

The PowerLine

The Newsletter of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Niagara



December 2006

Issue 10 Volume 7

December's Sunday Services

3 - 11:00 AM - Rev. Frances Manly - **Dark Nights**

As the days grow shorter toward the solstice, the nights seem not only longer, but darker. Our souls, too, have their dark nights, which may bring unexpected gifts.

Usher: Matt McCabe

Coffee Hour Hosts: Kirstin Dixon & Susan Diachun

10 - 11:00AM - John Mayer - **Four Strands of Spirituality**

Often conventional religion fails to harmonize the need for justice and the need for celebration. This analysis will show the linkage.

Usher: Janet McKenna

Coffee Hour Hosts: Bonnie & Bill Soley

17 - 11:00AM - Rev. Frances Manly - An Intergenerational Christmas Service

Story, music, and a bit of quiet reflection on the meanings of the season. This is a service for all ages.

Ushers: Norm Rowlinson

Coffee Hour Hosts: Joe Padlog

24 - 7:30 PM - Rev. Frances Manly - Christmas Eve

Candlelight Service - Bring your family and friends to this contemplative service of readings, stories, and music of the season. A plate of cookies or other goodies would be a welcome contribution to the refreshment table after the service, to go with the mulled cider brought by the minister.

Ushers: Susan Diachun

Refreshments: Skeeter Tower & Elaine Pethybridge

NOTE: There will be no 11:00 AM service this Sunday.

31 - 11:00 AM - Yvonne Stocker - **Endings and Beginnings**

Meditations and reflections on endings and beginnings

Usher: Angela Flower

Coffee Hour Hosts: Peter Nimkoff & Candace Smith



Holiday Sharing

Bonnie & Bill Soley

This year we have decided to adopt Community Mission families with which to share the true spirit of the holiday season. Our own families understand that we will not be exchanging gifts, but will be buying gifts and food for families that are among our community's poorest.

For a number of years we have contemplated this, but just continued to exchange gifts with our family and do the usual financial contributions: the Salvation Army bucket; the "at the register" donations at local supermarkets; and other seasonal donation opportunities that helped us to share our good fortune.

But this year the crude commercialism seems to us, at least, to be "over the top"! So, through Community Missions, we will purchase gifts for the children and food for the entire family. For each child we will buy a gift of about \$15 and donate \$25 to enable each family to have a holiday dinner. I can't wait to go shopping for the children! Knowing that these gifts may well be the only ones they will receive, brings home to us how fortunate we truly are. The holiday season already seems much more meaningful to us. If you would like to adopt a family, contact

Community Missions, 285-3403

May Your Holiday Season be Filled with Joy and a Vision for World-wide Peace

President's perspective

I'd like you all to sit up a little straighter and give yourself a pat on the back because we are truly moving ahead on our goal of "being the people the world needs". The October issue of "Small Talk" – a newsletter for small UU congregations – discusses leadership and burnout. In the article the author, Rev. Jane Dwinell, a small church consultant, states that churches with less than 50 (active) members should plan to do nothing besides quality Sunday morning programs, religious education and one social action project per year.

We do way more than that! For openers we have both adult and children's religious education as well as an active book group. When any of these groups meet the conversation is basically devoted to improving our world through one means or another.

The church is active with NOAH and other social action projects – one a year; we do more like one a month!

We also take the time and make the effort to minister to each other – whether by the telephone tree or during joys and concerns or through personal interactions – we try to keep connected to the needs of our small community.

One last thing that Rev. Dwinell mentions is that we

must always remember to have fun. And that we do. Whether we gather to break bread together or to see one of our own in a stage production or try bobbing for apples at the Halloween coffee hour hosted by our Sunday School children, we always remember to have fun.

While we're into our "bragging" phase, we've had the nicest spin off from one of our other on-going projects. The church is beginning to shine! Janet McKenna, in researching to designate our building as a National Historic Site, has found that many items were left in memoriam to past members. She and members of that committee have gone on a scavenger hunt to find the items throughout the building. Then, in order to read the inscriptions better, Janet has gotten out her Brasso and shined up the collection plates, the brass candlesticks and two tall urns that will hold dried arrangements. We even found a memorial plate on one of our card tables. The history of the church is certainly coming alive for us all through this work. Do take the time to check some of these "finds" and compliment Janet for her hard work.

