

## Finding Our Center

Rev. Kathleen Rolenz and this month's theme team: Drew Danielson, Ray Hommeyer, Rev. Karen Gustafson, Rev. KP Hong, Laura Park, and Rev. Andrea La Sonde Anastos

On the first Tuesday of every month, a group of us gather in the Center Room to discuss the following month's theme.

Although the writing of the article is not a group effort, the ideas reflected in this article are the result of our contemplation on an opening question: "Where do you find your center?"

"For me, I have to always practice finding my center," said one participant. "But finding it is outside my control! When it comes, it's a gift..." Another said, "My mother. She is my center. When I feel myself spinning away from my center, she pulls me back. And spiritually, I go to my 'mom' — that is, my connections that help me to ground myself in the center."

So, is finding your center a practice, a person or a place? One of our members spoke movingly about experiencing the solitude of her childhood in a particular place. It was in this place where she felt most safe, secure and grounded — a place of being well cared for; where her basic needs were met. She experienced that at "my center... is a sense of well-being that is not based upon the existence of others; and it helped to develop my sense of trust in the care of the world and the universe." Finding one's center, then, can be intimately connected to our experiences of place. As one participant said, "...it's knowing the land that formed my bones. This is what keeps me centered, even though I no longer live on that land."

In some ways, it felt as if the conversation were circling around the center, but never landing there, as each one of us tried to explore the feeling of being centered. That feeling was reflected in returning to one's center time and time again; to particular people, both past and present, and to ordinary or special places that help us to center down.

What's not to love about the idea of being centered? "Well," said a member, "I would prefer not to use the word 'center,' but instead 'grounded'... Because centering implies a certain duality, in that you are either centered or not-centered." When the Buddha, who was seeking enlightenment was being tormented by Mara and his minions, the Buddha touched the ground and the earth immediately responded, "I am your witness." That simple act of touching the earth was a grounding experience from which the whole of Buddhist tradition unfolds.

We also explored the dangers of "seeking our center" so much so that we neglect the ways in which we must also *de-center* ourselves. Our culture emphasizes individual achievement over collaboration. White people must continue to de-center the ways in which they have adopted and benefitted from white supremacy culture. Learning to de-center our own egos is a lifelong practice.

As we enter into this month's theme of "Finding Our Center" we encourage

you to explore both the ways that you center yourself and the ways in which you de-center yourself.

We began and concluded our conversation by reading this poem by Ha Jin. We offer it to you now for your own reflection and contemplation.

A Center by Ha Jin

You must hold your quiet center,  
where you do what only you can do.  
If others call you a maniac or a fool,  
just let them wag their tongues.  
If some praise your perseverance,  
don't feel too happy about it—  
only solitude is a lasting friend.

You must hold your distant center.  
Don't move even if earth and heaven  
quake.  
If others think you are insignificant,  
that's because you haven't held on  
long enough.  
As long as you stay put year after year,  
eventually you will find a world  
beginning to revolve around you.

### Theme Resources

For further reflection on this theme please see this month's Spiritual Practice Packet which will be available online at [unityunitarian.org/chalice-circles.html](http://unityunitarian.org/chalice-circles.html).

# IN THE MEANTIME / WHEEL OF LIFE



*In the Meantime*  
*Reflections from Unity's Interim Senior Minister*

## The Gifts of De-Centering

Rev. Kathleen Rolenz

Happy New Year! In new year's past, I found myself making "suggestions" to myself. No resolutions, mind you — or even promises, but suggestions about how to improve. The list was long — and grew longer every year. It usually started with the physical (more mindful eating, drink less coffee, 100 sit ups and squats a day, etc.). Then, I'd create an impressive but often (for me) unrealistic set of spiritual goals: pray without ceasing, journal every single day. But in the last couple of years, I've taken a different approach for the new year, inspired by the work I've continue to internalize about de-centering whiteness in every aspect of my life.

Some of that work is involved with noticing how I show up, as Ta-Neheshi Coates writes, "a person who believes [her]self to be white." Because it's all I've ever known — this whiteness — it whitewashes everything I think, see and how I behave. It influences how I think about my work as your interim and how I create worship (see *Worship as Spiritual Practice*, page 8). Whiteness centers *me* — that is, the ego-me, the me that believes my thoughts, feelings and culture should always prevail. When I first was confronted by the need to de-center whiteness from other white parishioners, it was a deeply de-centering experience for me. Why? I thought to myself privately. I've worked hard to achieve this level of skill and knowledge. What does this mean (for me, of course)?

Through the daily practice of de-centering whiteness, I'm beginning to understand just how spiritually demanding and deeply rewarding this practice is. Sometimes this practice makes me feel off-balance, but I find my center through the other spiritual practices that shape my day. I sit zazen, or I read scripture, or I simply take seven minutes to pray in gratitude for the gifts I've been given and the people who I want to remember in prayer. I also find my center in conversations with so many of you, who are struggling to find and maintain your balance; who are actively challenging whiteness, and who with curiosity and compassion, continue to joyfully do this work of de-centering.

Happy New Year, dear ones! I am excited to share this ministry with you as we move forward, together. I hope you discover new ways to find your balance and keep de-center-(ing)!

Many blessings,

Rev. Kathleen

## Mark Your Calendar • Unity's Spring Fundraiser

*March Forth!* Unity Church's spring fundraiser will be held on Saturday, March 4, 2023! Save the date and start planning your donations! Donations that honor our 150 year history and that build and sustain connection and fellowship are encouraged — time at a vacation homes, tours, theme parties, dinners, tickets to concerts, theater and sporting events. Our goal is \$40,000 which will support the mission and programs of the church.

If you'd like to join the planning team, please contact Barbara Hubbard at [barbara@unityunitarian.org](mailto:barbara@unityunitarian.org). We need folks with a variety of skills — creative, detail-oriented, artistic, techy, and visionary.

The Wheel of Life  
In Memoriam

Judith Steller  
1936-2022

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# JANUARY SUNDAY SERVICES

## Worship Services

Unity Church offers two in-person services each Sunday at 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. (except where noted). The 9:00 a.m. service is offered via livestream.

