



The Steeple

December 2011 Newsletter

First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington, Vermont



In The Interim

"What is the memory that's valued so highly we keep it alive in that flame? What's the commitment to those who have died when we cry out they've not died in vain? Have we come this far always believing that justice would somehow prevail? This is the burden, and this is the promise, and this is why we will not fail. Don't let the light go out!" (Peter Yarrow)

December light. Hanukkah, Winter Solstice, Christmas. All have an image of light at their center. The Hanukkah menorah is lit to commemorate the survival of the Israelites through a period of tyranny and discrimination. Each year the candles are lit to remind us anew of that legacy of perseverance in the face of discrimination.

The solstice harkens even farther back into history. The word solstice comes from two Latin words which mean literally, the day of the sun. Ancient peoples, watching the earth grow darker day by day, lit fires and sang songs to encourage the sun to return. In England, bonfires were lit and burned for days as people sang and danced and feasted. In Egypt a High Priest would emerge from a cave bearing a torch in one hand and a new born infant in the other. In Rome, the feast of Saturn was celebrated by the exchange of lighted tapers. This year we will have a solstice celebration in our sanctuary on Wednesday December 21st at 5 pm. With music, readings, reflection and a little dramatic flair, we will join people practicing earth based spiritualities around the world in celebrating the return of the sun.

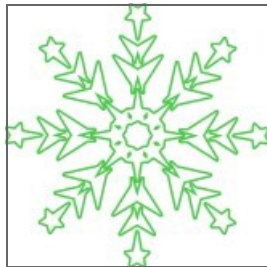
Menorahs, bonfires, Christmas tree lights - all beckon to us, inviting us into the heart of the season. The heart of December is the co-existence of light and dark. Both nourish the human spirit. Darkness reminds us of the ebb and flow of the natural world, of the reliable cycles of the sun and moon and earth. Darkness invites us to rest and reflection. The lights remind us of our connections to each other - connections that reach across time, and space. These connections call us to seek out those who need our love, our words of mercy and compassion, our acts of justice and peace-making. In the spirit of the season light a candle of memory, a candle of hope, a candle of hospitality, a candle of peace. Don't let the light go out!

See you in church,

Rev. Roberta

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Solstice

Have you considered incorporating an earth centered celebration into your winter holidays? Celebrate the turning of the earth and moving from dark to light at a special new event in our Sanctuary.

Bridget Meyer will lead a Winter Solstice service on December 21 to honor the longest night of the year. If you'd like to participate please get in touch with Bridget by calling 879-5409 or email bmeyer1038@aol.com. Look forward to a short solstice play for children (10 child actors needed!), seasonal readings and music! Have you written something appropriate to the season? Do you have a favorite winter or dark to light poem or reading you'd like to share? Don't be shy. It's going to be fun!

Rev. Roberta Finkelstein
Interim Senior Minister

Martha Dallas
Director,
Religious Education

Christina Fulton
Society Administrator

David McFeeters
Facilities Manager

Kathleen Kemp
Administrative Assistant,
Newsletter Editor

Lisa Wolff
Music Director

Bill West
President,



A Message from Martha...

I grew up celebrating Christmas. One tradition, particular to my family, was this: Every Christmas eve, we would “do ‘The Night Before Christmas.’” We had several copies, in various editions, of Clement Clarke Moore’s “A Visit from Saint Nicholas.” My Mom always did it from memory. First, we would go to our rooms and each get a sock. Then would gather in the living room, each with a book, and line up. When we were young, Dad would lead the line, but eventually we became old enough to lead. Mom usually took up the rear.

Together we would begin to recite: *’Twas the night before Christmas when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse....* And as we spoke, we began to leave the living room and to walk in a snaking line, through the house. As we moved through the poem in ragged, but deliberate unison, we processed steadily through each and every room of the house. It was a practiced ritual: holding the sock, looking down at the book, avoiding tripping on the stairs... and timing the whole thing so that we returned together to the living room to cheer: ... *And I heard him exclaim ’ere he drove out of sight, “Happy Christmas to all! And to all, a Good Night!”*

It really was magical to me. With this ritual, we wrapped our house in a sparkling spell of Christmas possibilities. And then, one Christmas Eve about ten years ago, Mom abruptly disclosed that she had never liked doing this. It was silly and contrived. She had done it every year for my Dad (from whose family it came) and for us, but she had had enough of it. I was fairly stunned to hear this, but taking in Mom’s feelings, that year we did not do it. And though perhaps we did it once or twice for grandchildren, we have not done it regularly since. I have fond memories of it, but I don’t feel a need to re-start it. That tradition, in that form, is now a family story.