So remember, We believe in UU and You!

Betsy

Christmas Family Adoption Program

This Christmas season our congregation will participate in Community Missions' Family Adoption Program, which helps fifty of the poorest families in the south part of Niagara Falls. We will receive information about our family that will enable to provide presents for children who otherwise might receive none as well as food for a holiday feast. Our commitment is to buy a present worth about \$15 for each child (we'll know their names, ages and wish lists) as well as a food basket or Tops gift card worth \$25 for the family.

Since the expense will not be great, the board voted to pay for the gifts from the Caring line in the church budget, but contributions are welcome to help cover part of the cost. Members who may be interested in adopting a family on their own may call Community Missions, 285-3403, for more information.

Collection Plates

When you contribute an offering during Sunday service or, as an usher, pass the offering plate down the aisle, have you ever noticed the engraving on each plate?

The brass plates are engraved: "In memoriam Mr. and Mrs. Jacob P. Billett" and "In memoriam Margaret Billett Auman." Margaret Auman, nee Billett, died August 12, 1956. The plates were purchased with memorial funds donated to the church at her passing.

The Billett/Auman families were significantly involved in earlier days of the church. In 1920 Mr. and Mrs. Billett and Margaret were charter members. Donald Auman, Margaret's husband, was church treasurer for 25 years and also served as church school superintendent.

The plates were presented to the congregation at the May 5, 1957 service during which two Billett great grandchildren and Auman grandchildren were dedicated.

Sic transit gloria mundi.

Walking Together



Rev. Frances Manly

One of the powerfully enduring images of the ancient Christmas story is that of the shepherds, huddled in fear on a dark hillside, while angels overhead sing the good news of the newborn babe in Bethlehem. Their song proclaims that the Holy has broken through into the ordinary world, bringing peace on earth and good

will to all. It is a song we still long to hear, not only over the fields, but over our cities and towns, over Baghdad and Darfur, over the Gulf Coast and Pakistan, and deep down in the depths of our souls.

But what if you don't believe in angels? Apparently that's not a problem for most Americans. Recent polls tell us that somewhere between two-thirds and four-fifths of us believe in angels. The popularity of movies and TV shows (and even commercials) featuring angels would seem to support those numbers.

Truth be told, though, I doubt that believing in the existence of actual, literal heavenly beings who visit earth (as one poll question put it) has anything to do with hearing the song I'm talking about. Whatever did or did not happen on a hillside near Bethlehem two thousand years ago, and whether or not the babe they sang of was born in a manger or snug at home in his parents' house in Nazareth, the song goes on for those who have ears to hear.

The Holy is all around us, all the time; it is our eyes that have forgotten how to see it, our ears that have forgotten how to listen for its song, our lives that have become so busy and crowded with the ordinary business of our days that there is no place for the singing of angels to break through. The long Advent-Hannukah-Solstice-Christmas-New Year holiday

Rainbow Singers to Give Concert

The Rainbow Singers, a mixed choral group, under the direction of Anita Harless, will present "Sing Joyfully" on Saturday, December 2nd in our sanctuary. The concert, a collection of holiday music and a Christmas Cantata, will begin at 7 PM. Refreshments will be served afterwards. A freewill donation will be accepted.

season is as good a time as any to remind ourselves to step aside from the bustle and the busyness for a moment now and then and pay attention.

As Howard Thurman wrote:

There must be always remaining in every [person's] life some place for the singing of angels—some place for that which in itself is breathlessly beautiful and by an inherent prerogative [throws] all the rest of life into a new and created relatedness. Something that gathers up in itself all the freshets of experience from drab and commonplace areas of living and glows in one bright white light of penetrating beauty and meaning—then passes. The commonplace is shot through now with new glory—old burdens become lighter, deep and ancient wounds lose much of old, old hurting. A crown is placed over our heads that for the rest of our lives we are trying to grow tall enough to wear. Despite all of the crassness of life, despite all of the hardness of life, despite all of the harsh discords of life, life is saved by the singing of angels.

