



Stone Temple News

December 2022

From the Minister's Study

By McKayla Hoffman, Ministerial Intern

A theory occurred to me in 2020: cynicism doesn't stand much of a chance against Christmas lights.

A couple of years ago, while the pandemic was still raging around us, the Malo household got sick of staying inside. This family—my fiancé Lindi's family—really loves the winter holidays. So, when we heard about the “Magic of Lights” display at Gillette Stadium, all of our ears perked up.

We couldn't argue with a drive-through light show with a “Blizzard Tunnel” and LED animations! Lindi and I, their parents, and our niece all hopped into the car and made our way to Foxboro, donning our flashing rainbow string-light necklaces and ugly sweaters. We were a bit skeptical about how it'd be, and whether it'd be worth the time and money.

We pulled into the dedicated field of lights, and our suspicions collapsed into the sound of “Ooos,” “aaas,” and commentary like “What the heck is wrong with that reindeer, bro?” The promised 12 Days of Christmas inspired our singing: “12 pipers piping, 8 maids a milkin'—oh wait—11 drummers drumming, 9 ladies dancing—wait oops.”

We laughed so hard. This family, who had experienced seemingly-impossible levels of loss the year prior and during the pandemic, was swept away in wonder together in blurs of rainbow and gold and glitter.

That night, we each tapped into a shared core of peace, one that we all made together, and one that gave us permission to wonder. I truly don't believe this state of inner and outer wonder can be manifested alone. When shared, wonder unearths what we believe is lost when we leave childhood for adulthood, when we experience trauma or loss, when we are present for the unimaginable. When shared, wonder can remind us of our humanity, of our wholeness. When shared, wonder invites us to lean into, instead of away from, a life worthy of us.

Beloveds, sing that ridiculous holiday tune. Let your eyes widen at the sight of stars in the cold, dark sky. Let yourself feel that “snow day” excitement when the snow falls. Go slowly. Hang up those lights. Make space. Wonder out loud.

May the excitement, joy, and light of this holiday season surround you and yours.

Spirit Circle News

By Nan Moore, Director of Family Ministry

The holiday season is upon us. For some this time of year evokes joy, and for some it is difficult. The blessing of community can provide comfort during this time of year no matter where you are on the joy to difficult continuum. Spirit Circle is an opportunity to join in community activity, ritual, worship, and socializing - helping us remember that UFPC is a place where we can fully connect and experience a sense of belonging. Here is an overview of the month that hopefully you will find engaging.

December 4th

- Special event this week is card making with Nan. Children will create cards for whoever they choose, family, friends, teachers etc. The RE HOSTS will be Albert Vaughn and Kendra Dupiton.
- We will be preparing costumes and have a list of parts the children can choose to be for the December 18th Unpageant Pageant.
- Children will go upstairs at the end of circle time for a hymn, Deck the Halls, as they place swags on the pews, and then join around the Christmas tree for singing before social hour.

Youth Group Social Event

- McKayla Hoffman and Peter Kovach are the advisors taking the teens for a social time. Originally, we planned to go bowling, but the alleys are reserved all day so there is a change in plan.
- The group will be going to IHOP at 1:00 pm and then going back to the church to plan for their next project.

December 11th

- Spirit Circle Mindfulness class at 10:45 am with Paula Webster and the RE HOST will be Andrew Carleen.
- IMPORTANT - children will be taking home their costumes following the service for the December 18th multigenerational service. The RE committee thought this would be a great way for children to be in character before the play and also making preparation less labor intensive.

December 18th

- Multigenerational Unpageant Pageant (NEW name contributed by RE member Marie Louise).
- The pageant will be the Christmas story with a little twist. Members of the congregation are going to be invited to take part in the pageant. There will be costumes in the sanctuary and people will be asked, during the pageant, to go and put a costume on, if they would like to participate.
- We want to make this worship fun, meaningful, and easy as possible, while inclusive for all ages...this change is part of our Spirit Circle Pilot year!

December 25th – Nan Moore will be leading the worship service in the parish hall.

Happy holidays to all and may we enjoy this season together knowing we live by our UU principles and spiritual virtues as the most precious element guiding us, our families, friends, faith community and the world. Blessings of love and...Shalom, Shanti, Salaam, Paz, Mir, Peace to all.

Social Justice Action Committee Report

By Claire Fitzmaurice, SJAC Chair

The Social Justice Action Committee is glad to partner with the Religious Education Committee in our Donation Drives for the Interfaith Social Services over the Church Year. In December, the SJAC will take the lead and stay on brand to promote a book drive Reading is Fundamental for children and teens. This is the ISS's statement of purpose: "Our food pantry aims to nourish the mind as well as the body. Just the mere presence of books in the home impacts children's academic success, vocabulary development and future job attainment...When available, each food pantry client receives a bag of age-appropriate books for their children on each visit. From Board books for infants to chapter books for young adults, we aim to get books in the homes of all our young clients." The SJAC will collect children's books in new or gently used condition. Please no books with torn or missing pages, or that have been colored in. We will have collection bins in the foyer of the Sanctuary and the Parish Hall. I hope our families will talk with their children about sharing their books. I know that I will be sorting through old sentimental favorites on my book shelves to donate.

