



The Parish Record

The First Church and Parish in Dedham

www.dedhamuu.org

Volume CXXX, No. 4

December, 2009

Sundays in the Meeting House

December 6, 10:00 AM: "Embracing the Chaos"

The Rev. Rali Weaver will preach.

Children will start in the Meeting House and be sung to Pageant Preparation.

This week we will look at the advantages of embracing chaos and explore how it might open us to new joy in living.

December 13, 10:00 AM: "The Spirit of the Christmas Tree"

An intergenerational Pageant performed by the children.

We will also participate in the Hanging of the Greens this Sunday.

The pageant is an inter-generational experience. Everyone has a little part. It has all the elements of a regular pageant: a story, singing, costumes, a little chaos, and sweet moments. Please note we will have a rehearsal Saturday, December 12th at 9:00 AM.

December 20, 10:00 AM: "Winter Solstice"

The Rev. Rali Weaver will preach.

This will be a family service. Children are invited to stay.

The season of winter we are confronted by countless contradictions. This Sunday we will explore what our pagan ancestors have to teach us about weathering this season.

December 27, 10:00 AM: "Interfaith Perspectives"

Seth Carrier, our ministerial student, will preach.

There will be a special activity for the children they are not staying for the entire worship.

What does it mean for Unitarian Universalists to engage in interfaith work? Aren't we by definition interfaith? Is celebrating Christmas as UUs an interfaith experience? Our Student Minister, Seth Carrier, will reflect on these questions and others as he shares with us his experience from his December trip to the World Parliament of Religions in Melbourne, Australia.

Calendar

Holly Fair: December 5, 9:00

Christmas Eve: December 24

6:00: Carol Singing on the Meeting House Steps

6:30: Candlelight Service

Also in December...

Holly Fair Preparation: Dec 1-4

Parish Committee: Dec 1, 7:00

Pageant Rehearsal: Dec 12, 9:00 am

Cakes: Dec 18, 6:30

Aerobics: Mondays & Wednesdays, 6:30

And...

Please see our website for the complete and up-to-date calendar

If you do not receive our weekly church emails and would like to please contact the church office by phone: 781-326-7463 or by email: firstchurch@dedhamuu.org

From Our Minister

"Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes" -Carl Jung

As we approach each holiday season we are each confronted with conflicting messages of darkness and light, inner reflection and celebration. This is in part because at the heart of Christmas is the celebration is focused on the light returning to liberate us from darkness. Until that light returns we are in churches at least, preparing our hearts and minds to receive it.

While there are countless ways to go about becoming spiritually centered there are two main categories for spirituality they are Apophatic and Cataphatic. Apophatic spirituality is generally a contemplative approach to life and seeks the divine in life by withdrawing and looking inward. A Cataphatic approach to spirituality is more expressive and finds the divine externally in attributes of love and celebration.

At this time of year we generally celebrate the season in our homes in much more Cataphatic ways through caroling and lights and music and gifts. Our way of interacting as a culture at Christmas is with light and music in joyous exuberance.

While the Christmas Eve Service at First Church has for many years been a mixture of both celebratory and reflective approaches to the season it has tended more to the Apophatic approach. There is caroling on the green before worship but we enter and leave worship in silence and darkness. Caroling and silence represent these two different forms of spirituality.

In most Christian Churches the Eve of Christmas is a time for Apophatic spirituality. Christmas Eve is the time to look inward one last time before the birth of the light returning. In most traditions, worshippers return for a more Cataphatic celebration on Christmas Morning.

At First Church you have worshiped in a contemplative manner and approached Christmas Even with inner reflection for generations but because Christmas does not fall on a Sunday you do not celebrate together with exuberance the return of the light.

Having worshiped with you on Christmas Eve for the past two years I have felt something missing. I love your traditions of hymns and scripture and darkness. I simply miss the opportunity to celebrate with you the light returning.

To that end I hope to re-frame the way we prepare our hearts this season.

There will be offered a Seasonal Meditation on Sunday mornings in December at the Parsonage. Join with me at 8: 45 Sunday, December 6, 13 and 20th for a 45 Minute seasonal reflection on the season. On Christmas Eve Join with me again at 5pm in the Dining Room for one last Christmas Eve meditation.

Whether you join in these times of spiritual reflection or not I hope to see you on the green at 6pm for some Christmas Caroling and then following our worship which will be structured slightly differently this year to reflect both the Apophatic and Cataphatic approach to this season. Following worship you are invited to the Parsonage for some additional celebration and refreshments.

May you and your yours find ways to awaken to all the beauty that surrounds you this Season. And may the light return to your heart and remain with you in the coming year.