May the old, old story remind us, amid the noise and glare of the secular holiday season, that the holy came into the world not once and for a moment, but comes again and again, and each time we feel it, we are changed and renewed and healed. This season and always, may you find place in your life for the singing of angels.

Blessings,
Frances



December's Dedicated Offering

Our monthly donation to a non-profit group will be given in December to Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Niagara County. The designated offering will be made at our Christmas Eve Service to be held at 7 PM on December 24. Checks should be made out to the church with "BBBS" indicated on the memo line.

Up to Our Steeples in Politics - 2006

Richard S. Gilbert

Social Justice Coordinator, St. Lawrence District

No doubt many of us have been “up to our steeples in politics” (Will Campbell) these past few months. Perhaps it is time to step back and gain some perspective on Election 2006 and its impact on Unitarian Universalists as we attempt to “repair the world.” Here are some of my learnings and thoughts:

Evangelicals are clearly not beholden to one party. Values voters were not just those who are anti marriage equality (same sex partners), anti-choice, etc., but were those who opposed the Iraq War, who cared about poverty, political corruption, civil liberties, etc.

Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely – and its corollary – affluence tends to corrupt and absolute affluence corrupts absolutely. Some of the same elements that brought Democrats down in 1994 helped bring Republicans down in 2006. Progressive people will need to watch the current crop of officials just as we watched the old. Human nature is evenly distributed among both Republicans and Democrats.

We are beginning to understand the political power of technology – bloggers, websites, e-mails, etc. were much in use to raise money, educate on issues and get out the vote. From a time when it required huge sums for mass

District Conference on Racism and Classism

The 2006 General Assembly in St. Louis voted to urge each UUA congregation to sponsor a program on racism and classism in the 2006-2007 church year. The St. Lawrence District is planning a district-wide conference. May 5, 2007 – Save the date.

December 3 - Mini-Bazaar

Don't forget there will be a “Mini Bazaar” during coffee hour on Sunday, December 3. We will have one-of-a-kind handmade items – crafts and artwork - from our members and friends as well as an array of holiday greens from Opportunities Unlimited. Along with the greenery there will be decorative glass, paper ornaments, jams, jewelry and other hand made items.

This will be an opportunity to do some Christmas shopping while drinking coffee and visiting with friends.

Is Your Pledge up-to-Date?

We'll be sending letters out early in December letting you know the status of your pledge and/or contributions during 2006. If there are any questions or concerns you may contact the Treasurer, Yvonne Stocker. We do appreciate everyone's financial support.

mailings to do political work, now the playing field is much more level, and the process somewhat more democratized (save for the access gap).

I am saddened that good Republican moderates were taken by the Democratic tide, pushing the Congressional Republican Party further to the right. I feel the pain of moderate Republican UU's who are probably increasingly uncomfortable in the Republican Party, but can't bring themselves to the Democratic Party. No matter our party affiliation, once again we become the “loyal opposition.”

This may be a kairoitic moment (Paul Tillich) when significant changes can be made. Or, as educators like to put it, this may be a “teachable moment” in which our liberal religious values may well have currency.

NYS: nothing much changed in the New York State legislature, but the Governor is pro-choice, pro-marriage equality and pro-governmental reform. It is time to hold his feet to the fire.

In the words spoken by Unitarian Justice Oliver Wendall Holmes, Jr., in his 1884 Memorial Day Address: “As life is action and passion, it is required of a man that he should share the passion and action of his time, at peril of being judged not to have lived.”

Committee Faire

Our first ever “Committee Faire” was not very successful. Some people did sign up to work on certain things of the church but they were mainly the people who were already participating in those areas. Last year's “teams” didn't seem to work too well either. The Board is trying to work this out so we are all sharing the workload. To that end we have invited Jeanie Crane to lead us in a workshop designed to help us iron our small church governance and how it should come together. This will be held sometime after the first of the year; probably on a Friday evening with a potluck dinner preceding the discussion. It may be too late for this year but it will certainly help in years to come. For right now, if you feel someone tap you on the shoulder to tackle just one job, please consider taking it on – you'll get lots of help and it will make the church a better place.

