

Hope and Fear

The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries, and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community.

This year December 1 marks the first Sunday of Advent. The season is one where the days get darker, where a spark is lit at the solstice and the sun begins its long return.

The season of Advent covers the four weeks prior to Christmas. Contrary to what our culture seems to tell us, the focus on Advent is not shopping, it is not "a season of savings" event. It is a season of "expectant waiting" of hope for the coming of a child. In many traditions the seasonal color is purple — not the solemn purple of Lent, but the royal purple or blue of hope and celebration.

Because it is, taken on its own terms, a hopeful season. "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is an advent carol. Emmanuel — "God is with us," the long hoped for Messiah who will come to rescue a people bent and bowed by an oppressive Roman empire.

The hope of Advent, indeed of the whole Christmas story, is on its face absurd. This idea that the embodiment of hope and love in the world will be born, not in the halls of power, but in a lowly barn in a back road town in an almost forgotten colony in a forgotten corner of empire.

To Christians, this is the anchor beyond the horizons of the experienced world. The hope of a baby, born thousands of years ago, who brings hope to the broken-hearted. So, Advent is a time to reaffirm that hope — waiting for the

thing that is most unexpected, and at the same time hoped for.

At the same time, the stories that we tell in this season are strange, full of fear and anxiety. As we inch towards the longest nights of the year, the fears of our larger season start to creep in: the metacrisis of democracy, climate, inequality and so much more that feels nearly inescapable. In a world that is dehumanizing in so many ways, how shall we live? How do we live into the best of our humanist tradition when everything around us devalues human life?

The season of early winter is full of holidays that fall right on the border between hope and fear. Their familiarity can blind us to their strangeness but have no doubt these stories of a lantern burning for eight days, the Oak King overthrowing the Holly King, and angels appearing to shepherds and new parents proclaiming, always, "Fear not!" these are very strange stories. They take seriously the darkness of the world, the uncertainty and fear that is part of the human experience, and they tell us that it is there, right where things feel most uncertain and fearful, that we should look for the unexpected.

There are lessons for 2024 in these familiar stories. We are in a moment in history when much feels uncertain, where we don't know how the story will turn out and when many of us are carrying fear and anxiety around

with us daily. This is a good time to turn to familiar stories in new ways, trying to see the strangeness and uncertainty in them with new eyes. These stories are important not because the hope they offer is easy — there is little cheap grace to be found here — but because the hope they bring comes in moments of confusion and uncertainty.

At some point in the next month, we'll sing "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem." For me (Oscar), it is a lullaby that my parents would sing to me growing up. Many of us know it by heart. But I hope that, this year, we can hear the comfort in it and the strangeness of this line: "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

*Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair
with this month's Theme Team*

Theme Resources

For further reflection on the theme, see this month's spiritual practice packet, available online at unityunitarian.org/chalice-circles.

December holiday services and events, please turn to page 7.



JUST WORDS



Just Words

Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, Senior Minister

I love Christmas, unashamedly and unironically. I love the light at Christmas Eve, the reflections of candlelight in the eyes of church folks. I love the mad pagentry of it, cold pizza gulped down between maybe-one-too-many worship services in late December. I love the quiet of Christmas Eve, after the last service is done and I sit down at home with a glass of whiskey and the broadcast from King's College on in the background. And I love, more than all of it, the mystery and the strangeness of the story.

The traditional Unitarian telling of the Christmas Story often goes something like this: 2000 years ago, a baby was born in the midst of an oppressive empire. That baby grew up to become a man, and his teachings on non-violence and love have changed the world over the last two millennia.

This is true, but the story, the myth, is more than a birthday. The traditional Christmas Pageant at Unity Church begins with words from the prophet Isaiah: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: They that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." During the pageant, a light in a cradle represents the infant Jesus, pointing back to this phrase.

But there are also many pageants that begin the story with the Gospel of John:

In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.

² The Word was with God in the beginning...

What came into being

⁴ through the Word was life,[a]
and the life was the light for all people.

⁵ The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light. (John 1:1-5, CEB)

What is happening in this crib? Is it a baby? Is it God? Is it an 80-year-old piece of wiring the minister worries will catch fire some year? Or is it, somehow, all of these things all at once?

My colleague Diana Davies recently presented a paper on the theme of encounter in speculative fiction. In it, she writes, "Separate entities, including beings from entirely different cultures and entirely different universes, struggle, come together, and, without losing their own recognizable attributes, become something 'beyond what the sum of its parts could ever imagine.'"

I don't understand exactly what happens on Christmas Eve. I am enough of a humanist to reject the Christmas story as a discrete, one-time event, joining instead with Sophia Lyon Fahs when she writes that, "Every night a child is born is a holy night." But in those nights, something holy does happen, that joins us as individuals with a story and truth greater than ourselves. It is a story I think we need right now, and I am looking forward to telling it together in St. Paul.

commUNITY is the monthly newsletter of Unity Church. Deadlines are the 15th of each month. Subscriptions are free to those who make pledges to Unity Church and are available to others for \$30/year.

The Wheel of Life

In Memoriam

Vincent Grundman

September 16, 1952 —
November 14, 2024

In Celebration

Carol and Dennis Miller who are celebrating 60 years of membership with Unity Church.