What are your feelings about your family’s traditions? Are they all somehow precious and meaningful? Are there some which you merely tolerate? What would it take for you to ask truthful, trusting, and curious questions about your traditions? Since traditions are bound to change, to what extent are you dreaming forth new traditions?

Grateful to share this journey with you, *Martha*

A “Credentialed” Director of Religious Education



Dear First UU folks,

I am pleased to tell you that I have decided to enter a special, structured program for my professional development as a Unitarian Universalist religious educator. I seek to become a “Master Level Credentialed Religious Educator,” and will be submitting my application to this program, this month.

In my professional field, leaders have worked with dedication and vision for decades, to raise the bar of professionalism and excellence. Professional development programming for DREs has progressively grown in quality, breadth and structure. This has benefitted those of us doing the work; it has fostered higher quality in UU religious education programs; and it has increased our esteem in the eyes of our congregants, lay leaders, and ministerial colleagues.

The UU Credentialing Program has been in place for 5-10 years now. There are three levels, and I aspire to the Master Level, the highest of the three. Outside my hours as your DRE, I will work towards becoming credentialed for probably 2-3 years, for several hours a week, and with the support of a DRE-Mentor. Gradually, through showing what I have already learned; and by reading many books; attending more trainings; and by probably taking a couple more graduate-level courses – I will demonstrate Master Level proficiency in 16 areas of competency.

Becoming credentialed is an offering of commitment to this congregation, and to our Unitarian Universalist faith. It is also a gift and challenge to myself. It will provide the structure both to enhance my strengths and strengthen my weaker areas. I will be able to serve First UU more fully, as well as our region and denomination. Too, it will serve me on my professional path, wherever that may lead. Let me be clear that I intend to be both contented and challenged in my role at First UU for years to come!

There are at least a couple things I love about this work: 1) It requires a *really* broad range of skills. Room for improvement is endless! 2) I get to be creative about how I approach the work, and in a collegial team I can bring out my strongest passions and talents.

I am eager and excited to begin the credentialing process. I look forward to sharing periodic updates with you, and to receiving your support for me on this professional journey. You can find more information online at:

<http://www.uua.org/careers/re/index.shtml>.

Martha Dallas, Director of Religious Education

FUUSB Stewardship by Kristin Kany

Our UU faith means the world to me, as does our congregation especially. The inherent values of Unitarian Universalism make my heart sing, particularly when our beliefs and actions are congruent. I love the principles of our faith; I love our meeting house; I love our focused energy on creating Goodness in the world and in our own community. In realizing the depth of my attachment to all this in the past few years, I decided to devote myself to becoming actively involved in and around our meeting house. Fundraising and Membership were the two areas I felt were key in providing a platform to create a more lovingly intentional society. I hoped my involvement in these areas could assist in enabling our UU community to become more alive on many fronts, especially in giving members the opportunity to feel appreciated and essential. The fundraising was simply a vehicle for us to provide the dollars necessary to make all the Grace happen.

This past fall, I was asked to consider the co-chair position of our Stewardship Committee. After a deliberate reflection on whether or not I could devote the necessary energy to this important post, I told Bill West I would be honored to accept his request.

To me, the Stewardship Committee represents yet another means to exhibit the best of who we are. I view Stewardship essentially as an engagement process with on-going community-building opportunities. Recently, I have arrived at the place where I know, definitively, that money, like anything, can bring Goodness to our world. I believe that our FUUSB is filled to the brim with generalized benevolence-- our members, our friends of the church, our children, our guiding principles, our values, our faith -- I am often profoundly moved by both subtle and overt manifestations of these expressions of kindness and generosity. Abundance in all its forms is indeed here and everywhere around the universe. And so, I felt it was time to translate all my feelings into action in order to help further ourselves even more.

I believe that we, as a congregation, have and can continue to accomplish even more wonderful things together. Stewardship in the general sense, and in dollars too, can be an instrumental avenue in that quest.

Last year financial contributions shrank, possibly related to the confusing year we experienced together. For varied and personal reasons, some of our own chose not to contribute. My hope is to get folks back into the mindset that we, as a community, as with any living entity, have, are, and will continue to mature and grow. Our participation on many fronts will reflect that. This year, may we climb back on board together, utilize our collective spiritual oomph and contribute financially, energetically, positively, and from the heart in order to boost us all forward.

The chaos of the globe is calling out to groups like us. We can help lead it to that place we all hope for. Please join me in going there; together, let's reignite our connections and nurture ourselves in the process. It can be fun and extremely fulfilling.