### January 1: *Small Change — Inching Toward Center*

**One service at 10:00 a.m. • Rev. Karen Gustafson**

Livestream: <https://youtu.be/EMs-gxH3iuY>

Would that we could resolve ourselves into transformation; that the turning of a calendar page would actually shift us into a new beginning; that the moving of the spirit would be like a magic wand granting our noblest desires. Instead we are left to the practices of patience and faith and trust in the mysterious unknown in the crucible of community.

### January 8: *Tolling of Bells*

**Rev. Kathleen Rolenz and Rev. Karen Gustafson**

Livestream: <https://youtu.be/GDbTLvvZ1CQ>

When someone we love dies, something in us is forever changed. Grief and loss can de-center us. Rituals of memory, shared in community, can help us find our balance again. We begin each new year with a memorial service for those who have died in the previous year.

### January 15: *The Dream Has a Name*

**Rev. Kathleen Rolenz and Music Director Ahmed Anzaldúa**

Livestream: <https://youtu.be/yfUNdpBhdHE>

Each Martin Luther King, Jr., weekend provides an opportunity to reflect on the progress (or lack thereof) of racial justice in this country. For many years now, Unity Church has placed antiracist multicultural work at the center of its mission, ministry, and vision. On this Martin Luther King, Jr., Sunday, we will reflect on how we may center this mission to embody it more fully.

January 15 is a Story Sunday, children in grades 1-8 begin in worship with the congregation in the Sanctuary. After the Story for All Ages, Workshop Rotation children go to their classrooms while junior high youth remain for the service.

### January 22: *Reckoning with Acosta's Laugh*

**Rev. KP Hong**

Livestream: <https://youtu.be/v6lvI7ookvk>

From the moment Jesuit missionary José de Acosta Porres set foot in the New World, the land was a Spanish world in the making and a native world in collapse. Facing a world beyond the scope of his imagination or training, with a theology inadequate to attempt any explanatory claim upon new creation, Acosta laughs at the sheer immensity before him. His encounter, like many others, fails to read the land and peoples. Rather than acknowledgement, the colonial mind makes adjustments, enfolding theology inside racialized existence, inside whiteness, and gutting religion of its deepest humanity and intimacy. As part of our land acknowledgement, of recognizing injustices committed against indigenous peoples, worship associate Ray Wiedmeyer and Rev. KP Hong amplify the work of honest storytelling.

### January 29: *Improvising a Life*

**Rev. Kathleen Rolenz**

Livestream: <https://youtu.be/JJtb5oB5EPQ>

Although we may create goals and plans for our lives, much of our life requires daily improvisation. The music of jazz is built on chords and chord progression; but the magic that happens is up to the individual artist, working in concert with others. This service will explore jazz as a metaphor for the ways in which we must regularly, and with intention, “improvise a life.” This service will include musical guests from Walker West Music Academy.

Offering recipients are on page 12!

## What's that? I can't hear in the Sanctuary...

**Heidi Birkholz, Facilities Maintenance Coordinator**

Greetings friends and happy new year! Let me begin by offering my apologies to those of you who may have had difficulty hearing in the Sanctuary on Sunday mornings. Without going into too much detail, suffice it to say “a switch got flipped” and it took two sound professionals to help me diagnose and fix the problem. But don't take it from me, take it from Bruce Behrends:

*I attended last Sunday and the hearing loop worked great. What a blessing to be able to hear what is going on! The app is on my iPhone so I can control the volume and turn it off to hear the music. Are other people with hearing loss aware of the loop? Maybe a blurb in the newsletter about it would be appropriate. My guess is that most of the prescribed hearing aids have the loop technology available. If someone is getting new aids I recommend getting a model with loop technology. It really is working well for me!*

For those of you not aware how a “loop system” works, there is an actual loop around the pews that creates a signal for increased volume — so if you have trouble hearing outside of the pews, that is why. If you are having problems with the assisted listening devices offered by the church, please check with a Welcome Team member for help or for their direction with the new assisted listening packs (your capital pledge dollars in action). In an effort to keep our system working well, please reach out to me at [heidi@unityunitarian.org](mailto:heidi@unityunitarian.org) if you have trouble. Happy listening!

# BOARD OF TRUSTEES / CONGREGATIONAL LIFE REVIEW



## Moving Forward Together by the Numbers

Clover Earl, Trustee

This month's theological theme is "Finding Our Center," which after the challenges of 2022 seems like a fine aspiration to lean toward as we cross the threshold into the new year. A quick Google search turned up the following description of what it means to find one's center: *finding footing on unstable ground; grounding yourself in truth and rediscovering your essence; feeling stable, inspired, and hopeful.*

Our Forward Together: Next Steps gathering held on November 5 was attended by over 200 people, 75 of whom joined on Zoom. Those who participated were extraordinarily generous with their feedback. We received 68 completed surveys; eight-pages of Zoom chat content, and 75 people filled out index cards that answered the questions, "Did we hear you? And if not, what did we miss?"

Executive Director Barbara Hubbard and I had a conversation recently about our shared passion for numbers, spreadsheets, and data because of the stories they can tell. To that end, I volunteered to organize the input and identify themes from the information we received. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, yet there are those who continue to feel unmoored by the May 22 vote and its aftermath.

The Unitarian Universalist Association was mentioned dozens of times and the input was wide-ranging. The board is committed to strengthening this relationship and hope that those who attended Rev. David Pyle's December sessions and sermon found them valuable. Attendance at the meetings was robust with over 100 people participating. Rev. Pyle mentioned from the pulpit that he welcomes questions, and even went so far as to offer his contact information: [dpyle@uua.org](mailto:dpyle@uua.org).

We also heard loud and clear that many were concerned that the search process lacked transparency and we plan to do a better job with this during our next search.

At the end of the November 5 meeting, we committed to present an action plan by early January. During the meeting, Rev. Kathleen Rolenz lifted up a number of program possibilities intended to help us understand who we are as a church, to help heal broken relationships, and to better understand the role conflict plays in our community. While there was no clear consensus about any one of these opportunities, there was considerable interest in all of them.