In The Justice Database

Bridge Alliance



Transforming Families Minnesota is a volunteer-based peer network of families; a community where transgender, gender non-conforming, and questioning youth and their families come together to support each other in a safe, welcoming space. Meets in four locations around the Twin Cities, including St. Paul, and online. bit.ly/JusticeData



Cairns

The Unity Church Journal of the Arts
Vol 16, 2024

Cairns Vol. 16, 2024
Coming December 2024

SUNDAY SERVICES | OFFERING RECIPIENTS

Sunday Services

Sunday services are held at 9:00 and 11:15 a.m., except where noted. The 9:00 a.m. service is also offered via livestream. Find the livestream links and sermon podcasts at unityunitarian.org/sunday-services.

December 1: Gifts and Wounds

One service only at 10:00 a.m.

Ari Giles, worship leader

How do we build hope from the gifts and wounds we carry with us, while also navigating the fear of change?

December 8: Magnificat

Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair

"My Soul Magnifies the Lord," Mary tells the Angel Gabriel in the gospel of Luke. The song she sings next is a vision of a world that might be, one where the mighty are thrown down, the hungry are fed, and the beloved community arrives. What lessons do her words hold for us, 2000 years later?

December 15: The Waiting Time

Rev. Lara Cowtan

In the Christian calendar, Advent is a time of waiting and preparation for the coming of the Christ child. The story from first century Palestine tells us that with the birth of Jesus comes hope, love, the undoing of the status quo: a new reign of peace on earth. In times of fear and uncertainty, where is hope to be found in these ancient stories? In our own stories?

Family Sunday, December 22

The Road to Bethlehem

Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair | Carol Sing: 9:00 | Carol Shout: 11:15

At the start of the Christmas story, Mary and Joseph are internally displaced refugees, traveling from their home in Nazareth to be counted in a census for a far-away imperial capital. By the end of the story, they are fleeing their homes as refugees, looking to start a new life in Egypt, away from political violence and oppression. In 2024 in St. Paul Minnesota, where do we locate ourselves in this story? Are we the innkeeper, telling the young family there is no room? Or are we the shepherds, called from the fields to witness and provide what help they can?

December 29: Will It Be Enough?

One service only at 10:00 a.m.

Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair

The story of the Maccabean revolt is the inspiration for the Jewish festival of lights, Hannukah. The miracle at the heart of the story is simple: lamp oil that appeared to only be enough for a night lasted for eight days. But even in simplicity, the story holds meaning for what it means to live sustainably, hopefully, and what it means to rededicate ourselves to a cause.

Offering Recipients

Each week, sixty percent of our Sunday offering is given to a community non-profit and forty percent supports the Community Outreach Ministry at Unity Church. Donations are gratefully accepted online at bit.ly/sundayoffering.

December 1: FREC

[Facilitating Racial Equity Collaborative \(FREC\)](#) is a cohort of individuals and organizations working towards just, equitable, antiracist communities throughout Minnesota. FREC works to expand awareness of local reparation projects and works to drive racial equity and justice programs within community organizations. This collection will support community leaders in their work to organize a conference exploring the harm racist policies and practices have caused within Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.

December 8: Restorative Justice Circle of Healing

The Restorative Justice Circle of Healing at the Minnesota Department of Corrections women's prison at Shakopee provides a compassionate way to help incarcerated women heal by offering a circle practice where women share their stories and engage in reflective conversation. This collection will help compensate an experienced BIPOC circlekeeper and trainer whose presence adds valuable insight, counsel, and mentoring for the circle participants.

December 15: Evergreen Quilters

[Evergreen Quilters Community Outreach Ministry Team](#) raises money through the sale of their handmade items for non-profit organizations that focus on children, food security, education and housing for all people. Their work supports Hallie Q. Brown Food Shelf, Jeremiah Program, and Project Home. This collection will help with expenses related to the crafting of their raffle quilts and One More Redeemer quilts.

December 22: Project Home

[Project Home](#) provides shelter and supportive services for families experiencing homelessness. Interfaith Action of Greater St. Paul's support team is on site to help families find permanent, affordable housing and connect them to employment and educational opportunities. This collection will purchase supplies for Project Home families when they first enter the shelter as well as when they transition into permanent housing.

December 29: Casa Guadalupana

[Casa Guadalupana](#) in St. Paul is a home created in 1999 by a group of concerned immigration activists to provide safe, dignified, stable housing to women and children who have been forcibly displaced from their countries of origin and are seeking a safe place to live while they navigate the complex immigration system. Casa Guadalupana is part of the St. Paul Sanctuary Coalition, a partner of Unity's Sanctuary Team.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES



Ends Mark New Beginning

John Steiner-Manning, Trustee

Every several years we get together at Unity Church to work on our ends — a handful of statements that capture where we imagine going together. Yes, it sounds a little tricky; while we call them ends, they are a new start, a new beginning.

Crafting Unity's ends is a board responsibility that depends on input from as many members of the Unity community as will participate. We'll be holding nearly 20 meetings in January and February for Unity members and friends to come together and do some dreaming (see the back cover to register!). We'll be joining some pre-existing groups — imagine a coming of age group session — and contacting some of our "moral owners" as well — people for whom Unity works and to whom Unity is accountable, even if they are not members. The board will be working closely with the executive team on this.

For those of you who have joined recently, this is likely all new, another maybe-mysterious Unity Church custom. And even if you've been a member of the congregation for years, it is something you may not recall well; the last time we took this on was in 2019, before the pandemic. Know that no familiarity with this is needed to contribute; coming to a community meeting and doing some dreaming together is what this takes.

We go through this effort because the results have proven so important for our church. The language we craft together will guide the congregation, giving staff clear goals to aim towards when making decisions for how we do church together. When we have new ends, our executive team — Oscar Sinclair, KP Hong and Laura Park — will take the lead in planning out just what they'll mean for how the church operates moving forward. And over the coming years, they'll report back to the board on our progress.

