

Cobblestone News

Unitarian Universalist Church of Cortland, 3 S. Church Street, Cortland, NY, 13045

uucortland.uuism.org

From the Minister

Dec2013/Jan2014
Volume 5. Issue 3

A few years ago, I had the privilege of being an intern at First Unitarian Church of Rochester. I was inspired by the ministerial and lay leadership who were so creative and innovative in their programming. An example was their alternative to Black Friday holiday shopping – you know, that Friday after Thanksgiving when retailers expect record sales to put them in the “black” ink of profit as opposed to the “red” ink of operating losses. First Unitarian offered a worship service on the morning of Black Friday which featured tongue-in-cheek activities like a Shopper’s Confession Booth and a White Elephant Gift Exchange. There was also locally-made and Fair-Trade merchandise for sale. For me the best activity was a stack of “gift” cards given to all who attended the service with the message, **“YOU are the gift of this season”** – we were encouraged to give out the cards to friends, family, even strangers. A number of youth went to the mall on that Black Friday to give out these cards – what a great idea!

What a wonderful message: **You are a gift!** I hope this holiday season we can hold in our hearts this sentiment and realize what a gift we are to each other as we share in the beloved community that is Unitarian Universalist Church of Cortland. Let us remember also to give the gift of ourselves to the wider community through our generosity, compassion, and loving kindness; these are the priceless gifts of our being to both give and receive. May it be so.

With warmest wishes for the holidays,

Kathy

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A Note from Marion

Hi Folks,

Wow! December is going fast! Tis the season! Our holiday season started with the wonderful children's program. The children did a great job! They have been working on doing acts of kindness. What a great lesson for all of us! Thank you Ashley, Bess and Tricia for all of your work with the children.

Thanks to all who participated in the Christmas poinsettia plant sale. Our sanctuary will be beautiful! The nursing home appreciates our gift of the flowers as well.

I wish you all a happy and safe holiday season with your loved ones.

P.S. A BIG THANK YOU to Natalie Rew for doing the newsletter!

December Worship Theme: Fallowness

Fallowness is about Sabbath – a time of rest. During the holiday season, we tend to over-function in an environment of manufactured light. Getting away from the glare of holiday commercialism and into shades of gray gives us a chance to learn what's important in our lives, what's important for the nurture of our souls.

Our devotion to light only increases the intensity of the melancholy which sooner or later must come to us in the natural rhythms of our human lives. And so it is, after the holiday frenzy of

Christmas and New Year's, many feel a let-down, an emptiness that gifts and parties cannot fill. But rather than despair of the emptiness and rush to fill it up, we can learn to welcome it and lean into it. Outside, away from the bright lights, there is a cold and starry night which waits for our presence, waits to accompany us on an interior journey in the dark.

In this season of often overly-lit darkness, let us remember to find our Sabbath by taking intentional time out from the holiday rush. Put down your to-do

list and sit in the dark of evening or the gray of day. Breathe deeply with full appreciation for the present moment. Find in your heart what you are grateful for and speak it softly to the universe; *if the only prayer you utter is thank you, it will be enough* (William Blake).

Be well in these days of darkness,
Kathy

Children's Religious Education by Ashley Vormwold, RE Coordinator

For many children, the holiday season can be a time of great excitement. It can also evoke a host of other strong emotions. All this happens amongst a backdrop of colder days and longer periods of darkness, a perfect atmosphere for practicing relaxation. Here are some ideas you can try with your children (or try yourself!) to bring about a state of calm and peacefulness.

3. Read books with interesting, appealing pictures that you and your children can linger over. A great picture book can be enjoyable for children of all ages. For this experience, I like books by Jan Brett.

1. Practice meditation techniques, such as focusing attention on how each breath feels as it enters and exits the body. It may be helpful for children to lay down with one hand on their belly and one on their chest and feel their belly and then their chest rise as they breathe in and then slowly sink down as they breath out.

4. Yoga can also be a calming experience. A quick search online can result in suggestions for yoga poses for children. This is one website that I found useful:

www.namastekid.com/learn/kids-yoga-poses/

2. Engaging in a quiet, creative activity. Building with blocks, drawing, painting, writing, or creating gifts for others are just a few ideas.

5. Take a walk and include some time for silence to bring awareness to all the sounds, sights, and smells in your surroundings.

