

December 5, 2021



A Publication of the Winchester Unitarian Society

The Mystic Messenger

www.winchesteruu.org 478 Main St Winchester MA 01890

December's Theme is

Opening to Joy

By The Rev. Heather Janules,
Parish Minister



"It's the most wonderful time of the year..." If you haven't heard this sung to you as you shop for groceries or run errands yet, it's only a matter of time.

It seems like "the holidays" are coming earlier and earlier, not necessarily on the calendar but in the stores. I am sure I am not alone in wondering why there are boxes of Christmas tree lights for sale next to the Halloween candy. In pursuit of a seasonal sale, retailers stretch the boundaries of the "most wonderful time." To me this only makes December less unique, less beautiful. Less wonderful.

My negative reaction to the impending arrival of the December holidays tells me I have my guard up. Defen-

siveness does not help us connect with what this "most wonderful time" can offer – gathering with beloved friends and family and celebrating the coming light, miracle, mystery and new life. Joy.

December's theme is "Opening to Joy." This suggests a spiritual opportunity, not a spiritual promise. This coming December and holiday season may indeed be "the most wonderful time" but I have lived long enough to know that joy is not inherent or guaranteed. For me, the "holiday spirit" is sort of like grace, something that arrives seemingly unbidden, something that changes us for the better.

As we approach "the holidays," I am holding on to the understanding that my experience of December is uncertain. While we cannot buy "the holiday spirit" I also know that keeping an open mind and heart makes it more likely that joy is possible.

This might require a little effort on my part. To be honest, I find setting up the Christmas tree to be a big hassle. Most

(Continued on page 7)

Inside this issue:

- Opening to Joy | 1
- Living with Intention | 2
- The Bell Tower Terrace | 4
- Widening the Circle | 5
- My Coming Sabbatical | 6
- Holiday Schedule 2021 | 8

January's Theme is Living With Intention

By Sam Wilson, Interim Coordinator of Religious Education and Director of Youth Ministries

Sam.wilson@winchesteruu.org

In many ways living with intention is the ultimate goal of Religious Education. How can we learn to live our lives in a way that honors our faith, ourselves, and each other? How can we learn to live our lives in a way that moves our world a bit closer toward what we want it to be? Instead of simply thinking about things like spirituality, social justice, equity, God, etc., what can we each actually do on a day-to-day basis to link ourselves and our lives with the things that matter to us?



Here's a picture that I came across when I was searching for some inspiration for this article. (For screen readers, it says "Live with intention. Walk to the edge. Listen hard. Practice wellness. Play with

abandon. Laugh. Choose with no regret. Continue to learn. Appreciate your friends. Do what you love. Live as if this is all there is." - Mary Anne Radmacher). It's effectively a list of 10 things that the author suggests we do in order to live with intention. I have to admit, when I first read it, I wasn't particularly inspired, and didn't immediately save it to use for anything. If I were to really think hard about how I wanted to live my life with intention, only a few things on their list really resonate with me. How about you? In fact, if you're reading this, I challenge you to stop - yes, you! - and write your own list of 10 things. Take time and really think about what those 10 things would be for you. Go, live with intention and switch things up, stop reading this and make your list now; the rest of this article will still be here when you're done.

Now that you've written your list and come back to this article (though perhaps I lost a few of you who realized you no longer had time to squander and are off being more intentional about how you spend your time today; that's okay for them too!) I would ask you to consider where your Unitarian Universalist values fit into this list. If you do not see them represented somehow on your list, perhaps add 1 or 2 more

things to it. If you feel so moved (and wouldn't mind), send me your lists! I would love to see them and draw inspiration from our beloved community for how best to live with intention (and in turn perhaps pass some of this wisdom onto our youngest).

If you struggled coming up with 10 actual things that you can do, or, if you'd otherwise be open to adding some more to your list, here are a couple of ideas inspired by what we've been doing in our Outdoor K-7 Religious Education (RE) lately. One of the ways that we've been encouraging our children and youth to live with intention this month is to channel generosity in this season of gratitude by participating in the Guest At Your Table (GAYT) program. If we are intentional about thinking through all of the things that we are grateful for, many of us, especially as Unitarian Universalists, feel called to generosity so that more people in the world may experience all of the things that we have and are grateful for.