Given the importance of doing this well, we are being supported by D Ohlandt, a Unitarian Universalist who has facilitated several planning efforts and retreats with UU congregations, including in the past with Unity Consulting. Skilled at facilitating team efforts, she'll be guiding how our community meetings run and help the board draw meaning from all the input we receive.

While we'll be imagining new ends together, the board plans to continue to use our current values and mission; we've seen those as a solid foundation that we can continue to use to build our next set of ends. And if all this talk makes you curious just what our current values, mission and ends are, you'll find them listed on this page. They're also posted on Unity's website, under the "about" section: unityunitarian.org/values-mission-and-ends.html.

It will be exciting to see what ends next year's board will craft based on what they hear from the congregation. Rooted in our values and mission, our new ends will guide Unity's future. We have a lot to hold on to but we're also open to growth and change. It all depends on having congregation members contributing their thoughts. I hope you'll register to participate for one of the congregational meetings and help shape our shared future.

Are you a natural facilitator who likes drawing people out and would be open to putting some time into helping this process? We've identified several facilitators for the community meetings the board will be holding, but the board could use a few more. While trustees will be coming to the community meetings to listen, the facilitator volunteers will be key. If you want to see more about the qualities that are important to help out and want to raise your hand for this, please visit bit.ly/endsrenewfacapp for more information and to complete the application.

Values

Unity Church-Unitarian honors the ambiguity and uncertainty in the search for greater truth, meaning, and equity. In all we do, we strive to embody: wonder, open-hearted engagement, courageous action

Mission

Unity Church-Unitarian fosters transformation through a free and inclusive religious community that encourages lives of integrity, service, and joy.

Current Ends

Working within ourselves, among our church community, and beyond in the larger world, we the people of Unity Church-Unitarian:

Create a multicultural spiritual home built on authentic relationships.

Ground ourselves in personal practice and communal worship that grows our capacity for wonder and spiritual deepening.

Articulate our Unitarian Universalist faith identity, teach it to our children, share it with others, and live it courageously in the world.

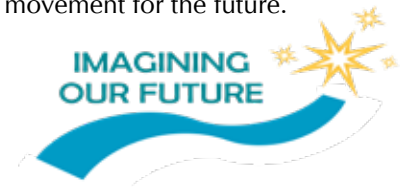
Know each other in all our fullness and create an ever-widening circle of belonging for all people.

Generously give and openly receive compassionate care in times of joy, sorrow, and transition.

Discover and pursue our individual and collective work to advance justice, wholeness, and equity for people, our Earth, and all life on it.

Create brave space for racial healing and dismantling dominant culture.

Sustain and steward the church and our larger Unitarian Universalist movement for the future.



Turn to the back cover and be part of Imagining Our Future!

CONGREGATIONAL CARE



Carrying Hope and Fear on the Cusp of Change

Rev. Karen Hering

In the turbulence of these times, I've been hosting an unruly exchange in my heart between hope and fear. To settle myself, the morning after last month's elections, I walked to my neighborhood park, removed my shoes and wrote this poem, which Rev. Lara Cowtan asked me to share here.

Concession

This morning,
in the lingering fog,
I took my heavy heart
and went down to the rise
overlooking the lake,
and I stood with the burr oaks,
crooked and sturdy,
which weeks ago gave up
their leaves to the wind.

And there,
beneath the bare bones
of their branches,
I took off my shoes
and planted my feet
in the cold morning dirt,
 holy ground
 burning not with heat
 but with the churning
 of this moment.

I asked out loud –
of the earth and the trees,
of the lake and the sky –
What do you want me to know?

As the fog lifted, my eyes
rose too, shifted my view,
and I leaned back, held
by the trunk behind me,
by the roots below me,
by the branches and clouds above me,
and the breeze moving gently
around me.
I tell you,
I was held.

My hope for all of us teetering on the cusp of change, is that we will let ourselves be held — by one another, by nature, by our ancestors and by Love itself. That together, we might keep our hearts open — to the fear and despair, the grief and anger that may be stirring, as well as the joy and love. And that we might keep our feelings moving as emotions are meant to do. That together, we might lift our eyes to a wider horizon where hope still shines and rises.

For this and other reflections about living through change, please visit:
karenhering.substack.com.

*It's the same world
today as it was yesterday,
came the answer.*

Still circling the sun,
still turning inevitably toward winter,
which will turn inevitably
toward spring.
A world broken by storms,
by winds, by greed,
by blasphemy.

*It's the same world today
as it was yesterday:
a thousand beauties shining
and life still rising,
growing toward the light
offering seeds to the wind,
to the morrow,
to the ground beneath my feet,
 holy,
 waiting,
 ready
 to be planted.*

And here I am, too,
still held
and leaning,
 broken open,
 listening,
 hoping,
 rising.

Holding All Our Grief

Sunday, January 5 | 1:30-3:00 p.m.
Parish Hall and Zoom

Optional soup lunch and fellowship,
12:45-1:15 p.m., Center Room.

Following Unity's annual Tolling of the Bells Service of Remembrance, we will come together for kindness and comfort with Rev. Lara Cowtan, to honor and hold space for each other's grief and loss, whether your loss is recent or has long been part of your life.

We will join in small circles with those in similar relational loss such as parent, partner, sibling, child/grandchild, friend or colleague, grandparent. We will also have small circles for those whose grief and loss is a health challenge, another major life change or major challenge or multiple losses.