The Executive Team, along with Interim Minister of Pastoral Care Rev. Karen Gustafson, with the data in hand, put together the following plan:

Saturday, January 28: **Change, Conflict & Complexity Workshop with Team Dynamics** (Details and registration link on page 7.)

Friday and Saturday, February 3 and 4: **Congregational Life Review** (see box at right)

March of 2023 (date TBD): **Wellspring Wednesday program focused on "What is a Covenant of Right Relations?"**

**Read and discuss the Rev. Dr. Teresa Cooley's book *Transforming Conflict: The Blessings of Congregational Turmoil*.** This book is available in Unity's Bookstall. Watch for a discussion date.

There was interest in the idea of **facilitated conversations between congregants who are estranged from one another**. If you hope to restore right relationship with a fellow congregant, please email Rev. Rolenz at [kathleen@unityunitarian.org](mailto:kathleen@unityunitarian.org).

In her December column trustee Deborah Cushman shared an outline of the work that lies ahead for the board. We will meet in January to discern our next steps and are eager to get busy while also giving thought to what it takes to stay grounded in these liminal and complicated times.

## Congregational Life Review

Friday, February 3  
7:00-8:30 p.m.

Saturday, February 4  
9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.



This month's theme of Finding Our Center provides rich opportunities for interim work because it offers experiences for deep reflection on where you came from, who and what you are, and where you hope to go next. One of the ways congregations engage with both history and identity is through a History Wall or Congregational Life Review. On Friday night and Saturday morning, Rev. Karen Gustafson and Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, aided by members of the Board of Trustees and the Interim Monitoring Team will engage you in the practice of storytelling about your experience with Unity Church.

What's the purpose of this exercise? It provides a snapshot of important events in the life of the congregation. But even more important than that, it's the gathering and the storytelling where wisdom is shared; where "aha" moments often occur, and a deeper appreciation for all that the church and its people have shared over the decades or centuries.

This experience is the third part of the interim plans. The first step was the Moving Forward conversation on November 5. The second step was to invite Regional Lead David Pyle to meet with small groups and lead worship in December. The insights gleaned from the Congregational Life Review will form the basis for the next steps in our work together during this interim time.

Watch for more details! An online option will be available for the Saturday session, but participants are encouraged to come in person. This is one way we can lean in to our longing to build Beloved Community together.

# WELCOME NEWCOMERS / PASTORAL CARE



## Welcome Words

**Laura Park**  
**Director of Membership and Hospitality**

In January, I particularly appreciate the warmth of what we call our practice *among* at Unity Church. Our commitment is to develop the skills of intimacy that let us go deep quickly with others, to explore our spiritual lives in community with courage and vulnerability. Our work among us asks us to be both kind and brave as we are attentive to our own truth and to the truths of those around us. This is a challenge that can both warm us and singe a bit as we move closer to an understanding of who we are in relationship with one another. It's work I'm profoundly grateful to be doing with all of you.

If you're new to the church, I'm here to help you find your way into the practice among us. In worship, at Wellspring Wednesday meals and programs, in the work of our Community Outreach Ministry Teams, in music ministries, in Religious Education, the church offers a variety of ways to find and keep your balance and develop the skills of intimacy. Let me know what questions I can answer about congregational life and the pathways you might explore to know the church better and deepen your spiritual life. Contact me at [laura@unityunitarian.org](mailto:laura@unityunitarian.org) or 651-228-1456 x110. I look forward to getting to know you!

## Pathway to Membership Classes

The offerings below invite you to explore a deeper connection to Unity Church and the commitments and opportunities of membership. If you have questions or would like one-on-one conversation about getting connected or about membership, please contact Laura Park, Acting Director of Membership and Hospitality, [laura@unityunitarian.org](mailto:laura@unityunitarian.org) or 651-228-1456 x110.

### Finding Yourself at Unity

**For visitors and inquirers; held Sundays at 10:15 a.m., in the Gannett Room and online via Zoom at [bit.ly/fyonline](https://bit.ly/fyonline).**

Drop-ins welcome; childcare in the nursery.

Join the repeating eight-session cycle at any time, and attend the sessions in any order. This month's offerings:

January 1: No class (Happy New Year!)

January 8: Community Outreach and Social Justice

January 15: Congregational and Pastoral Care

January 22: Unitarian Universalist History

January 29: Religious Education for Children, Youth, and Adults

### Committing to Unity: Joining Unity Church

**Tuesday January 17 • 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.**

This session, for people ready to become members, explores the deeper meanings and expectations of membership and shared ministry. The class concludes with a ceremony as participants sign the membership book and officially join the church. Contact Laura Park if you plan to participate.



## Pastoral Ponderings

**Rev Karen Gustafson**  
**Interim Minister of Pastoral Care**

In the northern hemisphere, cold and darkness overtake us so predictably every year, yet there is always, it seems, that element of surprise and annoyance that pops up in the human community in the parlance of winter. I sometimes wonder what people in climates with less dramatic light and weather cycles have to talk about. Certainly much of it is place holder, something to open the space for more meaningful conversation, to make an easy connection with a stranger or to bridge the awkwardness in a fractured friendship. But at best, it can be a way of staying present, of noticing the natural world and claiming our place in it.

My family were, for many years, caretakers and later land owners on Rainy Lake in far northern Minnesota. The homes we lived in until 1953 were built for summer use and retrofitted with wood stoves and kerosene heaters and lamps that provided heat and light in the winter. We were cold some of the time. We went to bed early. We got up with the sun. We used the daylight for daytime things like chopping wood and toting water. New tasks were added as the earth tilted gently toward the sun.

I was a child and so it is easy for me to romanticize that time. But what I remember is the complete immersion and appreciation and respect for the power of the elements, the beauty and variety of the seasons and the ways my parents leaned into the realities of the life they had chosen. I never felt that they were enduring the hard times so that they could enjoy the good times. There were challenges and extravagant gifts in every season. Their energies were given to what mattered most. There were always friends and family and neighbors, in all seasons, sharing chores, and meals and fellowship.