An excellent way to do this is through GAYT, a program that supports the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, which in turn supports grassroots organizations that are aligned with UU values and fighting for human rights

(Continued on page 3)

Living With Intention

(Continued from page 2)



around the world. If you did not get a box to collect donations at worship last week, you can download the template at UUSC.org/guest which is where you can also find out lots more information about this program and whom it serves (I would encourage everyone to also go there to learn more about the guests, especially parents so that you can intentionally talk about this with your children and encourage them to help out throughout the month). The “guests” are 4 people who are leading some of UUSC’s partner organizations, though the name of the program has various symbolic meanings: some people use it as an opportunity to talk about UUism and living our values, and ask their actual guests to contribute who are joining them for the holidays; others imagine that they have invited one of the “guests” to their table for the week or month, and think about the cost of adding one more plate to the

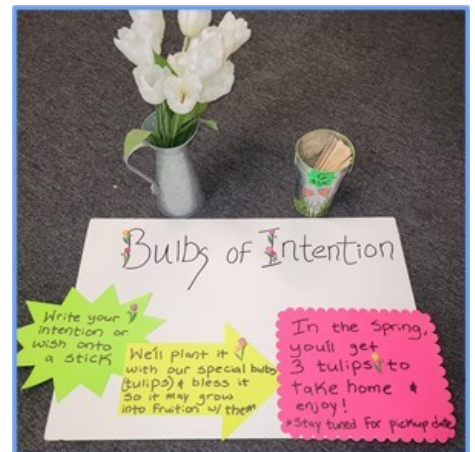
dinner table.

Children in Outdoor RE and youth in WUSYG made their own boxes last Sunday and are encouraged to add change to them throughout the holiday season, too. Adults reading this can make their own boxes or simply send in a check to me at WUS, made out to UUSC. I will be collecting back the boxes and/or checks on January 2nd and 9th to send all of our donations to UUSC together (and create and share a tally of how much our congregation contributed). Thank you in advance for your participation!

Another one of the ways that we’ve been talking about living with intention recently with our youngest (that may inspire you as well) has been to think about a wish that you have (and we encouraged them to think not just about wishes for themselves, but wishes for things for other people and for the larger world). Then, once you’ve come up with your wish, what are some things that you might be able to do to help that wish come true? At our recent Fall Fest, some of you purchased “bulbs of intention.” See below for more information about these.

It’s not too late to get in on this if you want to; send me your wish/intention with \$6 and I will write it on one of our big popsicle sticks,

then have RE kids decorate and plant it. Then in the spring, you’ll get 3 tulips! Last Sunday, our K-6 group also each wrote out their own wishes on sticks, and next week they will begin planting all of them as a border around the tulip garden.



I hope that some of these ideas have inspired you to take action toward living your life with more intention, and, perhaps you will post that list-you-created somewhere visible so that it may inspire you each and every day. Don’t forget to send it to me too! Living a life with intention is living the life that Unitarian Universalism calls each of us toward, no matter what age we are or where we are on our own spiritual journeys.

May each of us continue to live with intention each day, and may all of our wishes and intentions be so.

The Bell Tower Terrace and Pathways of Celebration and Remembrance Dedication

The WUS community dedicated our new Terrace and Pathways on November 7th, 2021. Visit the front page of our website to view a recording of this special ceremony (www.winchesteruu.org)



Dr. Frank Virnelli and Julie Khuen on the day of the Dedication

The following is a reflection by Dr. Suzanne Virnelli, a member of the Virnelli family, whose generosity made the Bell Tower Terrace possible. She writes:

It is with great happiness combined also with great sadness that we dedicate the Bell Tower Terrace in memory of my mother, Judith Cochrane Virnelli...Julie Khuen has used this project to transform this very prominent corner of the town and enhance the beauty of our church. Our family is very pleased to be able to support this project and integrate it with the Pastoral Care Com-

mittee's memorial brick paths. We also know that our mother would be very pleased to have her Unitarian Minister grandparents acknowledged on the plaque.

A brief history of how this project came together: Ten years ago, Julie Khuen organized a Landscaping Task Force at the church that included my father and Barbara Keyes. She drew up a wonderful set of plans for landscaping to surround the church buildings. Unfortunately, budget restraints postponed implementation of most of the plans.

In 2016 Dick Spencer asked Julie to design an appropriate memorial for his wife Janet and a beautiful Meditation Garden was built outside the Religious Education office that had long been neglected. It became Heather's "outdoor office" during COVID.