For questions or if you would like to help with this gathering please contact Linda Kjerland (KjerlandLinda1@gmail.com) or Signe Nestingen (Signe.Nestingen@gmail.com) from Unity's Congregational Care Team.

Twin Cities Congregational Spiritual Care Training

Two Saturdays: January 25 and
February 15, 9:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m.,
at Unity Church

Register: bit.ly/uucaretrain

Rev. Karen Hutt will lead these workshops designed to build your skills in providing spiritual care. We are called, in these times, to level up the ways we extend radical, inclusive welcome, to offer a true experience of sanctuary, care and belonging.

Attendance at both is required for participation. Lunch is included for those attending in-person. Questions? Email Rev. Lara Cowtan at lara@unityunitarian.org.

WELLSPRING WEDNESDAY | COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Wellspring Wednesday December Offerings

Wellspring Wednesday gathers a multigenerational church community to nourish right and holy relationship among us and deepen our life of faith, grounded in spiritual practice and antiracist multicultural work. Dinner begins at 5:45 p.m. in Parish Hall, a short chapel service is held at 6:40 p.m., and programs begin at 7:10 p.m. Childcare is available and advance registration is not required. Details about dinner, programs, and the Zoom links are online at unityunitarian.org/wellspring-wednesday.html.

December 4

Dinner: Rancho Gordo bean chili, jicama slaw, cornbread, Anna's Christmas bars

Action of Immediate Witness: Solidarity with Palestinians | Parish Hall and Zoom

This session will educate attendees about the Action of Immediate Witness (AIW), entitled "Solidarity With Palestinians," that passed at the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) General Assembly in June. Come learn about the AIW and its significance for the UUA and all Unitarian Universalist congregations. There will be space for attendees to share their grief and concerns regarding the violence suffered by Palestinians in Gaza, Israel and in the Occupied West Bank, and the violence suffered by Israeli Jews. Participants will also discuss the formation of a Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East (UUJME) chapter in the Twin Cities.

Religious Education New Family Orientation | Gannett Room

Interested in learning more about Unity's religious education programs for children and youth? Email Nelson if you plan to attend: nelson@unityunitarian.org.

Beginner Violin | Choir Room

Join Mayra Mendoza for beginning violin lessons appropriate for all ages. Learn basic violin posture, note reading, and more! Contact Mayra at mayraquitzia@hotmail.com by 3:00 p.m. on Wednesdays to ensure a lesson.

Young Adults Group (ages 18-35) | Center Room

A fun, reflective group of people working to build multifaith and multicultural community, exploring questions of life and faith, and practicing sharing what is sacred as they navigate the complexity of being an adult.

December 11

Dinner: Barbacoa or bean tacos, lime slaw, Mexican rice, assorted cookies and bars

Poetry Reading | Parish Hall and Zoom

A special poetry reading by Karen Sandberg and guest Thomas R. Smith, celebrating Karen's new book, *Dreams of the Floating House*.

Santa Pause | Parish Hall, Ames Chapel, Lower Level

Unity provides free childcare, crafts, play space and a movie for kids ages three and up. Parents and guardians are invited to attend Wellspring Wednesday events, enjoy an evening out, prepare for the holidays, or otherwise cultivate a moment of pause in what can be a time full of distracting business. RSVP by Monday, December 9: unityunitarian.org/childcare-request-form.html. See page 7 for a schedule for the evening.

Lectio Divina | Zoom (Gannett Room)

Join a sacred experience of listening, contemplating, and responding to inspirational texts and contemporary poetry. Participants report that Lectio Divina is "rejuvenating" and "insightful." Zoom from the Gannett Room on Wednesdays.

Hymn Sing | Robbins Parlor and Zoom

At each session group members sing the hymn, discuss its music, text, history, and theology, while also sharing personal reflections on the music and its meaning.

Beginner Violin (see December 4)

Project Home Opportunities

Unity's **Annual Mitten Tree** is waiting downstairs in Whitman Lobby (near the nursery) to be decorated with new mittens, hats, scarves and gloves. This year, items will be distributed to families housed at Provincial House in St. Paul.

Bring unwrapped gifts (in the \$15-\$25 range) to Provincial House in St. Paul for their **Holiday Dignity Shop** serving children 0-18 years. Parents can choose a few gifts and wrap them. Or, you can volunteer to watch children while their parents "shop." Or be a set up elf! Gifts accepted through December 16: tinyurl.com/DignityShop2024.

Adults needed for **weekend meal teams at Provincial House** in Saint Paul. Serve meals, visit with guests, and clean up. Sign up: bit.ly/ucuph.

The Faithful Hospitality initiative partners with local houses of worship to provide shelter for families seeking asylum. Interested in volunteer opportunities? Contact Annessa Ihde at aihde@interfaithaction.org.

Gun Violence Prevention Team

The Gun Violence Prevention Team is contacting UU churches and fellowships across the state of Minnesota. This effort is to build support for Minnesota legislation that will help make guns and gun ownership safer for all Minnesotans. We are asking for their help, and yours, to strengthen our voice in the Legislature.

Those of you who have family, friends, neighbors at your cabin... ask them how they might imagine Minnesota being a safer place for all of us, and free of gun violence. And then let the team at work here at Unity know what you find out.



DECEMBER HOLIDAYS AT UNITY CHURCH



Holiday Services

Blue Holiday Service

Thursday, December 19 | 7:00 p.m. | Ames Chapel
For some, the holiday season is “the most wonderful time of the year.” For others, the holidays are a bittersweet time, filled with mixed emotions. We gather for a service of words, music, and sharing.