The Stewardship Committee for 2011-2012 is comprised of John Byer, Louis deRosset, Barry Finkelstein, Woody Fulton, Stephen Rainville, Ken Swearingen, Bill West, Daniel Wilds with Debby Bergh and myself, Kristin Kany, as co-chairs. We welcome all members and friends who wish to participate and help in any way. Starting in December, we will have many time-framed specific tasks available for any who wish involvement, including:

- Talent/Variety Show
- Website/Social Media Updates
- Brochure/Communications
- Visiting Stewards
- Small Event Hosts

In the Cherokee culture, the word for "bead" and the word for "money" are the same, inferring that beauty and money are intimately intertwined. I feel grateful and honored to serve and work side by side all of you in all our Beauty. Should you have any questions or suggestions, please contact Debby Bergh or me at kriskany@yahoo.com or debbergh@comcast.net.



Getting The Word Out

As many of you know, we are no longer putting the calendar in the newsletter. So how do people find out just what is going on around here??? For those of you who have an email address, you are getting the Enews Blast every Thursday afternoon. The Enews Blast is a weekly publication that focuses on events. It gives the details of all the many, many things that are going on at the First UU Society.

But we want everyone to know what's going on, not just people with an email address. So here is the plan: If you do not have an email address, you can pick up your Enews Blast at church on Sunday morning. There will be a color copy of the Enews Blast on the bulletin board for anyone to look at. However, if you would like your own copy to take home, just let me know and I will show you how to get your own copy by pushing just 3 buttons on the copy machine. Once you're taught how to print your copy, you can just do it on your own every Sunday.

I promise, it really is easy! I look forward to teaching you how to do it!

Christina Fulton



Christmas Breakfast Thoughts

A UU minister in New England says in part : 'This is very close to what Unitarian Universalism means to me. This is what a Unitarian Universalist does with Christmas, does at Christmas. We sing. We light candles. We hope for a better world. "If we cannot believe in God as a noun," Frederick Buechner says, "maybe we can still believe in God as a verb." '!



Many UU's are ambivalent about Christmas-"it's not my faith tradition...my family was always stressed out at the holidays...it's too commercial...all that peace and hope and then it's a big letdown in January..." Whatever your reason, you may find that the approaching holidays are a mixed bag of high expectations, small wonders, stress and ambivalence.

Sixteen years ago a group of UU women were brainstorming over many cups of tea and a plate of cookies: how could we as UU's make a difference to Burlington's holiday scene. It seemed like such a big agenda but we each left thinking about what small thing we could each pull off. And thus was born the UU annual Christmas breakfast.

And so on Christmas morning FUUUSB throws open its doors and our community room is filled with the sounds of Christmas as a verb. Of UU 's offering their neighbors and themselves radical hospitality. This event is not only a gift we give to folks living alone, to our Meetinghouse neighbors, to people with no housing...it is also a gift we give ourselves, the chance to gather together, to eat a simple breakfast, have coffee with someone we've never talked to before (even someone from our own Society). This is a wonderful way to spend Christmas morning with your family, make it a tradition. As a pagan, a UU, and the wife of a Buddhist- leaning UU, no one could classify our home as Christian; but as a pagan and the mother of two, I can't resist the hope of a mother and child, the brightness of a star or a fire and the chance to honor and live the interdependence of all existence and compassion in human relations.

Please join us, the Breakfast is like a family meal, plenty to do but many UUs make for light work, so come and eat, pour coffee, try making a strata, live in the moment. Try Christmas as a verb! Follow the Enews Blast for details.

Lynn Douglas



RE Brainstorm Feedback from Spring 2010

Our RE program has been faced with chronic teacher shortages year in and year out, for many years. Therefore, those who did volunteer to step in as teachers ended up giving far more than their "fair share" of time, and this led to teacher burn-out. In March, the RE Committee hosted a Brainstorming Dinner to get input on key questions to help us solve this ongoing issue. Questions such as: what keeps people from volunteering in our RE program?; Why don't more people without children in RE volunteer to teach?; and How do you turn someone who has never taught (and is afraid to) into someone who's a seasoned pro?