Over the decades encroaching civilization has shaped my expectations and attitudes in ways that do not always serve me. While I deeply appreciate central heating and the ways that electricity has extended my days, I am sometimes troubled by the urgency with which I fill my life. Winter, now, makes me hungry and tired when the natural limits of daylight stretches too far. I am a mammal, after all, and there is some wisdom in the urge to hibernation. And in the light there is, I often find, little reason to be outside where in every moment some miracle is unfolding in trees filled with singing birds and the color of winter skies and the exhilarating awareness that there are just a few layers of wool between my skin and the killing power of cold.

In contrast with the cultural tendency to repel and resist the darkness and the cold, I am reminded that leaning in, negotiating a holy relationship with the power in nature is in all ways a spiritual practice. In whatever ways we choose to spend our days, let there be spaces for the gifts of January.

# BELOVED COMMUNITY STAFF TEAM

## But Where Are You Really From?

*A Very Brief Examination of the Sources of Anti-Asian Racism*

**Lia Rivamonte, Beloved Community Communications Team**

Recently, I found myself standing elbow to elbow in a local brewery teeming with Asian Americans grateful for the opportunity to be in community for a joyful cause — to drink beer and talk theater. Among them I recognized people whose ethnic and cultural roots were Hmong, Lao, Cambodian, Filipino, Japanese, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, and Indian. This only includes the people I actually know. “Asian American” serves as an umbrella term for a fast-growing 22 million people from more than 20 countries in East and Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. It was Theater Mu’s Open House at the BlackStack Brewery. We were all ages but mostly people in their 20s and 30s engaged in Twin Cities’ theater-making.

Also, there was a smattering of white people, funders and longtime advocates of local theater. But they weren’t the focus of the event. They were there to support the future of Mu and its 30-year legacy of art centering on the lives of Asian Americans. This Minnesota arts organization is now the second largest Asian American theater in the country.

I spotted Rick Shiomi, one of Mu’s founders, who after the first 20 years relinquished his role as artistic director to make room for new leadership and has moved on to form the Full Circle Theatre Company. We reminisced about those early days of Mu and the thrill of discovering a community of Asian American artists in the Twin Cities.

Rick and I joked about all the times we’ve been questioned about our origins, “No, but where are you from, really?” In fact, on a recent flight back from New York City, the woman sitting next to him queried him. “I’m from Minnesota,” he said. The woman kept drilling, uninterested in hearing where he was actually born and raised. It was



Photo: Elvert Barnes from Silver Spring MD, USA  
02a.StopAsianHate.UnionStation.WDC.13April2021

only when he told her his grandfather was from Japan, that she could rest her case. She *knew* he was a foreigner!

Yes, many of us make light of it but we all recognize the deeper implications of being constantly regarded as alien in the country in which we were born and raised, and often where our parents were born and their parents before them. When we are continually asked where we come from, however innocent the question, we understand the answer may not satisfy the need to separate us from those who “belong” here. Our physical appearance alone is enough to spark suspicion, resentment, fear, and hatred. We need not even open our mouths to speak. Historically referred to as the “Yellow Peril” it is fear rooted in xenophobia and racism and the belief that the dark forces of the East will subsume the West. To extend that further, if we identify as Asian — regardless of citizenship — we cannot be trusted to hew to our American identity at the same time.

This and the long, sordid history of systemic racism and public violence against Asian Americans are the reasons why the recent spate of violence against us has unleashed in us such tremendous anger, fear, and sadness. The murder of a Chinese man in 1854 by a white

person sparked the California Supreme Court ruling that people of Asian descent could not testify against a white person. Seventeen Chinese men and boys were lynched in Los Angeles in the Chinese Massacre of 1871. Racism was put into federal law by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In the Rock Springs Massacre of 1885, 28 Chinese miners were killed, and 79 homes burned down. This is just the tip of a very, very large iceberg. Most are familiar with the Japanese Internment during WWII, and the barbaric acts that our military perpetrated against citizens during the Vietnam War.

In 1966, the stereotype, “model minority,” first appeared in a New York Times article. This myth perpetuated the idea that after WWII, despite internment and the wholesale destruction of their homes and businesses, Japanese Americans had quietly accepted their fate, and simply started over, refraining from asking for government aid. Instead, they worked hard, assimilated, and were “model citizens.” It was the “Why can’t you be like them?” attitude obviously directed at other nonwhites — specifically Black people that successfully pitted one group against another.

{continued on page 7}

# BELOVED COMMUNITY STAFF TEAM

*But Where Are You Really From?*  
{continued from page 6}

In 2020, a new epidemic of anti-Asian harassment and violent acts arose in tandem with the pandemic as the President and conservative media pinned the origin and spread of the virus on China. Over 2,500 incidents of harassment and/or violence were reported in that year alone, and anti-Asian racism continues. A few of the reported pandemic induced anti-Asian racist incidents were initiated by Black men, a stark example of how the “model minority” label has served the dominant culture, sowing mistrust and envy between nonwhite groups. These examples illustrate not just individual or interpersonal racist acts but stem from the direct result of historic institutional and structural anti-Asian racism.

There are more questions to answer and deep reflection is warranted, as we peel back the layers about what constitutes Asian-ess, and as we wonder how to break through the narratives imposed on us by others who want to de-humanize, demonize, and label us as “other” on one hand, and at the same time persuade us that we are somehow more “equal” or “like” the dominant culture in order to gain us as allies.

One antidote to anti-Asian racism is education. There is a long, complicated history of the Asian American experience — a large, diverse, ever-evolving story — that deserves our exploration. Thirty years ago, when Theater Mu was first begun, it was rare in Minnesota to hear Asian American stories told by Asian Americans. Fortunately, much has changed since the 1990’s — we are rich in these stories and in the people who can tell them. It’s time to seek them out.

