

## Possibility

By Rev. Heather Janules

“Life is short, though I keep this from my children.”

Poet Maggie Smith begins her poem “Good Bones” with this succinct and powerful line. So much in human experience is difficult. And it is natural to want to shield the young from life’s difficulties, to protect their innocence...and ours as well.

Smith’s poem was one of the readings the local interfaith clergy considered when planning the vigil in the wake of the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue. While, in the end, it was one of the many good pieces set aside, it resonated with many of us as we grappled with what seemed like an impossible task.

The task before us was to symbolically reclaim sacred space by gathering in a Jewish house of worship, less than a week after another synagogue was defiled by violence and hatred. The task before us was to assure people of all ages that they are safe. The task before us was to proclaim there is hope. There is a path forward. We are not alone. After such a devastating attack on the Jewish community, in the midst of other senseless shootings and disturbing news from across the nation, it would be easy to appear dishonest or naïve in affirming such goodness in life.

“The world is at least fifty percent terrible, and that’s a conservative estimate, though I keep this from my children,” Smith continues. “I am trying to sell them the world.”

Maggie Smith’s poem speaks to me as she finds a way to speak both honestly and positively about the nature of things. Smith uses a metaphor from real estate: “Any decent realtor...chirps on about good bones: This place could be beautiful, right? You could make this place beautiful.” Maggie Smith does not turn away from the terrible but speaks of possibility.



Photo by Heather Janules

Possibility – the theme for January – is perhaps the more secular cousin of faith. We can believe in what is possible even though

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# Mystery & Music Sunday

By John Kramer, Music Director

Throughout the month of December our worship services will be exploring the topic of Mystery. This will be a particular focus for Music Sunday, which occurs Sunday, December 9th. We are looking forward to presenting a number of beautiful and powerful pieces of music that explore this topic.

Religion at times has been seen as an explanation of mystery, but often I think we find religion to be mysterious too. This is certainly true of two religious festivals that occur in December, Hanukkah and Christmas. The mystery in Hanukkah involves the miracle of the oil, which is only supposed to last one day, and instead lasts eight. When the Jews reclaimed the Temple in Jerusalem following war with the Greeks, they needed to purify it "from the dead bodies and the defilement." They are only able to find one bowl of pure olive oil, enough to last a single day, not the necessary eight days for the purification ritual. But God put his blessing on the oil so that it lasted eight days, and this has been celebrated through the lighting of candles ever since. The Maccabean revolt that preceded these events occurred because King Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Greek outlawed Judaism, took over the temple and erected an altar of Zeus there. So when the Temple was reclaimed, it was vital that it be rededicated and the miracle of the oil essential to the free exercise of the Jewish faith.



Music Sunday, December 2017

women's choir and the *Hallelujah, Amen* from G.F. Handel's oratorio *Judas Maccabeus*.

The celebration of Christmas involves several mysteries: the immaculate conception of Mary, the wise men who are able to follow the star to the birth place, the "King of Kings" born in a lowly manger stall with animals. The choir will explore yet another mystery through the 16th century motet *Mirabile Mysterium* by the composer Jacob Handl (also known as Jacobus Gallus). This deep and rich work sets a Latin text that explores the mystery of the divine mixing with the human, a fascinating topic to explore. Some believe that God and humankind are wholly separate; others believe that the divine is in everything, so certainly in humanity; still others declare there is no God, only humankind. Wherever you are on this spectrum, I know that when you hear *Mirabile Mysterium* you will find that Handl truly invokes the mystery of this text in his music.

*A wondrous mystery is declared today,  
an innovation is made upon nature; God is made man;  
that which he was, he remains,  
and that which he was not, he takes on,  
suffering neither commixture nor division.*

Another mystery to be explored on Music Sunday on December 9th involves the mystery of music and its power over us. Composer Craig Hella Johnson sets writings by



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Our Youth Choir will be opening the service with a delightful song called *Candlelight*, by the Maccabeats. It tells the historical story of Hanukkah and delights in many of the traditions of Hanukkah such as the dreidel and latkes. Also celebrating Hanukkah is a Candle Blessing song for



Rabindranath Tagore, which explore this question and several others, in his exquisite piece *Gitanjali Chants*.