Happy Holidays.
Rali

From Our Intern

“Understanding the Mystery”

I had a terrific conversation a few weeks ago with Tamar, a friend and colleague of mine who is studying to be a rabbi. We were sharing the reasons we felt called to a spiritual/religious path, and she shared a powerful metaphor with me which resonated strongly with my understanding of Unitarian Universalism. While I think the often cited quote “there are many paths up the mountain” describes the basic philosophy of Unitarian Universalism very well, Tamar’s metaphor of trees, religion and science took me to a level deeper.

“When a human being looks at a tree, a surface glance might lead her to think that there is no connection between herself and the tree. The differences are so glaringly obvious. Different species to start off with. We walk around; they stay in one place for their entire existence. We are soft and squishy in our exteriors; they are hard and tough.

A religious or spiritual person might, after that first surface glance, take a moment to look deeper. She may see all the differences, and yet still see another living being, and feel some sort of connection to that other living being and to a sense of something larger than herself, be it through love, spirit, God, or nature.

A scientific person on the other hand, may also take a deeper, and yet very different, second glance. She may look at the tree, and, recalling her study of biology, think about how the tree is taking a waste product from humans, carbon dioxide, and transforming it into oxygen, something we need for survival. She may find a sense of amazement in the realization of how symbiotic the relationship truly is, where we each party’s ‘waste product’ nourishes the other.”

I love this metaphor, because for me both the scientist and spiritualist get to the same or very similar points – a sense of deeper understanding of and connection to the tree – via totally different paths and understandings. If they were UUs, both might articulate an appreciation for our seventh principle, “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”

Is one of these theoretical people, the scientist or the spiritualist, more right than the other in their understanding? I do not think so. And thus this to me is one of the strengths of Unitarian Universalism, and part of the reason why I love our chosen faith so much. While I certainly hold my own set of core beliefs, the varied beliefs we share challenge me, and push me to deepen my understanding of the world, and of all the things knowable and unknowable.

Whether or not we reach common ground from sharing our different perspectives, I think it is always important to remember, and honor, the diversity we bring to our time together.

peace and love,

- Seth

Focus on Religious Education

On the coming of Solstice...

Leaves have been raked and bagged, pumpkins discarded, turkeys devoured. Only a few weeks left of Autumn. Darkness comes earlier and stays longer, interrupted by garlands of electric color and the occasional giant inflatable snow globe.

Soon it will be Solstice, the longest night of the year, to be followed by the return of the sun and the rebirth of light into the world. I imagine that in ancient times, before our scientific knowledge of universe, there must have been some serious trepidation in those predawn moments: "Will this darkness never end? Will the light return to us?" Of course, the sun did rise, ending the night's long vigil with a glorious promise that yes, the world would one day be warm again.

When I was a child the holiday season held a special magic for me. There were certain sacred components to the ritual surrounding Christmas Eve and morning; spotting the light-up dragon on the way to church, the reverential silence of the darkened meeting house, the wax dripping on the cardboard circle in my hand, the smell of candles and the magic of the dancing flames. Back at home it was pizza in front of the TV while I watched Christmas Eve on Sesame Street. There were the standard milk and cookies for Santa, and some time in the middle of the night I would sneak downstairs for a preview of the dazzling mound of presents beneath the tree, and pick out the one doll or stuffed animal that Santa had left unwrapped to take upstairs to bed.

As a young adult that holiday joy was slowly replaced by feelings of dread and depression. I had always heard of depression around the holidays, but never understood how someone could be sad when surrounded by all this beauty, joy and love. For some reason, though, I found myself hit by the harsh realities of adulthood, and it wasn't fun anymore. I didn't want to give or even receive presents when I knew there were homeless people freezing in the streets. Sometimes the sadness I felt was unbearable, and I had to wonder "Will this darkness never end?"

Thankfully, those dark places in my head were filled with a new light three years ago, my first Christmas as a mother. It didn't matter that we had no money or that our apartment was draftier than a cardboard box. Michael, Nerissa and I were a complete family, and having a little one to focus our energy on somehow let us off the hook for enjoying the holidays. Now, it was all about her. Every year Christmas has gotten even better for me as I experience the joy of the holidays through my young daughter's eyes.

But I know that many of us are visited by that ominous darkness. The assumed and obligatory joy of the holidays only accentuates the sadness in their hearts, especially when they have suffered a loss. So let us remember to reach out to our friends, neighbors, relatives who may be waiting in the dark night for that light to return. Make a phone call, stop by with a plate of cookies, or invite them over for a showing of your favorite Christmas special. Make it a new part of your family ritual to share some joy, and just like the spreading candlelight in the meeting house, we can bring back the light.

Aoife Barrington-Haber

Focus on Religious Education – December Events

Looking Ahead:

Our Final OWL 7-9 class for the year will be on Sunday, December 6.