*Note: This is the first in a series exploring Asian American identity and anti-Asian racism.*

For more information on Asian Americans, find these in the Anderson Library:

- *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* by Erika Lee, 305.8 L
- *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* by Cathy Park Hong, 305.4 H



## Change, Conflict, and Complexity: Antidotes and Spiritual Practices

**Saturday, January 28**

**9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. • In-person at Unity Church**

Registration: <https://bit.ly/changeconflictcomplexity>



For more and more of us taking next steps into antiracist practices and expanding intercultural capacities, the increasing complexity of this work is everywhere present about us — within, among, and beyond. There is no overlooking, evading, or simplifying this complexity as it is nothing other than the disquieting complexity of ourselves. And for those committed to this deep work, who expect to complexify this work, we invite you to register for this fall training event with Team Dynamics. We will find ways to be present to change, creatively engage conflict, and create brave space where complexity serves as fertile ground for learning and shaping change together.

As one who wrote, spoke, and wrestled incessantly with the complexity of racism in the soul of America, James Baldwin insisted, “Complexity is our only safety and love is the only key to our maturity.” A love that refuses simplistic definitions and illusions of safety promoted by our dominant culture. A love more perceptive to our battling instincts, assumptions, and beliefs that vie for position and power, even weaponizing antiracist tools like “characteristics of white supremacy culture” (Tema Okun, [teamdynamicsmn.com/blog/white-dominant-culture-by-tema-okun](http://teamdynamicsmn.com/blog/white-dominant-culture-by-tema-okun)) to accuse, shame, blame and perpetuate disconnection. But what are the antidotes and spiritual practices that can revive complexity in a time of false simplicities? How can we complicate the narrative and keep it from collapsing into that us/them binary? How do we wade into the messiness to achieve conflicts and truer conversations worthy of our humanity? If trust precedes facts, how can we claim a deeper covenant with one another that opens an alternate way to truths, tensions, conflicts, mutual care, and possibilities into the future?

We hope you will join us as we further our collaboration with Team Dynamics in deepening intercultural capacity across our ministry areas. We will build on practices and touch the complexities at the heart of our antiracist multicultural work.

# WELLSPRING WEDNESDAY

January 4

*Dinner: breakfast for dinner with cinnamon bread pudding, egg bake, sausage, fruit*

## Senator John Marty: Legislative Efforts to Address Gun Violence

Robbins Parlor

The Gun Sense Ministry Team welcomes Senator John Marty to speak about legislative efforts to end gun violence in Minnesota and offer ways for us to support these efforts. See page 13 for more information.

## Multigenerational Movie Night • Send requests to [madeline@unityunitarian.org](mailto:madeline@unityunitarian.org)

Center Room

Short movies and clips from Pixar! You can dress as your favorite character and have some popcorn as we enjoy our favorites together.

## Climate and Energy in our Community: No Xcel Rate Hike

Online via Zoom: [bit.ly/mnipl1-4](https://bit.ly/mnipl1-4)

Energy is at the heart of neighborhood economic health and well-being. Unity's Act for the Earth Team, in partnership with Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light, invites you to learn more about a proposed 21% rate hike from Xcel Energy that threatens that health. Find out how to encourage investments to protect our most vulnerable communities, increase access to affordable and renewable energy, and take action before the deadline for public comment. This program begins at 7:00 p.m.

## Beginner Violin

Choir Room

Join Mayra Mendoza for beginning violin lessons appropriate for all ages. Learn basic posture, note reading, and more! Questions? Email [mayraquitzia@hotmail.com](mailto:mayraquitzia@hotmail.com)

## Religious Education New Family Orientation

Learn about Unity's Religious Education programs for children and youth.

Questions? Email Ray at [ray@unityunitarian.org](mailto:ray@unityunitarian.org).

January 11

*Dinner: cabbage rolls, chopped salad, dinner rolls, dessert*

## Indigenous Healing: A Conversation with a Dakota Woman on Reclaiming Stories, Language, Land, and Power

Robbins Parlor and online via Zoom • Register: [bit.ly/justiceseriesfour](https://bit.ly/justiceseriesfour)

In this fourth session of the Indigenous and Environmental Justice Series, we will shift the focus from truth telling to healing. Joining us for conversation in the native tradition of storytelling is Teresa Peterson, *Utuhu Cistinna Win*, who is Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota and a citizen of the Upper Sioux Community and author of *Voices from Pejuhutazizi: Dakota Stories and Storytellers*, written with her uncle, Super LaBatte. See page 13 for more information.

## Worship as Spiritual Practice: Previewing New Possibilities

Parish Hall

Interim ministry is the ideal time to explore new possibilities for our shared spiritual practice of worship. Join interim Senior Minister Kathleen Rolenz to consider the liturgical elements of worship and their purpose, to hear the changes Kathleen will introduce in the coming weeks for us to experience, and to offer your initial reactions and feedback. Note: Kathleen will repeat this conversation on Zoom on Thursday, January 12, from 7:00-8:30 p.m. Register at [bit.ly/worshipsp](https://bit.ly/worshipsp).

## Lectio Divina

Online via Zoom: [bit.ly/lectio22-23](https://bit.ly/lectio22-23)

Following a centuries-old Benedictine spiritual practice of contemplative reading, a chosen poem is read aloud, as attendees are encouraged to lift up what they heard and how the poem spoke to them.

## Beginner Violin with Mayra Mendoza

Choir Room

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: 5:45 p.m.

Chapel service: 6:40 p.m.

Programs: 7:10-8:30 p.m.

Details at [unityunitarian.org](https://unityunitarian.org)

January 18

*Dinner: butternut Squash chili with homemade bread, salad, dessert*

## Once Removed Sharing with Artist-in-Residence Paul Kruse

Robbins Parlor

Artist-in-residence Paul Kruse will share updates about his audio documentary project *Once Removed*. This will include some clips of edited audio from the interviews, facilitated discussion about family stories, and a brief sharing from the Saturday *Once Removed* Workshop (see page 9).

## Board Game Night

Center Room

Open to everyone; kids are welcome with their adult(s)! Games will be available or bring your own.

## Beginner Violin with Mayra Mendoza

Choir Room

January 25

*Dinner: lasagna, winter slaw, dessert*

## Unity Church and the Tumultuous Early 1900s

Robbins Parlor and online via Zoom  
Register: [bit.ly/unityww1](https://bit.ly/unityww1)

Join Unity's History Teaching Team as they explore a tumultuous time in Unity Church history: World War I, the 1918 pandemic, and our church's 50th anniversary. What can we learn about how the congregation navigated these multiple challenges, and how might our understanding of Unity's past responses to difficult times help us today?