*Ever in my life have I sought thee with my songs.  
It was they who led me from door to door,  
and with them have I felt about me,  
searching and touching my world.  
It was my songs that taught me all the lessons I ever  
learnt;  
they showed me secret paths,  
they brought before my sight many a star on the horizons  
of my heart.  
They guided me all the day long to the mysteries of the  
country of pleasure and pain,  
and at last to what palace gate have they brought me at  
the end of my journey?*

*You came down from your throne and stood at my  
cottage door.  
I was singing all alone in a corner, and the melody caught  
your ear.*

*You came down and stood at my cottage door.*

*Masters are many in your hall, and songs are sung there  
at all hours.  
But the simple carol of this novice struck at your love.  
One plaintive little strain mingled with the great music of  
the world,  
and with a flow'r for a prize;  
You came down and stopped at my cottage door.*

Mysteries abound in life, faith, and music. Let's explore them together. ▫

## WUSYG Service Trip 2019: Ferry Beach

WUSYGers (teens in the Winchester Unitarian Society Youth Group) will be spending their April vacations this year at [Ferry Beach](#), a UU Retreat Center in Saco, Maine. The coastline in Saco is eroding, so April is a great time to assess and repair the natural dune system along the beaches, get rid of any

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washed-up winter storm debris, and put the beach access walkways back together. They will also help with dune restoration and planting activities.

All of their service work will be related to climate change realities that are destroying this important part of the environment and local ecosystem. We will be supplementing our programming by engaging in experiential learning opportunities focused on climate justice. Using the frame of climate justice, we will study how climate change disproportionately affects marginalized communities and intersects with economic and racial justice. Our teens chose climate justice as their #1 justice issue to focus on this year, so we are thrilled to have found somewhere that they can both learn about climate justice and also provide meaningful manual labor in order to serve the environment, too. ▫



Above: Ferry Beach. Below: Ferry Beach lodging.



## 2018-19 Concert Series

Our annual concert series, "Music in the Sanctuary," is in its 13<sup>th</sup> season! Join us for the next two events in the series.



### **Jazz in the Sanctuary** **Friday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 8pm**

*Fairy Tales* is the theme this year, as we bring together some of Boston's best jazz musicians for an enchanting evening of jazz standards, including "Alice in Wonderland," "Someday My Prince Will Come," "Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum," and many more.

### **Folk Musician Tracy Grammer** **Friday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 8pm**

Celebrating the release of her new album *Low Tide*, singer-songwriter Tracy Grammer brings her springwater-clear alto, inspired guitar playing, and gifted storytelling to our sanctuary. Of Grammer, Joan Baez has said: "Tracy Grammer is a brilliant artist and unique individual. Her voice is distinctive, as is her mastery over the instruments she plays."



"Music in the Sanctuary" concerts are made possible by your generous contributions.

Sponsorships are still available at the following levels:

Sponsors \$125

Forte Sponsors \$200

Fortissimo Sponsors \$300

**Tickets for all events will be available at the door (adults \$25/seniors \$15/students \$5).**

## Possibility continued from p1

we cannot see it in our own time, in our current world.

How could civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. do their work without a compelling vision of what is possible? In the times when we feel like “the world is at least fifty percent terrible, and that’s a conservative estimate,”

Indeed,  
we could  
make  
this place  
beautiful.

how do we keep going? By looking for what is possible.

Indeed, we could make this place beautiful. In our hard moments, I pray that we remember that life itself has “good bones.” I pray that, in January and beyond, we strengthen our ways of seeing what can be created on the founding architecture of our lives. ▫

## The Immigrant Experience

A Concert for Justice



On Sunday, November 18th, about 130 singers from nine different Unitarian Universalist congregations in the Boston area came together to perform John Kramer’s cantata *The Immigrant Experience* as part of a concert for immigration justice. Soloists included WUS choir members Peter McEntee and Tyson Kamikawa as well as Brendan Buckley and Kirsten Hart. Kirsten performed two songs by Henry Mollicone which told stories of immigrant women. The performance raised over \$13,000 for BIJAN, Boston Immigrant Justice Accompaniment Network (<https://beyondbondboston.org/>), which works for legal aid and bond relief for immigrants detained in prison. ▫



Image courtesy of Pixabay

## We’re Going on a Journey

By Rebecca Kelley-Morgan  
Director of Lifespan Religious Education

At about the time this Mystic Messenger is published, I will have departed for my sabbatical season. I am beginning my time away on December 1<sup>st</sup> and will return after five months, on May 1<sup>st</sup>. It has been a breathless, down-to-the-wire fall as the congregation and I sorted who and what would be in place when I leave to provide oversight and support to the religious education programs for children in my absence. Things appear to be settled, with temporary coverage and support for Sunday morning programming provided by Terry Currier. The rest of the

worship team has matters in hand, with Heather and others leading Family Worship and the parts of the 10:30 service that I have led or supported until now. The Our Whole Lives program is underway, with Heather and Marianne both training as OWL leaders (along with Ryan Levering) in January 2019. Between these three, and those who have led the program in years past, there are many who are equipped to problem-solve with the current facilitation team. The Growth and Learning Committee will have access to Marianne and/or Heather as schedules and hours permit.

