

## December's Theme: Mystery

We all know that "the holidays" can be a frenetic, sometimes stressful time. There is the shopping, the cooking, the traveling, the merrymaking. Out of our overwhelm we take advantage of the rich food and abundant drink all around us. Feasting adds to the joy but, in its own way, overindulging also adds to the stress. The Holidays are A Lot. They can be a lot of joy and the very stuff of treasured memories but they can also take a toll.



As we enter December this year, I wonder if it will happen. I wonder if, amid the mental noise of this time, I will have that special feeling. It is a feeling of peace, a feeling of wonder, a sense of connection and joy with friends and strangers alike. It is what some call "the Christmas spirit."

When I "get in the holiday mood," the experience often doesn't last long. And it doesn't happen every year. Like grace, it seems to come by surprise. But there is nothing like this feeling.

This month, people of different cultures and faiths celebrate miraculous, mysterious events. For me - and perhaps for you - there is but one simple mystery. How do we make meaning in this time? How do we navigate the expectations and experiences of December in a way that is more than consumerism and social pressure and fatigue? How do we reclaim the spirituality of this season, whatever we may understand this to be?

You will likely give and receive gifts this December. I hope you receive abundant gifts but gifts you cannot hold or unwrap. For you, I wish you

peace, I wish you wonder, I wish you connection and joy. However these gifts come, perhaps it is best not to think about the mystery of their origins but to just let these blessings find root within.

--The Rev. Heather Janules

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## December 2023 Events Calendar

### December 3rd, After Worship

Greening of the Building: Noon Until the Halls are Decked! Kids' Party:

#### Noon – 3pm

WUS Childcare Elves will engage the community's children with opportunities to take part in the greening, to make crafts, to watch a holiday movie and maybe even to join in a sing-along! Lunch provided. This will allow grown ups to run some holiday errands, to have an adult conversation, or to take a long winter's nap.

### December 10th, Music Sunday,

**10:30 am**, Sanctuary

We will honor the Jewish Festival of Lights with beautiful and inspiring music, a collective prayer for peace for all people.

**5:30 pm**, Solstice Spiral, WUS Side Lawn

We will walk a spiral path created by the community's children and decorated with lights. At the center, all will receive a seasonal blessing.

### December 17th, Paper Bag Pageant

**10:30 am**, Sanctuary

It is our annual tradition, retelling the mysterious story of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. The whole community is the cast for this production. Who will you be this year? A shepherd? An angel? A star? Come prepared to help tell the story or cheer on our impromptu actors. This is an all-ages service so it will serve as Religious Education for the morning.

### December 21st, Solstice Ceremony and Caroling

**6:30 pm**, Metcalf Hall

We gather in a dimly lit Metcalf Hall to recognize the longest night of the year and welcome the lengthening of the light with poetry, candlelight and song. This ceremony is welcoming to children, elders and everyone in-between! Once we Jump the Wreath, we will take our joy to Downtown Winchester where we will serenade our neighbors with Christmas Carols.

## December 24th, Christmas Eve

**AS CHRISTMAS EVE FALLS ON A SUNDAY THIS YEAR, THERE WILL BE NO MORNING SERVICE.** We hope all will attend one of our evening services. Bring your friends and family!

### Service for All Ages

**4:00 pm**, Sanctuary

This family-friendly service celebrates the Nativity Story with stories, carols, music and the ritual lighting of candles in the dark.

### Christmas Eve by Candlelight

**7:00 pm**, Sanctuary

This traditional service will retell the biblical story of Jesus's birth through scripture, carols and the peace of a candlelit Silent Night.

### December 31st, New Year's Eve,

**10:30 am**, Sanctuary

Through professional recordings by the Unitarian Universalist Association, this hybrid service, "Seeds for the New Year," will reflect on what we leave behind and what waits ahead. You may learn more here:

<https://tinyurl.com/SeedsfortheNewYear>

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## Music Sunday is December 10<sup>th</sup>

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Our Music Sunday, this December 10th, will celebrate Hanukkah, which begins the evening of Thursday, December 7th, and ends on the evening of Friday, December 15th. The centerpiece of our service will be the *Four Hanukkah Songs* by David Ludwig. These songs are part of a larger work commissioned by the Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia in 2007. Each of the four songs, Mi Y'maleil, Al Hanisim, Candle Blessing, and Maoz Tzur are central to the Hanukkah tradition and Mr. Ludwig sets them with great energy and vibrancy.