Holiday Food Drive

Our church will again be the site of the Annual Holiday Food Drive sponsored by The Friends of Niagara Community Services, a Division of AIDS Community Services of WNY.

Nonperishable foods and necessary household items will be given to people and families who have been directly affected by HIV and AIDS. All items should be in Unity Hall by noon Saturday, December 9th. Any cash donations will be used to buy additional food to round out the nutritional balance of the baskets. Checks should be made out to NFC. If you have questions please call Diane at 282-1658 or Kevin at 285-9050 or the office at 297-4004. Thanks!

Improving Communications

One of the president's goals this year is to improve communications between ourselves and with the community. It is still a work in progress. However, we do have a current directory available – second printing; copies on the table in the Narthex. (Please let the office know if corrections are needed.) We also have a Telephone Tree to spread the word among local members and friends.

The Board is trying various ways to see if this is effective. Again, let a Board member know if you are not being contacted. So far this year there has only been one call put out. Finally, we are working on our website. As soon as it is current and up and running well we'll let you know. Still along the electronic mode, this is the first Powerline to be issued mainly in the electronic format with a few issues being sent out via first class mail. Do let us know if this works for you.

UUA Resources

Provided by Kath McIntyre October 29, 2006
Part of her sermon: "What Is Our Religion for?"

Young Adult Network CUUYAN (18-35)

ya.cm@uua.org
Conferences: Concentric & Opus in the summer
Newsletter: Ferment (free)
Note: This is an avenue to community and intern positions GA caucus

Youth Network YRUU (14-20)

(617)948-4350 <http://www.uua.org/YRUU>
Conference: Con Conc in the summer
Newsletter: Synapse (free)
Note: GA caucus

Church of the Larger Fellowship [CLF]

On-line congregation of Unitarian Universalists
<http://www.uua.org/clf>
Newsletter: Quest (free - on-line)
RE & Worship Material Library

Church of the Younger Fellowship [UUCYF]

Unique UU spiritual community and worship space for young adults from all over the world
<http://uucyf.org/>
Newsletter: FUUSE News (free on-line <http://www.fuuse.com/>)

UUA Bookstore

Unitarian Universalist Association
25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108
(800)215-9076 fax: (617) 723-4805
<http://www.uua.org/bookstore>
bookstore@uua.org
Catalogues: Skinner: <http://www.uua.org/skinner/>
Beacon Press: (617)948-6553 <http://www.beacon.org>

UU Bed and Breakfast (Boston)

Pickett & Eliot Houses
6 Mount Vernon Boston
Boston, MA 02108
pe@uua.org
(617)948-4679 (617)248-8707 fax: 617 742-1364
Note: Very convenient to Boston Common, the State House, the Freedom Trail, and other downtown attractions. The neighbors on Beacon Hill decided that they didn't like having a B&B in their midst. Thus the UUA (who owns E-P House) changed the rules for who could stay there. To stay at E-P House you must "state" that you are there on official UUA business.
[A Conscience sop - visit the Archives or the Bookstore and buy something and you have done "business".]

St Lawrence District Office

sld@uua.org
716 882-0430
District Executive: Rev Tom Chulak
(518)781-0014
tchulak@uua.org
Admin Secretary: Sue Tabone
smtabone@localnet.com

Unitarian Universalist Association [UUA]

Unitarian Universalist Association
25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108
<http://http://uua.org/>
617 742-2100

Attention: People Over 70 Years Old Who Have an IRA

There is a two year program which allows people 70.5 years and older to make tax free withdrawals from their Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA) if the withdrawals are made directly to a charity like a Church. This will be of a tax advantage to some people, especially those who may be questionable between taking the standard deduction or itemizing deductions.

This special allowance is only in effect in 2006 and 2007. It means that withdrawals from your IRA which are made directly to charities are simply not declared as income. These must be made in 2006 to qualify in 2006. It will be offered again in 2007, which will be the last year of the program. For more detailed information contact Peter Diachun. (716) 791-4453 or email comcoco@yahoo.com

December Birthdays

10 Ralph Robertson
22 Jeanne Aydelotte
22 Isabella Dixon
24 Trish Bateson
30 Gary McCunn

The Book Discussion Group:

The Book Group will meet Tuesday December 12, at 7 PM in Unity Hall. Our group of sages will be discussing *Christianity without God* by Lloyd Geering who is a member of the Jesus Seminar. He has some interesting ideas and is able to explain them in simple language rather than obscure theological terms. His ideas have much in common with UU ideas. It should be an interesting discussion.