Our 4th Cupcakes for a Cause was held during Social Hour on Sunday October 30th and it was a great success. We wish to thank Florence Noonan who is the champion of this effort and our many bakers, donors and buyers. If you were any one of those, you were allowed to vote between three different local organizations to choose which would receive the proceeds of the event. The ballot consisted of The Massachusetts Tribe at Ponkapoag, Quincy Literacy at the Thomas Crane Public Library and Interfaith Social Services. We raised \$253 in cash from the sale of the delicious baked goods. That was matched by Rev. Rebecca's ARPA funds. \$506 was awarded to the Massachusetts Tribe. We recommend that Members and Friends check them out at www.massachusettstribe.org and at their Facebook page. Let us celebrate their hard work to keep their culture, history and community alive

against so many odds. The passage of Referendum Questions #1 and #4 during the November elections were Big Wins for several UU Mass Action that has advocated and lobbied almost a decade. Thank you to our indefatigable Bonnie Gorman who keeps the Legislature on our map.

“Welcome to the Path of Wonder”

Monthly reflection from Soul Matters Sharing Circle theme-based ministry

This seems to me the main problem... How can we contrive to be at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it?...How can this world give us at once the fascination of a strange town and the comfort and honor of being our own town?

–G.K. Chesterton

The path of wonder seems well worn. It’s a journey that brings us down to size. Just think of those pictures which reveal that our galaxy is just one of billions more. Or think of when you’ve stared into the empty darkness of a midnight sky or an endless ocean. Such images remind us that the universe is more vast than we can imagine. They leave us with a sense of wonder that overwhelms. In the face of such an incomprehensible abyss, one can’t help but feel humbled and small.

But religion never wants us to stop there. Hold on it says. Just stand at the abyss a bit longer. Lean in a little bit more. And when you do, you’ll realize that this path doesn’t end with a deep darkness that doesn’t care. No, if we remain there in witness long enough, a new message emerges. You look into the vast mystery and surprisingly, it stares back, as if to say, “Welcome home.”

As astronomers tell us, contemplation of the vast universe doesn’t make them feel smaller; it makes them realize the larger story of which they are a part. We are stardust, as they say. From the vastness we came and to it we will return. In other words, the path of wonder is not so much about feeling small; it’s about feeling connected.

And not just connected to the stars, but also to each other. Wonder, and its cousin awe, reduces us in order to make room for something more than our self-centered needs, wants and worries. With our narcissism shrunk down to a reasonable size, it becomes possible to notice that we are not the only ones up there on the stage. It’s in this way that looking up into the cosmos allows us to look across at each other. Which is, of course, a huge gift, because while being center stage and center of the universe can feel powerful, it’s also a very lonely place to be.

So friends, don’t just look up at the stars this month. Let’s make sure that our looking up leads to us looking across. And as we do, may we - like our friend G.K. Chesterton - not simply be astonished at the universe, but also feel at home in it.

WORSHIP SERVICES

Worship services are held on Sunday mornings at 10:30 am in-person and via livestream.

[December 4]

“Practicing Awe”

Rev. Rebecca Froom

The experience of awe can remind us that we are part of an interdependent and wondrous world. On this Sunday we reflect on the ways we can cultivate awe and wonder in our everyday lives. The service will end with our annual tradition of “Decoration Sunday” where the children will lead us from the sanctuary to the parish hall to decorate our Christmas Tree.

[December 11]
“Blue December: Honoring our Sorrows in a Season of Joy”
Rev. Rebecca Froom and McKayla Hoffman

In the midst of the winter holiday season that joyously celebrates love, hope, and peace, we take time to acknowledge and honor the sorrows, losses, and struggles we carry with us in this festive season.

[December 18]
“Holiday Pageant Sunday”
Nan Moore and Rev. Rebecca Froom

Join us for a special multigenerational worship service where we will tell the traditional Christmas story in new ways and celebrate “symbols of the season” as we approach Hanukkah, the Winter Solstice, and Christmas.

[Saturday, December 24, 6:00 pm]
“The Wonder of Christmas Eve”
Rev. Rebecca Froom and McKayla Hoffman

Join us for our annual Lessons and Carols Christmas Eve service where we celebrate the Christmas story through readings, music, and candlelight.