There was a good turnout and we received good feedback. Some ideas were not yet actionable, due to money constraints (such as paying teachers a stipend, or buying a van for field trips and service projects). However, the RE Committee has been hard at work on innovations gleaned from the feedback we received that night. We are focusing on 4 **Key Actions** for this year:

1. We are building a **mentoring program** for newer teachers. Some details and "job descriptions" have been developed, and the sub-committee is now working on how to match up and keep track of mentors and mentees. Additional input and help would be welcome!
2. The **teacher communication** form (in the classroom binders) has been updated and streamlined. Martha will check the binders each Sunday to see if anyone has requested contact regarding a question or concern. Our goal is to initiate contact with anyone who has requested it by Sunday evening. Please give us your feedback on how this new system is working!
3. Two **Fresh Sundays** will be offered this year. These will provide multi-generational opportunities to connect the "upstairs" and "downstairs" worlds. We are teaming with the Social Action Committee and will focus on hunger issues in November and restorative justice issues in February. We are hoping to expand these opportunities in the coming years!
4. We will be "hosting" 3 or 4 **potlucks** this year ~ just for connections, relationships and fun!!

Please feel free to talk to Martha, or any of the RE Committee members to request more information about, offer feedback on, or volunteer to help out with any of our **Key Actions** for this year! Your RE Committee members are: Suzie DeBrosse, Sarah Forbes, Todd Clason, Cheryl Herrick, Sharon Leach, Julia Paradiso, Peggy Owen, and Jennifer Callahan.



Save the date!

On Sunday, January 22nd from 12:30-2:00pm, there will be a Minister's Forum: Creating a Culture of Generosity During Hard Economic Times. Barry Finkelstein will facilitate a means to access our personal and/or congregational ability to transform that which we love into a vitality that is engaged, expanded, enduring, and vital.



Core Staff Covenant

Over the past few months your core staff has created a covenant of right relations. We started out talking about how to enter into an intentional working relationship that recognizes our individual needs to be autonomous, to be respected, to feel a sense of belonging, to feel cared for, to care for others, and to be effective in our jobs. We asked ourselves what we would need to promise to each other in order to be a healthy staff team. Out of those answers our covenant emerged. This is, in the words of Rev. Kenn Hurto, “an imperfect statement of unenforceable rules of conduct” that we all embrace. We (Rev. Roberta Finkelstein, Martha Dallas, Christina Fulton, David McFeeters, and Kathleen Kemp) share this, our covenant, in the spirit of collegiality.

“We acknowledge that together we are living and working through a time of transition and change and cannot know exactly what the future of FUUSB will be like. We hope to navigate this transition in the spirit of openness – in the mystery there are unknown possibilities. We recognize that creativity and flexibility will serve us well in this time of change. At times we hope to be playful in trying out new ideas. We give each other permission to take creative risks, knowing that not all of our ideas will work out.

We acknowledge that we are all unique persons with particular gifts and talents, limitations, and ways of working. We commit to learning about each other and celebrating our differences. We will support each other in our different working styles. We further acknowledge that we all have areas of expertise and will defer to each other rather than all trying to be generalists in every situation.

We promise to bring our best selves to our work together. We will strive to be kind and respectful to each other. We will be honest and speak directly to each other, even when it is hard to do that. We will stay in relationship. We will ask each other for help and support when we need it.

We recognize that there will be times when we fall short of these ideals. We will be accountable to each other, and forgiving of each other.”



Financial Assistance Available

Did you know that the Society has two funds from which we can provide small amounts of financial assistance to those in need?

The Church Family Fund is used to help members of the First UU Society of Burlington. Contact Rev. Roberta for information about obtaining either an open-ended loan or grant to help you over a rough financial patch.

The Discretionary Fund can be used to provide assistance to members of the community. Rev. Roberta usually asks that requests be made through a social service agency, and that payments be made directly to utilities, pharmacies, or other organizations. Rev. Roberta has already responded to several requests for assistance with preventing utility shut-offs, and we can only imagine that as winter progresses the requests will increase.

Assistance from both of these funds comes in the form of a check; we do not distribute cash assistance.



Introducing the Interim Task Collaboration Team

An interim minister brings a consultant's approach and a consultant's skills to the work of intentional transition ministry. Interim ministers need access to the congregation's history and culture that will make that ministry as effective as possible. One way the congregation provides that assistance is by appointing a team of people to work with the interim minister. Recently the board appointed an Interim Task Collaboration Team. These five people bring a diversity of gifts and perspectives to the Team. Some of them are longtime members widely known and well acquainted with the congregation's history. Others are relatively new, bringing fresh eyes and fresh notions. All are well respected. Their role is to provide the Interim Minister with insight, organizational and facilitative talent, and willing hands as the ministry proceeds. The team will be spending some time in the next month or so learning together about the nature of interim work, and will then put together a plan for assisting our Interim Minister in facilitating the congregation's work on the Five Interim Tasks: Claiming and honoring the congregation's past and healing its griefs and conflicts; illuminating the congregation's unique identity, its strengths, needs and challenges; clarifying the multiple dimensions of leadership, both ordained and lay, and navigating the shifts in leadership that accompany times of transition; renewing connections with available resources within and beyond the UUA; and reviving the congregation's vision, strengthening stewardship, preparing for new professional leadership, and engaging the future with anticipation and zest.