If you wish to read the book contact Judy Bongiovanni or Peter Diachun.

Hymn Books

New hymnals may be donated to the church for a contribution of \$30, which covers the cost of the book plus shipping. The hymnal you donate may be given in memory or in honor of someone you specify.

Invitation to Membership

If you are looking for a religious community in which to seek spiritual growth...

If you are eager to consider religious questions with others who are not always certain they have all the answers but who are determined to keep searching with an open mind...

If you would like the fellowship of others for celebration and worship, discussion and education, friendship and mutual support

If you want children to be helped to develop their own religious beliefs...

If you wish to preserve and extend the traditions of personal freedom and human dignity against the dangers they face today...

You may find that this church fills your spiritual and human needs.

If you wish to know more about us as you consider membership, please speak with our minister.



Adult RE Discussion Group:

The adult discussion group meets 9:30-10:30 on Sunday mornings in the Founder's room. We usually discuss articles in the UU World magazine or occasionally something else of interest to the group. We spread our cumulative wisdom freely so come and join our laughter.

NOAH

More than 300 people attended NOAH's first public meeting, on Sunday, November 12, at St. James United Methodist Church on Porter Road. Representatives from all NOAH member churches and organizations attended, including 17 from our congregation.

Elected officials representing the City of Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda, and the Niagara County Legislature were asked that on all government projects, to commit to hiring, at least 30 percent of their workers from low income residents. Among those committing were Mayor Vincenzo Anello, and Council Chair Charles Walker, Niagara Falls; Mayor Soos of North Tonawanda; and Niagara County Legislature Chair William Ross.

A follow-up meeting is planned for February.

The Mini PowerLine

CRE News

Special thanks to all who contributed to the Children's Religious Education program in November including Erica Kopp, AJ McCabe, Sheen Rajmahaira, Gary McCunn, Teresa Labuszewski, Skeeter Tower and Yvonne Stocker.

Special thanks to all of the CRE children for their hard work in making our Halloween Coffee Hour spooky and special and in preparing Thanksgiving Stone Soup.

We are looking forward to December and our annual intergenerational church service. Reverend Manly and Ed Tormay will be instrumental in its planning with lots of support from teens, children, parents, and other church members. It is always a community effort!

***Happy Holidays to all!
from the Children's RE***



December Calendar

- 3 - Planning Intergenerational Service
Ed Tormay
- 10 - Special craft project--gifts to brighten
the holidays for others Pat Loretto and
Betsy Diachun
- 17 -Intergenerational Service
- 24 -Christmas Eve Service
- 31 -No formal CRE program

***If you would like to learn more
about our classes please see
Kathy McCunn during coffee
hour.***

Foreign Policy Updates

Bonnie Soley

For interesting and thought provoking articles on foreign relations and policy visit the Foreign Policy Association's website <fpa.org>. This week's (November 20) topics are:

[**CAPITAL WATCH**] Proliferation legislation

[**MIDTERM ELECTIONS**] Implications for US foreign policy

[**GLOBAL FORUM**] Regional Rethink Part 1 - Iran

I find it very informative and enjoy reading it on a fairly regular basis.

Liberal Religious Hour Available on Podcast

For music and interviews on topics of interest to religious liberals, including peace, justice, interfaith communications, fair trade and labor practices, community action, environmental justice, dialog with other faith communities...

Go to UURadio.org

"For people who think about religion."

The minister is available at the church office by appointment and to visit members, especially those who are ill or unable to travel easily, in their homes. If you would like to speak with her, or you know of someone who would like a call or a visit, please call her at home, at 837-9230, or e-mail franly@mac.com. She is usually available at church on Thursdays, 10 am – 2 pm, but it's a good idea to call ahead and make sure.

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Happy Holidays



PowerLine

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To submit an article for the

PowerLine, please e-mail it to:

bonnie.soley@verizon.net or call 316-5863.

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