[December 25]
“Birth into Aliveness”

Nan Moore will be leading worship in the parish hall as we celebrate the birth of a child and celebrate the teachings of the holy ones. Spiritual teachers through the ages have a similar message for humanity with spiritual depth of belonging, connection, meaning making and therefore aliveness. This worship service will be interactive. Our guest musician will be Elisabeth Moore.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

For our most up-to-date announcements, please see our “Weekly Announcements” which are emailed to the congregation on Thursdays or Fridays, posted on our website and available by print on Sunday mornings.

Decorating the Sanctuary and Parish Hall
Saturday, December 3, 9:00 am–12:00 pm, in-person

Come Deck the Halls of UFPC in our Holiday finery! Please mark your calendars. Friends, members and our families come together to launch the Holiday Season. We will have tasks and simple crafts for Kids of All Ages. We will attempt a potluck breakfast using best practices. Hot coffee and beverages will be provided. Stop by as your schedule allows. We will be delighted to see and meet you. (Hint! If we have enough time, we can place Santa hats on the busts of John Adams and John Quincy Adams.) Contact Claire Fitzmaurice at 617-272-0274 or artclaire@comcast.net.

Sunday Morning Meditation
Sundays, 9:00 am, in-person

We will have meditation on Sunday mornings at 9:00 am outside in the garden, weather permitting, and in the church parlor (with masks) when it rains. Our practice includes guided, walking, and silent meditation. Feel free to contact Marie-Louise at marieljm1961@yahoo.com or 857-526-2579.

Church Choir

Sundays, 9:30–10:00 am, in-person

The choir welcomes new members! This year, instead of anthems, we are working on hymns to support congregational singing, particularly hymns that are unfamiliar or less familiar. And rehearsals are half an hour, rather than 45 minutes—from 9:30 to 10:00 am every Sunday. Talk to Norman or a choir member, or just show up. Thank you.

Writing Group

Sunday, December 4, 12:00 pm, in-person

Our UFPC Writing Group will be meeting again this year. We will meet the first Sunday of the month in-person in the parlor at 12:00 pm. There are no meetings in January or June. As in past years, we welcome everyone to join us in a free writing session and optional sharing of our words that pursue thinking on a theme. This is a non-critiqued, open minded, generous group that encourages self-expression in a supportive gathering. You can attend one or more sessions. No advance reservation is required. Groups tend to vary in size between 6 and 14 participants, and the session lasts for 45 minutes to 1 hour. Contact facilitator Jim Petosa at jimjamespeto@aol.com or 301-442-3781.

Standout Quincy for Black Lives

Thursdays, 3:00–4:30 pm, in-person

UFPC partners with Quincy for Transformative Change for an initiative in support of Black Lives Matter. We stand in front of the church to bear peaceful witness and to advocate for justice and equity for our fellow citizens of color. You are invited to join our small but dedicated group. Kindly contact me at 617-272-0274 or artclaire@comcast.net. Thank you, Claire Fitzmaurice.

Kindred Spirits Discussion Group for Seniors

Friday, December 16, 10:00–11:30 am, in-person

Join Rev. Rebecca for a monthly discussion group, grounded in our UU values, where we reflect on current events and pressing social issues. This group is open to seniors aged 60+ and will meet on the third Friday of the month at our church in the parish hall. Coffee and tea are provided! Please contact Rev. Rebecca with any questions at rev.rebecca.froom@gmail.com or 617-803-1159. If you need to enter the building via the handicapped accessible entrance, please contact David Bousquin at 617-842-1706.

Childrens' Book Drive for Interfaith Social Services

During the month of December, the SJAC will coordinate with the RE Committee to collect Children's Books to be distributed by the Interfaith Social Services whose statement of purpose is, “Our food pantry aims to nourish the mind as well as the body. Just the mere presence of books in the home impacts childrens' academic success, vocabulary development and future job attainment. When available, each food pantry client receives a bag of age-appropriate books for their children on each visit. From board books for infants to chapter books for young adults, we aim to get books in the homes of all our young clients.” Please place your gently used or new books in the green donation bins in the foyer and Parish Hall. Please no books with torn or missing pages or that have been written or colored in. Thank you, Claire Fitzmaurice Chair of the Social Justice Action Committee.

Visitor Program Vignettes

By Bill Westland, Church Historian

Once again it is time to retell the history of United First Parish Church's very own anti-war Christmas carol, “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.” I first wrote about this well over twenty-five years ago and have been doing

variations of the story every December since then, so I guess that it has become a tradition. No other church can tell such a story. It is an important part of our history and culture, and shouldn't be forgotten.