Solstice Vespers

Saturday, December 21 | 7:00 p.m. | Ames Chapel
The shortest day and longest night of the year are upon us. Since ancient times, people have gathered on this day to share in rituals and song to mark the gift of returning light, warmth and hope. Bring seasonal greenery and nature gifts to build a Yule Altar.

Find a Stillness

Tuesday, December 24 | 10:00 a.m. | Ames Chapel
In the full rush of Christmas Eve morning, come gather in the quiet of Ames Chapel. There will be extended periods of silence to provide time for relief and contemplation. The service will include an invitation to join in communion.

Christmas Pageant

Tuesday, December 24 | 4:00 and 5:30 p.m. | Sanctuary
This rich tradition dates to 1919, when Unity Church minister Frederick May Eliot compiled the script and music for our retelling of the Christmas story. Whether you are new to our pageant, or you have been part of it for years, we look forward to gathering together in the Sanctuary on Christmas Eve.

All children and youth are invited to participate in the Christmas pageant! Details including registration for pageant cast and children's choir are online at unityunitarian.org/pageant.html. Questions? Please contact pageant director Kelley Loughrey at kelleyloughrey@comcast.net.

If you would like to sing in the adult pageant choir, please email ahmed@unityunitarian.org. Rehearsal is Sunday, December 22, 10:15 a.m., Foote Room.

Lessons and Carols Candlelight Service

Tuesday, December 24 | 9:00 p.m. | Sanctuary | Livestream
Join members of Unity's ministry team in celebrating the ancient story of a baby, born in a manger, told through scripture, song, and candlelight.

If you would like to sing with the candlelight choir on Christmas Eve, please email ahmed@unityunitarian.org. Rehearsals are Tuesday, December 17 and Thursday, December 19, 8:00-9:15 p.m., and on Christmas Eve at 8:00 p.m. You are required to attend at least two of these three rehearsals to participate.

Holiday Events

Mitten Tree

Our annual Mitten Tree is waiting downstairs in Whitman Lobby (near the nursery), to be decorated with warm hats, gloves, scarves and mittens. All donated items should be new or like new and will be distributed to families living at Project Home's Provincial House in St. Paul.

Holiday Boutique

Sunday, December 1 and 8 | Parish Hall
Bolivian-made sweaters, totes, shawls, scarves, hats, tablecloths, and more from Mano a Mano. Hand-sewn and quilted table runners, wall-hangings, bags, purses, ornaments, and other gift items from Evergreen Quilters.

Tower Club Wreath and Cookie Sale

Sunday, December 8 | Parish Hall and Main Lobby
Unity's high school group will sell wreaths and made-from-scratch cookies to raise money to support their activities.



Santa Pause

Wednesday, December 11 | 5:30-8:30 p.m.
Unity provides free childcare, crafts, play space and a movie for kids ages three and up. Parents and guardians are invited to attend Wellspring Wednesday events, enjoy an evening out, prepare for the holidays, or otherwise cultivate a moment of pause in what can be a time full of distracting business.

5:30-6:30 Dinner. Parents are welcome but not required to eat dinner with children.

6:40-7:05: Festive and kid-centered chapel service.

7:10-8:00: Crafts, large motor play in the body room. Nursery open for children needing a quieter space or for younger siblings (parents stay in building at Wellspring Wednesday if there are younger siblings in nursery).

8:00-8:30: Short seasonal movie

RSVP by Monday, December 9: unityunitarian.org/childcare-request-form.html. Join this joyful gathering as a volunteer (ages 13+) by emailing katrina@unityunitarian.org.

Music Ministry Winter Concert

Friday, December 13 | Sanctuary

6:30 p.m.: Carol Sing

7:00 p.m.: Concert

8:00 p.m.: Potluck Dessert Buffet: Bring a dessert to Parish Hall before the concert: nut-free, labeled, cut and ready to serve.

Caroling

Sunday, December 15 | Watch for details!



Welcome Words

Philippa Anastos, Membership Coordinator and Program Assistant

I have struggled this year with the thought of how to observe Advent. It has always served as a haven of coziness amidst short days and cold weather, and this year, that image seemed more of a thin illusion

than anything. What is there to anticipate with joy, after all, when we know there is so much darkness and cruelty that surrounds us, and we do not know when we will have a reprieve from it? And yet, that is the very core of advent. Jesus was not born into a world free of troubles, but instead into an empire. In every religious tradition there is the celebration of hope triumphing over despair — not because we need something to keep us going, but because humanity has seen that triumph more times than anyone can count. Let advent this year remind you of who you are called to be.

Pathway to Membership Classes

The offerings below invite you to explore a deeper connection to Unity Church and the commitments and opportunities of membership. Contact Philippa Anastos, Membership Coordinator and Program Assistant, philippa@unityunitarian.org or 651-228-1456 x110.

Finding Yourself at Unity

Sundays 10:15 a.m. | Center Room | Childcare available

For visitors and newcomers. Join the repeating eight-session cycle at any time. Attend the sessions in any order!

December 1: Building Tour

December 8: Social Justice & Community Outreach

December 15: Q&A with the Minister

December 22 & 29: No session

Committing to Unity

Tuesday, January 14 | 6:30-8:30 p.m. | Center Room

This session, for people ready to become members, explores the deeper meanings and expectations of membership and shared ministry. The class includes a ceremony as participants sign the membership book and officially join the church.