We will also be singing a few Hanukkah favorites. The Adult Choir, Youth Choir, and Children's Chorale will all join together to sing *Ocho Kandelikas*, written by Flory Jagoda in 1983. The language of this song is Ladino, a mix of Hebrew and Spanish, and the song tells of the family celebrations, eating pastries, going to parties, and, of course, lighting the candles. Another favorite that the Youth Choir will be performing is the delightful *Candlelight* by the band The Maccabeats. The song is a cover of the Taio Cruz song

Dynamite and went viral when it was released in 2010. It tells the Hanukkah story in a fabulously articulate and whimsical fashion.

At the heart of Hanukkah is the reconsecration of the Second Temple in Jerusalem after it had been defiled by the Greeks. There was only enough holy oil to burn for one day, yet it burned for eight days, enough time to produce more holy oil. What holy space in your life needs to be reconsecrated? Will there be enough "oil" to make that possible?

--John Kramer

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## January's Theme is Justice and Equity

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One thing I love about both my stomping grounds - Woburn and Hinsdale - is the sound of local church bells and chimes. On the most practical level, the bells provide a community service, providing the accurate time. Sometimes when I am in the midst of something, the sound of the bells inspires me to stop what I am doing for a moment. Perhaps this is a "mindfulness community service"? I am always grateful for these pauses in day-to-day life.

But we don't often think about how a congregation's bell tower can serve as a preacher of sorts, as part of ministries of social witness. At the Arlington Street Church's Pride service this year, the Senior Minister, the Rev. Kim Crawford Harvie, recounted participating in one of Boston's first Pride parades. This was long before one could find Pride merchandise in department stores and living a full life as a queer person was, in a number of ways, illegal. And this was before Rev. Kim was a minister.

She recalled passing by Arlington Street Church and hearing the bells ring, not to tell the time but in celebration of the march. Her friends remarked with appreciation, "That's Kim's church!", perhaps giving her some spiritual pride, being a member of a faith that would make such a joyful noise as the march went by.

We at WUS have similar stories. I remember us taking part in a solemn commemoration, the 400th anniversary of the docking of the ship, *The White Lion*, one of the first that brought enslaved people to this land by tolling our bell in collaboration with other houses of worship. Similarly, as many gathered on our lawn in peaceful protest of the death of George Floyd, out of the silence "We Shall Overcome" rang from our tower. Many thanks to Director of Music John Kramer for making both of these experiences possible.

I am also grateful to James Pidacks for allowing us to see the inner workings of the chimes up close and personal. This saves us from a chilly visit to the tower and guarantees we will not be subject to guano!

For January's theme of "Justice and Equity" let us appreciate the many ways the Winchester Unitarian Society strives for justice and equity in our world. Here are just a few examples: advocacy (sharing our concerns with State Senator Jason Lewis in a town meeting held in our sanctuary), direct service (Thanksgiving Basket donation and coordination), education (Green Sanctuary's many session Drawdown series), social witness (such as the vigil for George Floyd), and fundraising (our grant program). And, sometimes, ringing our bells and playing the chimes.

Take it away, James, so we can learn more!

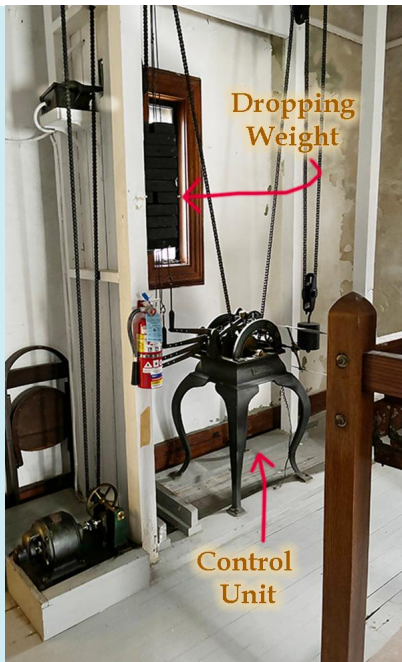
### Where is Quasimodo?

How do the bell chimes work to sound on the hour? This learning journey started while working with a vendor on security cameras. I was in the bell tower for the first time. I looked at all the equipment and wanted to learn more.



This picture shows a motor coupling between a 220-volt electric motor and a gear drive assembly in the bell tower. It is connected to the equipment used to ring the bells. Notice the pile of brass shavings on the floor and the shredded gray connector belt. I had never seen a coupling like this before, but I knew it was not good. I showed the folks on the Building Committee the photo. They asked if I would help figure out what was going on. So, always curious, I wondered how it all worked, how it kept accurate time (probably not with NTP [Network Time Protocol] from the Internet), and how we'd fix it.

This photo shows the overall assembly. When it's time to ring the bells, a signal to release a catch on the control unit happens (that round thing in the middle). The dropping weight on the left provides power to rotate the center drum. Cams on the drum pull the four cables and ring the chime bells. The weight on the right helps keep the proper tension on the chain.