Sunday December 6th is our Pageant Preparation, during church school time. Diane Winchester will teach the music.

Saturday December 12th is a pageant rehearsal, 9AM.

December 13th is our Christmas Pageant. This year we are presenting "The Spirit of the Christmas Tree." This is a wonderful inter-generational piece that takes an open-minded look at the traditional Nativity pageant.

Help Needed:

Help needed for the pageant: We need a costume coordinator, and two or three child-herders. Talk to Diane or Aoife.

Thinking about teaching Sunday school? We have several slots available. There is a sign-up sheet dining room. The details for each class, which begin in January or February follow:

- 3-4 year olds: Spirit Play begins in February (Starts in February, 1 teacher needed. There will be a training session)
- K-1: Special Places, Sacred Spaces (Starts in January; 1 teacher needed.)
- Grade 2-4: UU Heroes (full)
- Grades 5-6: Amazing Grace (Starts in February, 1 or 2 teachers still needed)
- Grades 7-8: Coming of Age (Starts in January; 1 teacher needed. Contact me or Tyler Carpenter for details)

The 3 and 4 year olds will be beginning the Spirit Play curriculum in February. Each class the children hear a story from one of our UU sources of faith. They are encouraged to derive their own meaning from the story and are free to respond through art or other activities of their choosing. It is important that we hear input from the congregation. Please take a moment during social hour to peruse the list of stories and write a suggestion.

Stuff Needed:

We still have a (short) wish list for our classrooms. We'd like an additional bookshelf or two, child height and in safe condition. Also an easel and child-sized brooms.

Feel free to call or email with questions or input about the program.

Aoife Barrington-Haber
faeriecool@hotmail.com
617-872-6960

All Around the Church Community

Holiday Meditations

Join Rev. Weaver Sunday mornings from 8:45 - 9:30 for seasonal meditations Dec. 6, 13 and 20th. There is no need to sing up or attend all sessions. Please enter quietly and take your shoes off at the door and join in the session in the living room. Or meditate at home during that time and know our hearts will be joined with yours. You will find the weekly meditations posted on the website at www.dedhamuu.org.

Holiday Reception for Everyone

Please join us at the parsonage following the Christmas Eve Service to greet each other for the season. All are invited to attend.

Christmas Caroling in Dedham Square!

Join a festive roving band of First Church carolers and friends on December 4th as we sing during the Dedham Square Holiday Stroll. All ages are welcome! Please contact Natalie Jensen (781-329-9289 or jenray1@msn.com) if you would like to participate.

Uno Fund Raiser

Thanks to all who enjoyed dinner at Pizzeria Uno last Oct 2. We received \$222 for our efforts. I think this is pretty good for our first time doing this as a fund raiser. I hope to set one up again soon- keep your eyes open for the publicity. If anyone has a suggestion for a date, let me know.

Eileen Sullivan

Meditation Group.

The regular meditation group will not meet during the month of December. Our next meeting will be on January 4, 2010 at 7:30. We will continue to explore Sharon Saltzberg's ideas on loving kindness. Everyone is welcome.

Carol Dixon

If you do not receive our weekly church emails and would like to, please contact the church office at firstchurch@dedhamuu.org

All Around the Church Community

Parish Players – Mark Your Calendars!

I am pleased to announce that the 2010 Production of the Parish Players will be “**Guys and Dolls, A Musical Fable of Broadway**”.

There will be lots and lots of information and e-mails forthcoming but bare bones of it all is as follows:

Auditions, **January 3, 2010**, Performances **March 19, 20 and 21**. We'll be following the rehearsal schedule of the past two years; rehearsals on Sundays after church and an evening week-day (the actual day for this has yet to be determined).

And there's even more good news! Diane has agreed be our Director once again, Natalie is our Set Designer, Becca Hutton will be our Costume Designer and Linnea will once again be our Musical Director.

As you may know, I am producing the show this year. This is a first for me and I am very excited about it. I am going to be calling on you for help on a regular basis - more to come on that... a lot more :)

Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to working with you all.

Best regards,

Virginia

Cakes

Cakes is a welcoming group of women. We celebrate with each other in high times, support each other in low times, and challenge each other with the stories of our lives. The trust we share gives us a deep sense of community.

We meet regularly on the third Friday of each month at 6:30 p.m.

In the spirit of Thanksgiving we will each be keeping a gratitude journal this month and will share from them at our next gathering.