Although one thinks of the sabbatical as time away for the professional, it is also a growth season for the congregation. You may uncover and hone skills and capacities that would never have been called forth if not for my absence.

I have also made plans for my time away. I have a book on family worship languishing on several hard drives to add to the body of work being developed for family ministry as the world of Religious Education shifts. That will be my project while my spouse recovers from orthopedic



# Trust

By Rebecca Kelley-Morgan  
Director of Lifespan Religious Education

I am an avid reader of political analysis, and one of the current tropes is to question the future of institutions that only function because people believe in them. That can also be said of the faith community. Each of us can probably point to an example of a religious institution which has lost credibility when it failed to keep its promises or live up to its ideals. Trust and faith are close cousins: in our context, faith speaks to religious belief and the ineffable; trust is the belief in each other and the institutions we construct. If faith is the belief in things hoped for and unknown, trust is the capacity to have confidence in each other and the unfolding "is," "now," and "shall be." For humanists, the two may be indistinguishable, and I would suggest that the way we put aside prior experiences to engage and re-engage IS an act of faith.

Why do couples come back together after a period of conflict? Or children lovingly care for parents who were less than perfect? Or why do we vote year after year when our candidates or party lose? Why do people remain with or return to an institution that has disappointed them? I am deeply concerned about the state of democracy both in this country and around the world, but I am not willing to disengage, because I believe the ideals and the values will overcome flawed individuals and structures. I am deeply concerned about the future of Unitarian Universalism and other liberal faiths. But even with the tilt toward conservative demagoguery and fewer people engaging with religion, I am not willing to give up on the idea that liberal faith communities can build strong ties in the present and inform the future for the better. I have decided to trust that our faith matters. And I will continue to act on that belief, beyond my personal experience, beyond the analysis, beyond the experiences of others, beyond all reason.

**I have decided to trust that our faith matters.**

Trusting beyond all reason does *not* mean accepting an untenable situation. I think of the Charlie Brown comic,

and the perennial football game that Lucy and Charlie Brown play. Lucy holds the ball and at the very last minute, she pulls it aside so that the kick rebounds on its originator. I recall a young Rebecca hoping that Charlie would one day get his kick. I also recall hoping that he would walk away and leave Lucy without a partner in this ongoing game of disappointed expectations.

Perhaps repeated disappointment calls for a different kind of trust. A decision to trust in yourself. A decision to create appropriate boundaries and walk away. Or a decision to create appropriate boundaries and insist they be honored. Or trust that uncertain outcomes should not prevent one from taking action.



Image courtesy of Pixabay

The more time we spend with other humans, whether as individuals or as institutions, the more likely our expectations will fall short of the reality before us. Trust is a decision. And I ask myself, and all of us: is believing in the trustworthiness of an individual, an institution, or an entire society after betrayal and disappointments, an act of faith or just naiveté? I don't know. But we are not in the business of evaluation. We are in the business of values. And religion and and community. So I suggest we practice trust, especially when it's challenging.

It's easy to trust in people and events and institutions that we are in control of. Or that we know very well. But introduce a variable or unknown and what happens then? Do we race around trying to exert control? Do we wish for a better outcome than the one we get? Do we become angry and resentful because "trust" has been violated? I suggest that trust does not demand the presence of the trustworthy; rather, trust exists in the presence of the trusting.

Trust yourself. Trust your gut. Trust your capacity for gratitude, hope and forgiveness. Because given the alternative of living a guarded, closed-hearted life, I'd rather we risked trust.

*"All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."*

—Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love* ◻

## We're Going on a Journey *continued from p5*

surgery. Once he's cleared for travel, we will be away in "Gulliver," the built-out van that will be our tiny home on wheels for several months as I look for the how and why of faith communities as they morph and change via visits to social service agencies, faith communities and unique and growing ministries. In addition to those visits there will be time to hike, seek out the sun, avoid the snow, and breathe deeply.