After we lost my mother in 2020, my father and Julie reviewed the original Task Force plans to create a fitting memorial for her. A number of projects were discussed including one that involved a site visit that Julie made to Avalon Gardens in Stony Brook, Long Island to see a highly-regarded labyrinth located there. After the long drive she was unable to see the

labyrinth because the area was closed for reseeding.

They finally decided that the best of the options was to continue the upgrade of landscaping that was part of the Spencer garden so that it would extend along the Mystic Valley Parkway side of the church and include a new terrace at the bell tower entrance. Julie made this a labor of love, working with the Pastoral Care Committee to integrate the memorial brick paths and utilizing many compromises to stay on budget. Julie hired Extreme Landscaping owned by Jamie Lewis, the grandson of one of Judy's close friends, Martha Speers who along with Judy, Barbara Keyes and Ruth Kenerson were former presidents of the Winchester Garden Club.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on May 18, 2021. Jamie's workers did a terrific job under



The Ground is Broken!

(Continued on page 7)

February's Theme is Widening the Circle

The Rev. Janet Parsons is the minister of the Gloucester UU Church. Before entering the ministry, she and her family were active members at WUS. This is an excerpt from her recent Thanksgiving sermon, "Giving Thanks for the Pizzazz," speaking to February's theme of "Widening the Circle."



"The creator loves pizzazz," wrote Annie Dillard. And so it seems, if you walk through our world with your eyes and your ears and your heart open, to hear the variety of sounds and see all the colors and shapes, the variety of people, and languages, and cultures. Life forms emerged and evolved with extravagance, with joy, out of a creating force that some of us call Love.

But so often we forget to give thanks for this. We can walk through our days scarcely notic-

ing: not noticing how the clouds dissipate and reform, how many colors we can see in the ocean water, how many different pollinators are buzzing amid the flowers, how many shades of green we can count when we look at a distant hillside. How can we be grateful if we do not notice?

We can forget to notice. And we can also forget to celebrate all the differences among our fellow humans. For some reason, these differences can too often be threatening. And how can we be grateful if we are afraid of our differences?

I learned the name of a new language yesterday. It's called Kinyarwanda, and it's spoken by some nine or ten million people in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda. And it's spoken by a family here in Gloucester. I could marvel at the fact that there are languages spoken by millions that I have never heard of. But in fact, it turns out that there are some six or seven thousand different languages spoken in the world. How much richer we are for having such diversity. From that starting point, imagine the cultures existing alongside all those languages. The variety of food. The clothing and jewelry, the songs and dances...

...Imagine the world without this texture; both the texture of landscape and of culture. It would be simpler, certainly. There would be less to learn, less to challenge us. But we humans are meant to strive, to respond to callings, to challenges. Here in the 21st century we are challenged and stimulated by the level of connections across cultures, time zones, and continents made possible by travel and by technology. We are challenged by the growing number of people who are not just like us, who are willing to share their stories, to insist that we see and hear them; all the people with the courage to no longer hide in shadows, in closets, in bodies that do not express who they really are. How do we respond? Do we celebrate and enjoy the pizzazz, or do we react in fear and turn away?...

...So let us give thanks for a bounty of people. Let us notice the differences, and respond with compassion and curiosity. Let us celebrate that we live in a part of the world where people, no matter the hurdles we try to place in their paths, try to come anyway. They try to succeed, to stay, and in doing so, lend their own textures to the fabric that is our culture.

My Coming Sabbatical



Dear Friends,

As many of you know, I will be away from the Winchester Unitarian Society beginning January 1, 2022. I return on May 1st. I will be away on a sabbatical, a time apart that was originally planned for last winter. However, the height of the pandemic did not seem like a good time for me to be away so WUS leadership and I compromised with a brief sabbatical of six weeks at that time. As I am currently in my seventh year with WUS, when my 2022 sabbatical concludes, I will have used all of my six months of earned sabbatical time.

There is a long tradition of ministerial sabbaticals. Ministers – and other staff at WUS – earn one month of sabbatical time for every year of service. The purpose of sabbatical is for the religious professional to renew in body, mind

and spirit while also growing in their learning and leadership.

Many have asked about my sabbatical plans. To be honest, the primary objective is to renew after many months of pandemic living and pandemic ministry. Beyond this general but critical goal, I will be attending a continuing education conference on the West Coast in January, offered by the UU Minister's Association. While out west, I will visit some dear friends who live in Oregon. I also plan to use what I might have spent on exotic travel to continue repairing and improving my home. There are many creative projects calling to me, including an autobiographical quilt as I prepare for my 50th birthday in August. And I am considering working with an organization that coaches leaders in different stages in their careers, doing some self-assessment to determine my next chapter of growth. But, as I have been on sabbatical before, I know the true gift is in seeing what emerges with the spaciousness that comes with time away from regular commitments.