Please contact Vicky Berg if you plan on coming so that she knows how much pizza to get. v.berg@juno.com

**Minutes of the Parish Committee Meeting
October 6, 2009**

Present: Judy Barrington, Audrey Cecil, Carol Dixon, Jeff Hutton, Sharon Lane, Claudia Leone, Grace Pena, Michael Roberts, Eileen Sullivan, Jeff Tegnell, Rev. Rali Weaver

Meeting called to order at 7:10pm

Unison Affirmation. Opening words by Judy Barrington.

Minutes of 9/01/09 – Motion made to approve the minutes of the last meeting. Second, motion carried.

Ministers Report- Rali reported that September was a successful start to the church year with attendance averaging around 70. Last weekend, a tent was set up on the church green for the memorial service of a Dedham resident. Seth Carrier, our student minister, will preach this Sunday. The Fall Fair will occur on 10/17. The Boston Symphony Orchestra will play a free concert at the church on Nov 1st. On Nov 7th the dining hall will be used for a luncheon.

Ministerial expenses were used for new software and for the fee to the Andover Newton Theological School for the student minister. The church received H1N1 prevention tips and institutional strategies for emergencies will be addressed such as church cancellation. We also need to systematize our processes for church meetings including familiarizing everyone with Roberts Rules. Church officers will write up a review of the tasks associated with their position and what steps are necessary to ensure that meeting prep is accomplished. Natalie Jensen will review the Year End Treasurer's report for 2008-2009 and report on this at the annual meeting, as this did not occur prior to the Special Meeting in September.

Work of the Parish Committee – Chair and committee members:

Finance Committee- Jeff Hutton will identify membership.

Stewardship Committee- Allison Staton and Kerry Gallagher will co-chair.

Nominating Committee- Judy Barrington, Janet Hurwitz/Susan White, Sharon Lane, RE Chair, and one more to be identified.

Membership Committee- Carol Dixon will identify.

Personnel Committee-Eileen Sullivan will chair, Claudia Leone, and one more to be identified.

Rali and Judy Barrington will organize a Committee Fair to occur after the Holiday season.

Treasurer's Report – Michael Roberts reported that a payroll adjustment was made in the salary of the Minister and secretary retroactive to July. All payments are up to date pending a check made to First Church in loan repayment to the endowment and a check for RE expenses.

Building and Grounds – Jeff Hutton reported on the B&G meeting on 9/22. They discussed purpose and scope of the committee, a list of duties, and how best to communicate. Action items included; rugs for the parsonage are on hold, an estimate for painting of Parish House entry was obtained. A dead tree behind the church needs to be removed, a new stove is needed for the Parsonage, and a radiator is needed in the Parsonage. October 24 and November 14 are scheduled for clean up days. The door lights at the Parish House and Meeting House are to be on constantly. A Garden and Grounds Group will be organized.

Fund Raising –

September Yard Sale 9/26/09. \$720 was raised.

Silent Auction of Red Sox and Patriots tickets brought in \$1060.

UNO Pizza – The event was fun. We don't have earnings yet but will hear soon. It was suggested that we offer this 2 -3 times per year.

Fall Fair will be 10/17/09

Harvest Dinner will be November 7th.

New Ideas included a supper in January, a movie night now that we have a digital projector and a game night including Wii games.

R.E. Committee –Rali is the only one certified to handle CORI checks. Aoife will be working on a Safety Plan.

Old Business – Thank you letters went out to Mike Dewar and to Sharon Lane's father who contributed the Red Sox and Patriots tickets for the fund-raiser.

New Business –Goal Setting

1. Systematize institutional practices- Write down job descriptions of committee chairs, the purpose of Annual Meeting/Special Meeting, the role of committees, the function of Deacons.
2. Leadership training. Budget for next year to include cost of sending a team to UUA training.
3. Acknowledgments for time and effort – thank you acknowledgments need to occur more often.
4. Include new members more – invite participation.

Food Pantry Discussion –We reviewed the discussion points raised at the Special Meeting on 10/4/09 and heard a recommendation made to the Parish Committee by those in attendance at the Special Meeting. A motion was made to accept the recommendation from the Special Meeting. Second. Passed with two abstentions.

With regard to how we move forward from here, the following motion was made subject to a formal vote by the congregation: First Church and Parish move to offer the use of the Larcom Room to the Dedham Food Pantry on a short-term basis (3 years) subject to acceptance of a mutually negotiated contract.

Second. Passed with one abstention.

A sub-committee was formed, comprised of Carol Dixon, Sharon Lane, and Eileen Sullivan, to develop a list of criteria to be considered when this proposal is formally presented to the church at an information session on October 18th. A church wide vote will occur on November 15th. A warrant will need to be posted about the vote.

Rali and Grace Pena will research First Church legal representation.

Next meeting will be November 3, 2009 at 7pm.

Grace Pena will offer the opening words.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:16pm

Respectfully submitted,

Audrey H. Cecil