The members of the team are:

Nancy Freeze: I am a retired RN and Nursing Home Administrator, currently working as a Hospice Volunteer. For twenty years I was an advocate for quality care in Vermont nursing homes, often working with regulatory agencies. I was raised Wesleyan Methodist, but happily discovered the Montpelier Unitarian Church in 1973. I joined our FUUSB in March, and am ready to participate in our journey towards a renewed and rejuvenated community.

Tracy Titchner: Tracy and her husband Jim Lawson have been attending FUUSB since 1997. Tracy is active in the Joyful Parenting Small Group Ministry and teaches Religious Education. Their twin daughters Kira and Amelia are in the first grade.

Tom Porter: Tom has been an active member of the FUUSB since 1988. He previously served on the Board as a Trustee-at-Large, on the Stewardship Committee, and as a Religious Education teacher for many years. He presently is on the Planned Giving Committee.

Jim Palmer: Jim Palmer taught environmental studies and landscape architecture for 26 years in Syracuse, NY. Now he has a landscape architecture practice here in Burlington, specializing in evaluating the scenic impacts of major development projects. He was raised in the Episcopal Church, but was unable to sustain his faith in a Christian creed. In contrast his beliefs resonated with the UU Principals. As a member of FUUSB for over a decade, he has served as a Religious Education Steward and served on the Personnel and By-laws Committees.

Paula Fives: Paula Fives-Taylor – retired Professor of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics at UVM School of Medicine where I researched mechanisms of bacterial adhesion as a way of preventing disease as well as taught medical, graduate and undergraduate students about infectious diseases. I have been a hospice volunteer for many years. I was in the convent for 16 years and after leaving, spent many years looking for a place whose values aligned with mine. I joined FUUSB last spring. Even though I was new to UU, I wanted to be on the task force, as I have a deep commitment to community and spirituality. I believe, as Rev. Roberta reminded us, that revelation is continuous, that all of us are called to worship and work together. I want to be part of helping our congregation find the ways to create a more caring community which would lead to a more caring world.



**First Unitarian Universalist
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

December Worship Calendar

Sunday December 4th @ 9 am and 11 am *“Advent 1: Finding Faith”* Rev. Roberta will use the writings of contemporary spiritual commentator Anne Lamott to explore the meaning of faith for Unitarian Universalists. We will welcome our newest members at both services.

Wednesday December 7th @ 5 pm *Silent Meditation, 5:30 pm Reflections: Memories/Elders*

Sunday December 11th @ 9 am and 11 am *“Advent 2: Finding Hope”* The poetry of Robert Frost will take us into an exploration of how we Unitarian Universalists can find hope.

Wednesday December 14th @ 5pm *Silent Meditation, 5:30 pm Reflections: Evergreens*

Sunday December 18th @ 9 am and 11 am *“This I Believe”* is an annual service organized by the worship committee. We invite individuals from our society to share their spiritual and life journeys thus far. Join us as we celebrate the inherent worth and dignity of our participants, and each other.

Wednesday December 21st @ 5pm Reflections: *Solstice*

Saturday December 24th Christmas Eve services

4 pm Family Service In this Family Service, through singing and story, we will gather 'round the innocent, unexpected light that Christmas Eve brings. Martha Dallas will lead, with Rev. Roberta Finkelstein participating. The Children's Choir will sing.

6 pm and 8 pm *“Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols”* Music, readings, and reflections on the ancient story of Christmas with a uniquely UU perspective. The service will conclude with a traditional candle-lighting ritual.

Sunday December 25th ONE SERVICE AT 10 AM. *“Tis the Season”* Following the traditional Christmas Day breakfast we will gather in the sanctuary to sing carols and share Christmas thoughts and memories. As Christmas Day falls in the middle of Hanukkah, we will also have a menorah lighting ceremony.

Wednesday December 28th @ 5 pm *Silent Meditation, 5:30 pm Reflections: Hanukkah*

Sunday January 1, 2012 ONE SERVICE AT 10 AM *“Coffin and Cradle”* Rev. Roberta will lead a participatory New Year's ritual in which you will be able to place in a coffin symbols of that which you wish to let go of, and in the cradle symbols of that which you hope to give birth to in the new year.