## Beginner Violin with Mayra Mendoza

Choir Room

# LIBRARY-BOOKSTALL / ARTIST IN RESIDENCE



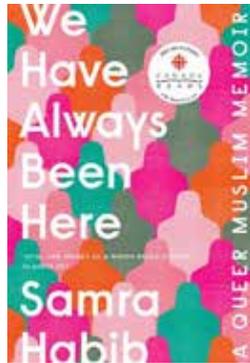
## The 2023 Unity Congregation Book Read

*We Have Always Been Here* by Samra Habib

Shelley Butler, Library-Bookstall Team

Why is it necessary for a Queer Muslim to state the obvious? I don't know, but it is.

*Kirkus Reviews* describes the 2023 Unity Congregation Book Read title as “a poignantly told memoir about a life fiercely lived.” Samra Habib tells us in a straightforward way about their early life as an Ahmadi Muslim in Pakistan, their middle years as a refugee in Canada in a strict Muslim home, their arranged marriage and divorces, and their journey to discover or more accurately, reveal who they have always been. They describe religious persecution in Pakistan, as well as racism and bullying in the Western world. Alienation from their family and faith is difficult but the author triumphs and reconciles with both. A story of faith, resilience, compassion, purpose, belonging, healing, and finding one’s personal power is moving and uplifting.



Among several awards and accolades, *We Have Always Been Here* won the 2020 Lambda Literary Award (a Lammy); for over 30 years, Lambda has recognized the best in LGBTQ literature. They write that the book is “an accessible and challenging text that fosters an essential sense of perspective for the reader and encourages them to consider how non-monolithic the world around them really is — there is no single right way to be queer; and there is no single right way to be Muslim.”

***We Have Always Been Here* by Samra Habib: Read in January — discuss in February!** In the Anderson Library (306.76 H) and the Unity Bookstall.

Browse the library catalog online here: [www.librarycat.org/lib/UnityChurch](http://www.librarycat.org/lib/UnityChurch).

## In The Justice Database: Just Me & Allah

Samra Habib’s photo project documents and celebrates creative LGBTQ Muslims. Habib says that there is a need for “accessible visual representation that will serve as historical evidence of the existence of queer Muslims.”

[bit.ly/JusticeData](http://bit.ly/JusticeData)

## Once Removed Workshop

With Artist-in-Residence Paul Kruse

Saturday, January 14 • 9:00 a.m.-Noon • Parish Hall

Artist-in-residence Paul Kruse will lead participants through an interview-based story sharing experience. Families (given and chosen) are specifically encouraged to join, but anyone who is curious to hear and share stories about family is welcome. The workshop will include a few fun theater games, one-on-one conversation, and small and large group sharing.



## Wanted: Artist in Residence Team Members

Unity's Artist in Residence program was established to support the church's vision of an antiracist multicultural community. For team members, there are monthly meetings, as well as other tasks related to identifying diverse artists from multiple artistic disciplines whose work and artistic goals align with those of Unity Church. Team members work with the artist(s) and church staff to ensure activities and events are accessible and provide meaningful congregational engagement.

Work includes:

- Running receptions and front of house for artist presentations and events
- Coordinating with staff to arrange Wellspring Wednesday programs and other events
- Coordinating with artists including scheduling, budget questions, etc.
- Helping to find collaborators and supplies
- Handling outreach and announcement for events
- Writing articles for the *commUNITY* newsletter related to artists and programs
- Designing the call for submissions
- Helping with outreach, spreading the word about the program, fielding questions, contacting press and other organizations
- Processing and evaluating submissions, interviewing candidates, selecting artists

If you are interested in joining the team, please send the following information to [artistinresidence@unityunitarian.org](mailto:artistinresidence@unityunitarian.org) by January 25:

- Your name, email address, and phone number
- A bit of information about your interest in and experience with the arts, arts administration, or artist support activities
- Artistic mediums that you feel comfortable discussing and/or evaluating

# ART TEAM

## Spectacular Mural in the Foote Room

### *Chalice of Many Cultures*

The Unity Art Team has recently installed a beautiful mural (pictured below) across the entire north wall of the Foote Room. It is entitled *Chalice of Many Cultures*. Initial planning of this mural began in 2019, was interrupted by the pandemic, and then restarted in the summer of 2022. The Art Team commissioned a talented local artist, Mica Lee Anders, to lead a group of Unity volunteers — youth and adults — in the design and creation of this work of art.

The overall concept for the mural was to reflect the values, mission, and ends of Unity Church — especially the idea that we want to create a multicultural spiritual home. As the volunteers discussed how the mural could work, a design concept emerged that it would draw inspiration from textiles, clothing, mosaics, pottery, artwork, and other motifs from cultures throughout the world. Mica Lee Anders then created an overall design in the shape of a chalice and flames made of broad ribbons composed of the designs created by volunteers inspired by those images.

### *Reception and Celebration*

All members and friends of the congregation are invited to view this permanent mural and share treats and beverages on Sunday, January 8, from 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., in the Foote Room. For those who have never been to this room, it is located on the second floor at the top of the stairs at the north end of Unity Church. An elevator is available for those who cannot use the stairs.

This reception is an opportunity to meet and thank artist Mica Lee Anders and her assistant, Briana Williams, as well as the creative volunteers who contributed their artwork including Elaine Ambrose, Andrea Anastos, Isabel Benagas, SAM Greene, Ariel Hansen, Nancy Heck, James Hood, Mary Kerres, Elizabeth Karre, Halie Karre, Beth Klemann, Julie Lindholm, Karma Mecey-Hill, Leila Poullada, Barb Rogne, Paul Rogne, Pam Satre, Claire Umolac-Bunker, Aidan Lynskey Wells, John White, Ramona White, and Colleen Zuro-White.

