery and symbolisms as well as providing meditation aids and open-eye meditation exercises. The workshop was prefaced by an article that I wrote on this subject that appeared in the January/February issue of Cincinnati's [Whole Living Journal](#) entitled: "[Beginning A Mandala Meditation Practice](#)." I am already anticipating offering more of these workshops at the next venue, which will be Beacon of Life Spiritual Center.