If you have been to the malls this holiday season or have been listening to the radio and heard the horrendous renditions of Christmas music, you can sympathize with Oliver Cromwell back in the 17th century when he banned all Christmas celebrations. In fact, Christmas carols are relatively new in the celebration of Christmas. Even though John DeBebeur wrote the hymn, "Jesus Is Born", back in 1649, people did not sing Christmas music in American churches until after the Civil War in the 1870's. Christmas was not an official holiday in the United States until 1870, when President Grant so decreed. Congress agreed and also established by law January 1st, July 4th and another day of thanks (Thanksgiving) to also be national holidays. Christmas carols were not considered serious enough to be sung in regular church services. The only music pieces that were regularly part of Christmas church services were biblical psalms put to music. It is not surprising that the very first book to be published in the colonies was "The Bay Psalm Book", published in Cambridge at Harvard in 1649.

Despite these prohibitions, the Christmas carol, "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear", was sung for the first time in the Sunday School at United First Parish Church, "Church of the Presidents", in Quincy, in 1850. It was written at the request of our minister at the time, William Parsons Lunt. Reverend Lunt was a strong advocate of world peace, as were a number of his Unitarian minister friends. They were particularly discouraged that during the 1830's and 1840's there seemed to be one war after another in Europe as well as the Mexican-American War herein North America. Reverend Lunt's friend, Edmund Hamilton Sears, a poet and also minister of the Unitarian church in Wayland, agreed to write an anti-war poem for him (Lunt) in 1849. It was put to music the next year by Richard Storrs Willis, an organist, music critic and friend of composer, Felix Mendelssohn. Then it premiered here at United First Parish Church in the Sunday School. It is ironic that some of these Unitarian ministers who opposed the Mexican-American War enthusiastically supported the Civil War, the bloodiest war in our history. In fact, some of them actually helped finance the raid of John Brown on the arsenal in Harpers Ferry, one of the events that led to the Civil War. In 1860 Reverend John Doane Wells was such a dedicated opponent of slavery that he voluntarily served an enlistment period in the Union army before he was called to be our minister that same year. Sir Arthur Sullivan, of Gilbert and Sullivan fame, wrote an arrangement of this carol in 1871, and got credit in some circles for writing the music. This is not the case as Willis definitely wrote the music.

The American poet, Oliver Wendell Holmes, called the carol, the original version not the sanitized one that is in our UU hymnal, "one of the finest and most beautiful ever written." You can see the anti-war sentiment in the carol by the following words: "Two thousand years of wrong, and man at war with man, hears not the love song that the angels bring. Oh, hush the noise ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing." Incidentally, John Quincy Adams was a friend of Reverend Lunt and equally opposed to the Mexican-American War. Adams got up in Congress and accused supporters of the war as being "beef-witted blunder heads." It is easy to see why John Quincy Adams never became a minister. He also voted against a bill that would pay bonuses to Mexican-American War veterans, not exactly a popular stand to take, and proclaimed that the war was "outright aggression by the United States." To Adams this war was not only illegal but was an attempt to seize territory from Mexico in order to create more slave states. Nobody was any more anti-slavery than John Quincy Adams. Ulysses S. Grant, a young officer during the Mexican-American War agreed and wrote in his diary: "The Mexican War is one of the most unjust wars ever waged by a stronger nation against a weaker nation."

During the 1870's one of the Christmas carols that was often sung in Christmas church services besides "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" was "Silent Night", composed in 1818 by Franz Gruber in Austria for midnight mass. Another, "Joy To The World" was written by Lowell Mason in Boston in 1836. Mason later became the first public school music teacher in the United States. "Hark The Herald Angels Sing" was written by Charles Wesley in 1739. Wesley's brother, John, was the founder of the Methodist Church. "We Three Kings" was penned in 1863 by Reverend Henry Hopkins in New York City. "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem" was written in 1868 by Phillips Brooks, the Rector of Trinity Church in Boston. As you can see, many of our familiar carols were written in the United States. It was the terrible carnage of the Civil War that led to the tradition of these carols featuring "peace on earth and good will toward men" being incorporated into regular Christmas services in the 1870's. The following words from "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" are just as meaningful today as they were back in 1850. "Peace on earth, goodwill to men, from Heaven's all gracious King. The world in solemn silence lay, to hear the angels sing." Sadly, this tradition of singing Christmas carols has not stopped the carnage, and unfortunately what Scottish poet, Robert Burns, called "man's inhumanity to man" has usually prevailed in the world. I am afraid that this still holds true in today's dangerous world.

Church Staff and Lay Leaders

Staff: Rev. Rebecca Froom (Lead Minister), Rev. Dr. Sheldon Bennett (Minister Emeritus), Nan Moore (Affiliate Lay Community Minister), McKayla Hoffman (Ministerial Intern), David Bousquin (Office and Property Manager), Norman Corey (Music Director)

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Congregational Committees: Ann Marie Willer (Committee on Ministry), Fiona Sankey (Nominating Committee)

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