## January Parish Hall Artist

### *Angie Malin*



I was born in Minnesota and currently live in Stillwater. Growing up my dream was to become an artist. As a kid I was quiet so art gave me a way to be bolder in expressing myself. My early college studies focused on Fine Art but after a year I set this dream aside to pursue graphic art and eventually settled on a career in nursing. Working with people in this capacity was so rewarding and taught me what is important in life. Learning the value of each good day we are given led me back to my love of art and thirteen years ago I returned to my art study and began taking studio classes and workshops.

My preferred method is plein air painting, alla prima, which is painting from life in the open air, wet on wet. To start, large shapes are put down thinly followed by smaller shapes of color and light to guide the viewer through the painting. These small “on the spot paintings” usually have room for technical improvement but they are much more expressive and authentic to the place and time they were completed.

Painting outdoors provides the stage to express and share the peace I find in nature. There are subtle changes from day to day each season that can be so easily missed as we rush through busy days. Painting slows me down to appreciate and enjoy the beauty in each day. In sharing my work, I hope to bring a little bit of peace to the viewers day and evoke happy memories from their life. [angiemalin.com](http://angiemalin.com)



# COMMUNITY OUTREACH MINISTRY

## Affordable Housing Team

### Housing Crisis Finally Top of Mind

Minnesota's housing crisis is a stated priority with the new Democratic House and Senate in Minnesota and the Governor's office — and an \$18 billion dollar surplus will help us accomplish a lot.

#### Legislative Need

Minnesota legislators hold the purse strings to our tax dollars, but we can ask for big things. Together with Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative we are asking for \$2B to supply housing vouchers to every Minnesotan who qualifies. This effort is called Bring It Home Minnesota. We are kicking off the legislative season with a rally in the Rotunda at the Capitol on Wednesday, January 11, from 1:30-2:30 p.m. Please join us as we turn up the heat now through May.



**Got spare keys?** Metropolitan Council distributes the greatest number of housing vouchers in Minnesota. Yet they do not have a policy to distribute them as Project Based Vouchers (PBVs), although every other city does this. Beacon cannot develop deeply affordable housing units without PBVs. So, between now and March, we will be collecting *your spare keys* starting Sunday, January 22, (and then on the following first and third Sundays) at a table in the Parish Hall. At the end of March, we will hold a clergy press conference and deliver keys collected

from churches all over the metro to the Metropolitan Council to help them “Unlock the Metro” by creating this needed policy. Questions about the rally or the keys? Contact Dayna Kennedy at [daynamelissa@icloud.com](mailto:daynamelissa@icloud.com).

#### Warming Hubs Assist Full Shelters

As temperatures drop, the need to help unsheltered individuals and families increases. For those unable to access shelters, Ramsey County and the City of Saint Paul have opened Warming Hubs, from 10:00 p.m.-6:30 a.m., now through March 1. This pilot project needs volunteers to serve a two-hour shift and hand out warm beverages, socks, hats, and gloves. A trained staff person is onsite and female volunteers can request a Women's Warming Hub. Each evening, a transportation loop will begin at area shelters, making sure to find anyone who was unable to gain access and get them to a warming hub.

A recorded training is available for each volunteer. To request the recording or ask questions, please contact Andrea Hinderaker at [andrea.hinderaker@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:andrea.hinderaker@ci.stpaul.mn.us). To sign up for a shift, please visit <https://bit.ly/warminghubsignup>. Unity Church members Justine Nelson at [justine.nelson@state.mn.us](mailto:justine.nelson@state.mn.us) and Janice Gestner at [janicemgg@comcast.net](mailto:janicemgg@comcast.net) are also available to answer questions.

#### Project Home at Provincial House

Do you know that Project Home served over 25,000 meals since moving into Provincial House this year? Every Saturday and Sunday (and some holidays), teams of volunteers are needed to assist at lunch and dinner at Provincial House (1880 Randolph Avenue). Meal teams can choose to either prepare/warm up and serve a meal planned by Chef Carlos or they can plan a menu, supply the ingredients, and cook onsite. Either way, trained staff is available to make

this easy and safe. Volunteers are also needed to set the dining room tables, eat with guests, and clean up. Sign up at <https://tinyurl.com/PHMealTeams>.

Help monitor the playground, computer lab and other communal spaces. Staff support included! Sign up at <https://tinyurl.com/PHwkdvol>.

Consider supplying winter gear to a Provincial Home family. Kids may need snow pants and families may need coats, boots, and hats. Sign up at <https://tinyurl.com/WinterGear2022>.

Questions? Contact Donna Franklin, Shelter Manager, at [dfranklin@interfaithaction.org](mailto:dfranklin@interfaithaction.org).

#### Saint Paul City Council

##### Four Open Seats for November Election

We have a unique opportunity to shape housing policy but we need delegates to the Ward conventions in order to vet candidates. This would entail a precinct meeting and a Ward convention (likely in March and April). If this sounds daunting, or you are curious/have questions, contact Dayna Kennedy at [daynamelissa@icloud.com](mailto:daynamelissa@icloud.com).

Interested in connecting more deeply to the work of Unity's Affordable Housing Community Outreach Ministry Team? Consider checking out a meeting! Contact Judy Miller for information at [jmkmam@comcast.net](mailto:jmkmam@comcast.net).

# COMMUNITY OUTREACH MINISTRY

## January Offering Recipients

Each week, seventy percent of our Sunday offering is given to a community non-profit and thirty percent supports the Community Outreach Ministry at Unity Church.