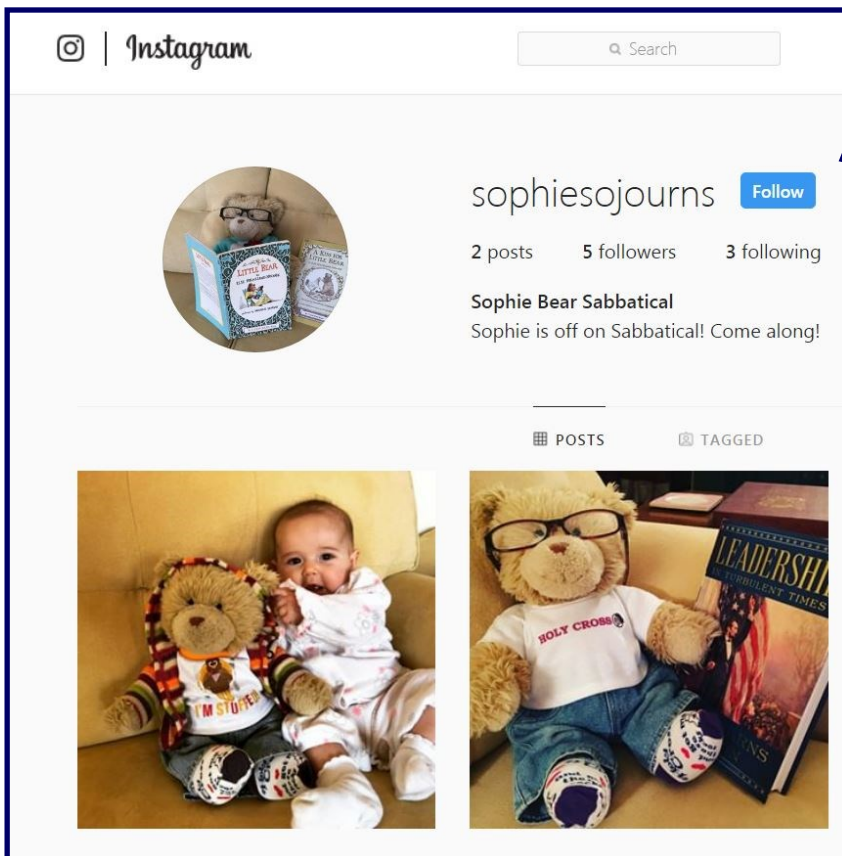
And here we have it. Plans for the upcoming five months, for me and you.

As I write these words, it sounds solid – doesn't it? – AND as I write these words, I do so with the absolute certainty that something none of us could foresee will come up. It might be something that impacts my personal plans or it

might be something that affects Winchester Unitarian Society. It might be a small internal matter, or it might be something that will reshape us for years to come. And that is why I am holding my plans lightly, and why I encourage you to do the same. Even after many years on earth, I've never been able to predict the future, nor do I wish to. Each day is its own gift and its own challenge, and I remind myself daily of that with the mantra spoken during my morning yoga practice of Saucha, the practice of outer inner purity. I invite you to join me in the sentiment of that intention as we begin the sabbatical journey:

*I am breathing, I am willing, I am open.  
To step out into the unknown. ▫*

**Although one thinks of the sabbatical  
as time away  
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it is also a growth season  
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*Follow the journey!*

If you'd like to have a peek at what's up during my sabbatical, I just found out that I will be accompanied by Sophie Bear. In a delightful confluence of our calendars, she is also taking sabbatical at the same time and has agreed to co-author the book on family worship and join me in my travels. Sophie will be documenting these five months on Instagram, if you want to stop by: <https://www.instagram.com/sophiesojoirns/>

—Rebecca



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**Grief, Loss & Transitions Group**

For many years, WUS has sponsored a Grief Support Group. The current leaders of the group – Lee Barton, John Loewy and Heather Janules – invite those coping with grief and those dealing with concerns beyond bereavement, such as transitions and uncertainty, to participate in this safe and confidential circle.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesdays in  
 December, January, February**  
 Dec 12 • Jan 9 • Feb 13  
**4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays in March, April, May**  
 Mar 28 • Apr 25 • May 23  
**7:30-9 pm**

Parlor, Winchester Unitarian Society  
 478 Main St, Winchester  
**Open to all • No RSVP needed**



**Family & Caregiver Support Group**

Is a loved one suffering from a diagnosed or undiagnosed mental illness? Come to this monthly drop-in group for family members, caregivers, and loved ones of individuals living with mental illness, providing a safe and confidential setting for mutual support and the sharing of resources. Led by Maria Shepherd and Maury Wood, trained by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

**Winter Dates:**  
**December 11th, January 8<sup>th</sup>, February 12th**  
**6:45-8:45 pm**  
 Michelsen Room, Winchester Unitarian Society  
 478 Main St, Winchester