Here's a close-up of the control assembly. The flat panels in front whirl and spin, acting as a governor to manage rotational speed, ensuring that the chimes ring at the same rate each time, regardless of how high or low the weights are. Okay, that is fun to watch, but how does it keep time?



When you're in the lower level hallway near the restrooms, do you ever wonder why we keep a dead clock by the stairs? Well, it's more than that. It's the original clock that controlled the chimes.

There is a paper tape loop with holes (see photo) and a reader inside the case, running along the left. When the old clock worked, its movement would move the paper tape. When a hole was reached, a switch closed, and the unit up in the bell tower got to work and rang the chimes.

Whenever the weights reached the floor (see photo), the motor turned on and lifted the weights back up to be ready to ring the chimes again.

The paper tape system died years ago. Who knows if the clock would still work if we wound it?



Now, the church has a digital control box on the wall around the corner from the clock.

It replaced the mechanical clock. If I were taller, I'd be able to read the instructions (maybe Gordy McIntosh posted them?).



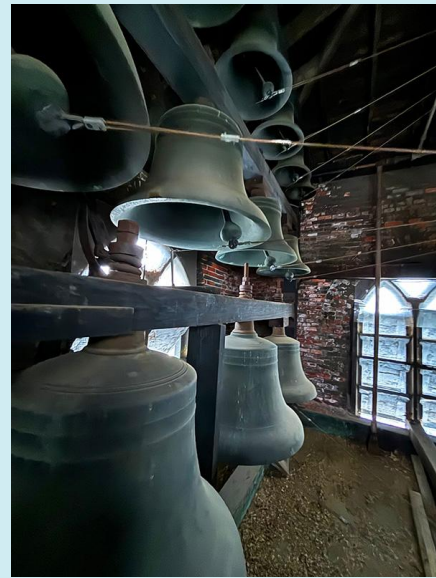
So now we know how we kept time for the chimes in the old days and how we do it now.

The next question was how to repair the motor coupling and who to call.

I returned to the bell tower and found this (sorry for the bad photo and small print; it's always the fine print that gets you). This set of handles is used to play the chimes and has the vendor name Meneely & Company, Watervliet, NY (near Rochester). The company opened in 1826 and closed in 1952 (before I was born).



Amazingly, all of the bells, chimes, and controller was installed in the 1920s and still work today (except for that clock paper tape gizmo). The damaged coupling was replaced with a metal and plastic spider coupling, which cost about \$20. It took under an hour to replace.



We included these images of the bells and control armature to round out a glimpse at the uppermost level of the belltower.

*--James Pidacks & the Building and Grounds Committee*

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## February's Theme is Liberating Love

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*WUS is a Soul Matters congregation. Soul Matters is a collection of congregations sharing themes and resources towards collective spiritual*



*growth. Many of our Covenant Groups use the Soul Matters materials to explore our monthly themes. If you are interested in learning more, contact Reverend Heather.*

*Here is an adapted introduction to the packet exploring “Liberating Love.”*

## **Welcome to the Gift of Liberating Love**

Love, it sits in the chest,  
at least at the start.

It's what makes our heart beat again after being broken,  
and our lungs breathe again after being closed off for far too long.

For some, it comes in the form of our grandfather's eyes  
who see us as carriers of something bigger and more precious  
than our little bodies reveal.

For others, it arrives as we press hard  
against our mothers' warm skin  
and hear a speechless whisper say  
we can always come home.

We know love as the thing that allows us to finally remove our masks,  
or that which said I don't want you to take it off, until you are ready.  
We are taught love by those who arrive in the midst of our fear  
and shake as we shake, instead of simply trying to make our trembling stop.

But here is the secret: The inevitable awakening.  
Love doesn't just love us;  
It asks us to become love.

That's why metaphors of comforting quilts  
wrapping us in their warmth will never do.  
True love is a thunderstorm  
cracking us open  
so the echoes of other breaking hearts  
can find sanctuary with us.

Yes, love wants us to be whole and strong.  
But love's deepest longing is that we will use that strength  
to tear down all that leaves others wounded and bruised.  
We must remember what Dr. King preached:  
Love and power must be wed.

And maybe this is where the second secret becomes known:

As we shake the walls to let others free,  
We learn the ones we have liberated include me.

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## SOUL MATTERS THEMES FOR THE COMING YEAR

December: **Mystery**  
January: **Justice & Equity**  
February: **Liberating Love**  
March: **Transformation**  
April: **Interdependence**  
May: **Pluralism**  
June: **Renewal**

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The next issue of *The Mystic Messenger* will be published in March. If you have a photo, column or submission for this edition, please send it to [office@winchesteruu.org](mailto:office@winchesteruu.org)

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