The techniques listed above all incorporate some level of awareness. The children's RE class will be exploring more topics related to awareness during the month of January. We will focus on topics and practices related to the importance of rest during the remaining December classes.

Flight to Egypt by Lynn Olcott

"Thus warned, Joseph arose and took the young child and his mother and departed into Egypt..."

Matthew 2:14

There are many people who are never mentioned in the spare biblical accounts that come to us today. I often feel I am reading glimmers and parts. At times I think I can hear the echoes of what has been left out, for example in the story of the Bethlehem inn.

Someone must have been charged with taking care of the innkeeper's livestock in the stable, right? I imagine a servant woman, good with animals and good of heart. In my imagination she helped the innkeeper's animals stay calm, as weary strangers bearing the scent of the road invaded their crowded space.

Perhaps she had heard the whispers of Herod's threat. She may simply have had an instinct for

caution. When villagers asked her just exactly what was going on down there in the barn, I imagine her speaking blandly of ordinary things, steering gossipy attention away from the young family as they made their escape.

God, help us to shield and support each other as we head through the dramas of our days. Amen

January Worship Theme: Awareness

In its simplest expression, awareness means having a sense of what's going on inside and outside of you. Awareness may be your perception of a situation, your grasp of a concept, recognition, self-understanding, or perhaps even a "light-bulb" moment. Here are some links to different concepts of human awareness for you to explore:

http://www.ted.com/talks/margaret_heffernan_the_dangers_of_willful_blindness.html

http://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_s_powerful_stroke_of_insight.html

<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness/definition>

While I invite you to explore the ideas put forth in the links, let us think of our Awareness worship theme in the spiritual sense, or perhaps I should say in the mind, body, spirit sense.

The month of January commemorates Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK). First, were you aware that MLK went to seminary at what is now Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School? Were you aware that at one time in their lives, Dr. and Mrs. King considered joining the Unitarian Church? Were you aware that the reason they did not was because they didn't think Unitarianism would make a good platform for the kind of reform he was being called to undertake? (Rosemary Bray McNatt in *Soul Work*, ed Bowens-Wheatley and Jones, 2003, Skinner House: Boston)

We can be sure that MLK was highly aware of the systems of oppression in the politics, education, and social structures in our country. He knew

he could not ignore what was happening to his fellow African Americans as they abided the dehumanizing effects of Jim Crow laws and institutional racism. His awareness kept him from the quiet life of an American Baptist minister, and catapulted him into a place he did not always want to go. But it's hard to ignore the call where

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

awareness, faith, and values intersect. I'm sure MLK experienced that call mind, body, and soul.

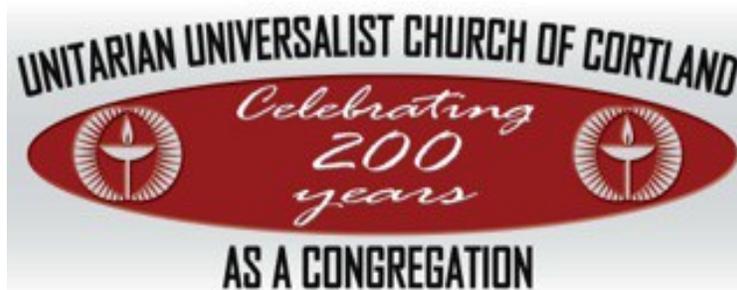
In the month of January, let us cultivate an awareness of the larger systems that affect our lives and the lives of others. This can be at any level from our neighborhoods, cities, states, countries, to the entire planet. Let us explore what might need our attention. Let us cultivate a greater awareness of how consistently we are living out our UU values.

Looking forward to exploring with you,
Kathy

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Upcoming Programming

Sunday, Dec. 15th - 10:30 am service with Kathy Tew Rickey.

Sunday, Dec. 22nd - 3-4 pm Meditation with Joe Pullman followed by Family Night Supper at 4:30pm. Please bring a dish to pass and your table service.

Tuesday, Dec. 24th - 6 pm Christmas Eve Candlelight Service with Kathy Tew Rickey. Join us in the social hall for some cookies after the service.

Sunday, Dec. 29th - 10:30 am Holiday pancake brunch. Bring your favorite pancake topping or breakfast food. Pancakes will be provided.

Sunday, Jan. 5th - 10:30 am Burning Bowl service with Ruth O'lill and Lynn Olcott.