Hallie Q. Brown

Great news: During October we delivered 419 pounds of food to Hallie Q. Brown. Thank you!

During December the food shelf is collecting holiday food including canned beans, corn, sweet potatoes, and cranberry sauce, as well as boxed mashed potatoes, rice and dressing mix. Paper products are always appreciated.

If you would like to donate money so Hallie Q. Brown can buy hams and turkeys please visit hallieqbrown.charityproud.org/donate.



Archives Team

When We Stand...

The Archives Team collects materials that tell the story of Unity Church Unitarian. However, some stories live only in the memories of Unity Church people; there is no documentation. An example of a question that archives alone cannot answer is: "Why do we stand as the worship leaders leave the sanctuary at the end of the service?" We haven't found answers in old orders of worship or in board minutes. How do we know the origins of this element of worship?

Fortunately, Unity Church members Sue Conner and Sally Foster recall the beginning of the practice. They point to the 2001 pilgrimage to the Unitarian village of Homoródszentpéter in Transylvania, Romania, as the source. Sue wrote about the church services pilgrims attended, a memory that Sally confirmed:

At the end of the service, the entire congregation stood until the minister had walked out of the church... it seemed that a strong, meaningful statement of respect was communicated by that simple gesture.

The minister of our Transylvanian partner church, Kinga-Réka Székely, noted that the tradition there is seen as "a sign of respect and being present."



One Sunday after returning to Unity Church, several pilgrims remained standing as the worship leaders left the sanctuary. Since he was not preaching, Rev. Rob Eller-Isaacs was in the pews and also remained standing. The practice caught on. The congregation

implemented a worship service change, a change that happened because of the first partner church pilgrimage.

That is not the whole story, as there have been other ways of ending the service. Dan Huelster observed that after the 1963 sanctuary fire, Rev. Arthur Foote no longer recessed during the last hymn but sat in the chancel to hear the postlude on the new Noack organ. Then he walked out while the congregation remained seated. This continued until interim minister Rev. Davidson Loehr discontinued the practice in 1999.

This story is just one example of how people at Unity Church can help tell our story. If you have insights about events or people in Unity's past, please let us know.

Archives Team: Pauline Eichten, Fritz Hoehn, Louise Merriam, Carol Miller, Betsy Moore, Deb Woodburn.



Find Some Cheer in the Unity Bookstall

Shelley Butler, Library-Bookstall Team

For me, an unexpected hug and being in the sanctuary with my community are just two of the things that lift my spirits. For Vincent van Gogh, it was something else: "So often, a visit to a bookshop has cheered me, and reminded me that there are good things in the world." Also comforting are the words of Jerry Seinfeld, "A bookstore is one of the only pieces of evidence we have that people are still thinking." What do you think? Perhaps a visit to Unity's Bookstall is just what you need this month. Here is a small sample of what you will find:



The Comfort of Crows by Margaret Renkl has been described as "a howling love letter to the world, the story of what we've lost and what we can save and the abundance of wonder in our own backyard." **Our Little Farm: Adventures in Sustainable Living** by Peter Wohlleben is from the bestselling author of *The Hidden Life of Trees*, and with his wife, Miriam, has written an "inspired, practical memoir of creating a sustainable homestead among the trees." The new, already-bestselling novel by **Louise Erdrich**, **The Mighty Red**, has been called "stunning" and word around the Bookstall is that it's great! Of **Belongings** by Margaret Hasse Jim Moore writes that the book is full of gifts, "the kinds of gifts that only come because the poet has made a lifelong practice of paying attention, not only to the world inside her, but also to the world around her." **I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times** by Mónica Guzmán. When the country could no longer see straight across the political divide, Mónica set out to find what was blinding us and discovered the most eye-opening tool we're not using: our own built-in curiosity.

We don't typically carry calendars in the Bookstall, but "**A History of Racial Injustice: 2025 Calendar**" from the Equal Justice Initiative is an important tool for deepening and expanding our understanding of our history.

Don't Miss: A poetry reading by Karen Sandberg and guest Thomas R. Smith, celebrating Karen's new book, *Dreams of the Floating House*, on Wednesday, December 11, 7:10 p.m.

The last (at least for now) *Cairns* Vol. 16, 2024: coming December 2024.

Parish Hall Artists

The Shared Language of Home

Shona Dockter and Bebe Keith



We are cousins. We've known each other for a lifetime, and share many memories and experiences. While Shona grew up on the prairies of North Dakota and Bebe in the Twin Cities, our families traveled back and forth frequently so our moms could have sister time.

We share a language of home and of family. This exhibit explores our upbringing, our yearning for home, childhood, and for the familiar. We believe these captured memories will create a sense of place and time for the viewers. By sharing the beauty in the everyday, this evocative exhibit will prompt personal memories, feelings of nostalgia, and visceral touchstones that invite the audience to explore.



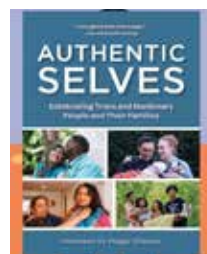
The Unity-UU Common Read 2025

Authentic Selves: Celebrating Trans and Nonbinary People and Their Families

Read in December and January

Attend workshop: February 22, 2025

Authentic Selves is available in the Unity Bookstall and Anderson Library.



MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH



Pitter-pattering Questions

[...like raindrops on the window, and little feet running through the house]

Rev. KP Hong, Minister of Faith Formation

Imagine your car breaks down somewhere in remote Alaska or a stretch of the Sahara. There is no cell phone connectivity, no radio, nothing to read, no gear to fiddle with, nothing to indulge wishful thinking or easy hope. With nothing to do but wait, you step out into the wild environment and gradually begin to notice how each and every thing happens to be there in their precise and unfamiliar way. Nothing has been created or shaped with your convenience or benefit in mind. Nothing has been arranged to shape your experience in any particular way. There is no marked entrance, no visitor center, no tour guide, no waysides providing natural-historical information, no benches, not even a path. Nothing elicits your attention by presenting itself as somehow designed "for me." In fact, this may be the closest to experiencing reality *unmediated* by offerings, choices, and options normally everywhere about us. (Even the phrase "get real" or "reality check" means that options have narrowed considerably.) And right there, caught in the spreading fear at the contrast between our heavily-mediated world and a greater feral reality, something is revealed: the opposite of *real* is not phony or artificial or fake — it's the *optional* that everywhere and continuously mediates our experiences, interactions, and understanding of the world for the purpose of maintaining our manufactured, self-reflexive simulacrum of reality.

Isn't there something peculiar in the popular fascination with extreme sports like wingsuiting and wilderness survival and reality shows like *Survivor* and *Fear Factor* — efforts to recover nature or achieve pain that might confer something real? Raw, unmediated experiences that give the feeling of the real (however ironic the opting to be alone and starving on some rugged coast of Canada). For at the core of such pursuits is an admission that the torrent of options mediating our lives may actually distance and alienate us from what is real and what truly matters. "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately," writes Thoreau, "to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." What if we touch a greater, more resonant reality when we are at the disposal of accident and necessity, the illegible and unpredictable, without our usual preferred options to mediate discomfort and fear? An unforeseen illness, caring for a child or aging parent, the inconvenient face of the "other" knocking at our border. No options, no easy hope; only the courage to risk intimacy with fear and learning to grapple with the need and givenness before us.

Of course our sacred play with children is mediated with their benefit in mind, with options and offerings and paths carefully planned out in great detail. But what if the accidents, necessities, and surprises that nonetheless break into our Sundays with children are not missteps but invitations into a more responsive and transformative relationship at the heart of spiritual practice? And stepping forth, we touch a deeper reality in ourselves than we had thought.

Sharing questions that pitter-patter across our sacred journeys...

Unity Church Youth Musical

For youth in grades 6, 7, and 8

Ready to reveal your fun socks? Wondering what Cluck the Chicken is up to? Join the fun!

The musical is a unique production created each year for Unity by Mary Blouin Auffert and Sandy Waterman.

All middle schoolers (grades 6, 7 and 8) are invited, and everyone who auditions gets a part.

Informational Meetings

Sunday, December 1, at 11:15 a.m. and Wednesday, December 4, at 7:15 p.m. in the Science Room (lower level) for anyone who would like to learn about the musical.

Auditions

Thursday, January 9 | 7:00-8:30 p.m. Foote Room

Parent/Guardian Meeting

Required parent meeting will be held during the auditions on Thursday, January 9, at 7:00 p.m., in the Center Room. Meet with the co-producers, learn more about the production, sign up to volunteer.

Important Dates

Rehearsals begin January 14 and are held Sundays, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., and Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7:00-8:30 p.m. at Unity Church.

Tech week is March 17-March 19.

Performances are March 20, 21, 22.

Volunteers from the Unity Church community, ages 6th grade to adult are welcome to help with the crew, staging, costumes, technical help, marketing and programming. For high schoolers, this can count towards service hours.

Questions?

Ask a co-producer! Contact Berry Farrington (berryfarrington@hotmail.com), Jen Schultz (jennyomn@yahoo.com), or Eric Weber (eric.weber1@yahoo.com).

Religious Education New Family Orientation | Gannett Room

Interested in learning more about Unity's religious education programs for children and youth? We offer Religious Education New Family Orientation on the first Wednesday of every month. Email Nelson one week in advance if you plan to attend: nelson@unityunitarian.org.

MUSIC MINISTRY | FELLOWSHIP GROUPS



Music Notes

Ahmed Anzaldúa, Director of Music Ministries

December is an extremely busy time for a church musician! In addition to the many wonderful musical events happening in the community, Unity Church has its share of beloved musical traditions for the holidays. Jump in and sing or attend a performance!

Here's what you can expect from the Music Ministry for the month of December:

The Music Ministry Winter Concert is on Friday, December 13. At 6:30 p.m. we will gather in the Sanctuary to sing carols and then all of Unity's choirs will perform, starting at 7:00 p.m. After the concert we will all enjoy an enormous buffet of desserts in the Parish Hall!

Christmas Eve includes our two performances of Unity's beloved Christmas pageant. If you wish to sing in the pageant choir, make sure to attend the rehearsal on Sunday, December 22, between that morning's worship services. The pageants this year are on Christmas Eve at 4:00 and 5:30 p.m.

The Christmas Eve evening worship service is at 9:00 p.m. and will take the form of Lessons and Carols. The choir singing is not one of Unity's regular adult choirs, but comes together just for the occasion! If you would like to be in the Christmas Eve choir, email me to sign up. The rehearsals are on December 17 and 19 from 8:00-9:15 p.m., and on Christmas Eve at 8:00 p.m. We ask that participants attend two of these three rehearsals.

The weekend before Christmas you can also look forward to caroling with other Unity folks. Keep an eye out for specifics as we get closer to the date!

Fellowship Groups

Email Philippa Anastos at philippa@unityunitarian.org to get connected.