As I write this, the Sabbatical Minister Search Committee - Standing Committee Co-Chair Gordy McIntosh, Harris Gibson, Martin Newhouse, Carol Delaney and myself – are actively securing a Sab-

batical Minister to step in during my absence. This person will serve three-quarter time and will focus on pastoral care, worship leadership and will be a resource for staff and committees as needed. As they are not taking on the full responsibilities of Minister, there are things that I usually do that may need to be picked up by others or be set aside for awhile.

While I look forward to this time of renewal, I know I will miss you and being an active part of the WUS community. Should we run into each other in town or at the Pond, feel free to say hello...but let's save discussion of congregational news for another time. Know that the Sabbatical Minister and the Standing Committee Co-Chairs will know how to reach me if there is a significant emergency that warrants "breaking the sabbatical seal."

It is standard practice that members do not contact the minister on sabbatical. While I don't want to be unkind, I cannot respond to messages I receive as, if I respond to one I would need to respond to all. This is what makes sabbatical hard for the one who takes leave.

While my absence will put more stress on a system that has already had its share of stress and adaptation fatigue, sabbatical can

My Coming Sabbatical

also be a time of renewal for congregations. Whoever steps in as minister will offer gifts I do not possess. The community will come to own its ministries in a different way. Change can be stressful but it can also be life-giving.

It has been about twenty years since a WUS minister went on sab-

batical – besides my “practice sabbatical” last year - so some may feel uncertain or uneasy. Yet I have faith in the tradition of sabbaticals and, most importantly, I have tremendous faith in you. I look forward to celebrating the December holidays with you and I look forward to returning in the Spring, to hear what you learned

during sabbatical and for me to share my discoveries.

Until then, may the New Year that will soon come also be a time of renewal and growth for you, as individuals and as a community. As always, you enter 2022 with my best wishes and my love!



Opening to Joy (Cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

years, I don't bother, leaving the tree and decorations in my storage space.

But last year, I set up the tree. I had fun, going through my collection of ornaments, remembering how they came into my life. When it was assembled, the warm glow

brought me so much peace. I was glad I made the effort. It brought me joy.

This moves me to ask: What will you and your family do to welcome “the holiday spirit?” What holiday traditions drain your spirit and what traditions lift you up?

At its best, December is – in the words of a colleague – “when we make the world beautiful for each other.” I hope you find your way to true joy in this “most wonderful time.” I hope you find a way to add to what opens others to peace. These gifts are not on the shelves; they remain within, currently unopened. May all of us become open to what is possible.

The Bell Tower Terrace (Cont.)



Julie's guidance and the result exceeds our family's expectations.

We are very pleased to see the terrace already being utilized!

Artisans from Extreme Landscaping meticulously install the Terrace pieces





Winchester Unitarian Society
 478 Main St Winchester MA 01890
 (781) 729-0949 www.winchesteruu.org

Minister and Staff

The Rev. Heather K. Janules, *Minister*
 heather.janules@winchesteruu.org

John Kramer, *Music Director*
 john.kramer@winchesteruu.org

Sam Wilson, *Director of Youth Ministries & Interim Coordinator of Religious Education*
 sam.wilson@winchesteruu.org

Thomas Slack, *Coordinator of Administration and Communications*
 office@winchesteruu.org

Jenny Goh, *Administrative Assistant*
 jenny@winchesteruu.org

Join us Online for Worship:

<http://www.tinyurl.com/WUSlivestream>

Find us on Facebook!

Holiday Schedule 2021

- December 5th** Walk the Advent Spiral
(4:30-5:30 PM)
- December 12th** A Celebration with
Music and Poetry
(Worship Service)
- December 19th** The “Parking Lot Pageant”
(Worship Service)
- December 21st** Winter Solstice Celebration
(6 PM) and Caroling (starting
around 6:30 PM)
- December 24th** Christmas Eve
 - 4:30 PM** Outdoor, Family-Friendly Carol
Sing Service (No Livestream)
 - 7:00 PM** Candlelight Service in the
Sanctuary (Livestreamed)

**Please complete our short Christmas Eve
Survey before December 15th.**

You can find it here:

www.tinyurl.com/WUSCEveSurvey