Afterthoughts: Sundays, 10:15 a.m., Middle School Room 021, to discuss the service

Caregivers Support Group: third Thursday of the month at noon, Zoom

Evergreen Quilters: second Tuesday of the month, 7:00-9:00 p.m., Anderson Library, and fourth Saturday of the month, 10:00 a.m.-noon, off-site.

Families Living with Mental Health Challenges: third Saturday of each month, 9:30-11:30 a.m., Zoom

Living With Grief Group: third Tuesday of the month, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Zoom

Men's Coffee Group: Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m., Center Room, for light-hearted conversation

Men's Conversation Group: December 9 and 23, 7:00-9:00 p.m., Zoom. Discuss a range of topics, offer support, and connect.

Men's Retirement Circle: Monday, December 2, 16, and 30, 1:00-3:00 p.m., Robbins Parlor

New Look at the Bible meets the second Thursday of the month, 7:00 p.m., Zoom

Recovery from White Conditioning: Wednesdays, 6:00-7:00 p.m., Zoom

Textile Arts Group: first and third Wednesday of the month, 9:30-11:00 a.m., DeCramer Room, bring your knitting, stitching, etc.

Unity Book Club: second Tuesday of the month, 7:00-8:30 p.m., Zoom
December 10: *James* by Percival Everett

January 14: *While The World Watched* by Carolyn Maull McKinstry

Women in Retirement: second and fourth Thursday of each month, 1:00-3:00 p.m., Center Room

Young Adult Group (ages 18-35): every other Wednesday at 7:10 p.m., Center Room

Music Calendar: Upcoming Events

Saturday-Sunday, December 7 and 8

Border CrossSing continues its tradition of performing *Navidad Nuestra* by Argentine composer Ariel Ramírez. This year's concert pairs this powerful work with Latin-American Baroque villancicos in Spanish and Nahuatl. Saturday, December 7, at 7:00 p.m., at Academia Cesar Chavez Charter School in Saint Paul, and Sunday, December 8, at 4:00 p.m., at Church of the Ascension in Minneapolis. bordercrossingmn.org

Sunday, December 8

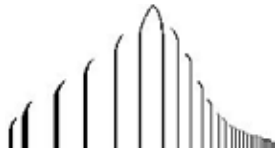
Join Mila Vocal Ensemble at 2:30 p.m., in the Sanctuary at Unity Church, for an afternoon of beautiful harmonies and festive cheer featuring the hauntingly beautiful folk music of Eastern Europe. Tickets on sale at bit.ly/mila1224. Unity Church members can use the code FRIEND to access discounted tickets or mention they are members at the door. Kids under 10: free!

Friday, December 13

Unity Church Music Ministry Winter Concert and dessert buffet. Carol singing starts in the Sanctuary at 6:30 p.m., concert at 7:00 p.m. Dessert buffet to follow the concert in Parish Hall. Bring a treat to share to Parish Hall before the concert: nut-free, labeled, cut and ready to serve. unityunitarian.org/music-ministry.html

Sunday, January 12, 2025

One Voice Mixed Chorus will present *Time & (Trans)formation* at 3:00 p.m. at The O'Shaughnessy Auditorium (2004 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul). Tickets coming soon at onevoicemn.org.



UNITY CHURCH-UNITARIAN

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Business Entrance: 732 Holly Avenue | Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-228-1456 | fax: 651-228-0927 | www.unityunitarian.org | unity@unityunitarian.org

Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, Senior Minister
Rev. KP Hong, Minister of Faith Formation
Laura Park, Executive Director
Louise Livesay-Al, Chair, Board of Trustees

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CALL TO MEETING Annual Meeting of the Congregation

Unity Church will hold its Annual Meeting of the Congregation on Saturday, December 7, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. Please plan to participate either in-person in the Sanctuary or online via Zoom (registration is required to participate online: bit.ly/annualmeetzoom). Join us for a pancake breakfast beginning at 8:30 a.m.

The annual meeting packet, including an agenda, will be on the church's website by November 24 and sent by email to eligible voting members shortly after that date. This year's annual meeting will include a vote on Unity's bylaws, the election of new trustees, and a vote to approve the 2025 budget. If you haven't made your 2025 pledge, help us create a more accurate budget and pledge today: unityunitarian.org/annualpledge.html.

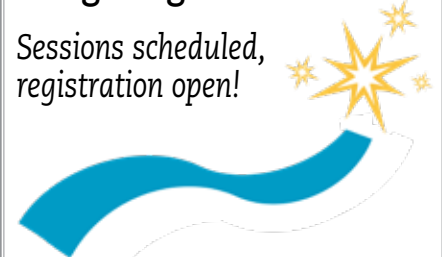
All are welcome to attend; only eligible voting members can vote. Eligible voting members include those who have, by October 8, 2024:

- Signed the membership book,
- Made an identifiable pledge to the operating fund in the current or upcoming year, and
- Made a payment on that pledge.

If you have questions about your voting member status, please contact Laura Park laura@unityunitarian.org.

Imagining Our Future

*Sessions scheduled,
registration open!*



Registration: bit.ly/ucuendsrenew25

You are invited to register for a community meeting to help imagine Unity's future. Held at Unity Church and running from January 26 to February 27, these facilitated, interactive sessions will each run about two hours. Participants will be connecting with one another and sharing experiences and ideas. Trustees will be in attendance to hear what you have to say. Childcare available by request.

Let's go deep into what Unity Church has been for you and what it could be in the future. See page 4 for more information!