### January 1: ComMUSICation

ComMUSICation offers high-quality, intensive music education opportunities using singing as one tool to empower youth with lifelong skills rooted in the spirit and culture of their community. Their choral program, serving St. Paul's Frogtown neighborhood, encourages family participation and this collection will help provide transportation, sheet music, and food for kids involved in the program. [commusicationmn.org/](http://commusicationmn.org/)

### January 8: Minnesota Moms Demand Action

Minnesota Moms Demand Action (MMDA) lobbies for sensible gun legislation and works to reduce childhood gun deaths through its Be Smart campaign. MMDA is an all volunteer organization working with St. Paul's Office of Neighborhood Safety on deterring gun violence in our community through prevention, environmental design, accountability, community action, and enforcement. [facebook.com/MomsDemandActionMN](https://www.facebook.com/MomsDemandActionMN)

### January 15: Before Racism

Before Racism is a comprehensive, hands-on program that works with childcare and preschool centers focusing on the ways very young children learn about, form, internalize and express attitudes regarding racial identity. Before Racism designs and delivers learning experiences that will have a lasting impact on preventing the development of overt and covert bias and racism. This collection will support the purchase of curriculum materials. [beforeraacism.org](http://beforeraacism.org)

### January 22: Unity's Indigenous Justice Team

Unity's Indigenous Justice Community Outreach Ministry Team envisions advancing the efforts of Minnesota Indigenous tribal nations to preserve their language, culture, and spiritual life and to restore broken treaties as outlined by the Indian Land Trust Foundation. This month (see page 13), join the team in learning about the language, cultural, and spiritual healing that is underway in the Dakota and Ojibwe nations and reveal the repair that is needed to interrupt the legacy of injustice. This collection will support the implementation of Unity's indigenous justice outreach. [unityunitarian.org/indigenous-justice.html](http://unityunitarian.org/indigenous-justice.html)

### January 29: Walker West Music Academy

Walker West Music Academy is the epicenter of a vibrant music learning community rooted in the African American cultural experience where people of all ages and backgrounds gather to explore and grow through music. This collection will support Walker West Music Academy's scholarship fund. [walkerwest.org](http://walkerwest.org)

## Act for the Earth Team

### Climate and Energy in our Community No Xcel Rate Hike

Wednesday, January 4 • 7:00-8:30 p.m.

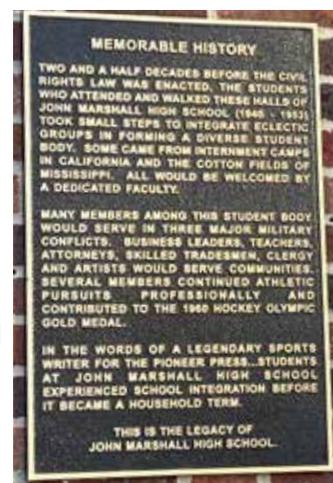
Online via Zoom: <https://bit.ly/mnipl1-4>

Energy is at the heart of neighborhood economic health and well-being in St. Paul. Unity's Act for the Earth Team, in partnership with Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light invites you to a webinar to learn more about a proposed 21% rate hike from Xcel Energy that threatens that health. Find out how to encourage investments to protect our most vulnerable communities and increase access to affordable, renewable energy sources and take immediate action before the deadline for public comment.

## Obama School Team

### A Look Back

As the staff and scholars at Barack and Michelle Obama Elementary School prepare to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the building, this commemorative plaque gives us a look back to the days when the building housed John Marshall High School. What a great heritage! If you would like to view the plaque for yourself, it's on the west side of the building, on Grotto Street.



Later this spring, we'll share opportunities for building tours and other events. Two Unity Church members will be part of the principal's planning team for the celebration.

Current Obama School volunteers and interested others are invited to our quarterly meeting on Sunday, January 22, at 12:15 p.m., in the Robbins Parlor. We'll hear what volunteers are doing in the classrooms and the library and get an early update on what opportunities may be available during the next couple of years, when the school building will be undergoing renovations. Join us if you can!

## Donate to the Food Shelf

Wow! In the month of November we collected 479 pounds of food for Hallie Q. Brown. Thank you — that is the largest amount that we have ever collected. For the month of January and February besides food donations the food shelf is in need of toilet paper, paper towels, disinfectant wipes, all-purpose cleaner, shampoo, conditioner, body and hand soap and body lotion. They will also accept pet food. If you would like to donate money for perishable food items please visit [hallieqbrown.org](http://hallieqbrown.org).

# COMMUNITY OUTREACH MINISTRY

*Act for the Earth and Indigenous Justice Teams*

## **Work and Walk Toward Right Relations**

*Truth Telling and Healing Series Continues in 2023*

**Alana Howey, Act for the Earth Team**

True reconciliation and healing require an awareness of the depth and breadth of the harms inflicted. Our U.S. culture of amnesia has intentionally left out and rewritten the history of our relationships to native /people/nations to justify and obscure these harms. As a white woman working toward integrating antiracism with spiritual development of the double helix, I am becoming more aware of the need for healing of the self and the dominant culture communities in which I operate. Part of that healing is reeducating myself. By doing so, I hope to move beyond guilt and move toward more authentic relationships with native people. Only then will reconciliation be possible.

Throughout the fall the Act For the Earth and Indigenous Justice teams initiated a series on *Truth Telling and Healing*. Each presentation thus far has provided much needed review of Minnesota (and beyond) history from an indigenous perspective. Iyekiapiwin Darlene St. Clair, started off the series by giving us an overview of indigenous history. Martin Case led the November presentation sharing information about treaties between the U.S. and Indigenous Nations. In December, Dr. Samuel Torres of The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition examined the history of U.S. sanctioned boarding schools for native children and the resultant generational trauma that has ensued. It was clear that these topics were deeply personal and painful to each of these presenters. More information about these presentations, including slides, recordings and resources are online at <https://bit.ly/unityijteam>.

Rev. KP Hong was able to help us appreciate the opposing perspectives of the indigenous theology of creation versus the European theologies of property and salvation (or the culture of separateness). It has offered some insight into the possible mindset of our ancestors.

The intentional, relatively slow, journey the series has charted allows for more absorption of the material and interrupts the sense of urgency to move right on to reparations. This rush to fix things in our white supremacist way can be too enticing. Of course the more you learn, the more you know what you don't know.

We invite you to join us in this important work to heal ourselves and to seek right relationships with indigenous people, communities and all the earth's beings.

### **Indigenous Healing: A Conversation with a Dakota Woman on Reclaiming Stories, Language, Land, and Power**

**Wednesday, January 11 • 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. • Parish Hall and via Zoom**

Register here: <https://bit.ly/justiceseriesfour>

In this fourth session of the Indigenous and Environmental Justice Series, we will shift the focus from truth telling to healing, starting with the proactive and inspiring healing in which Indigenous people and communities are engaged. In the traditional way of native storytelling, this session will not be a presentation but a conversation. Teresa Peterson, *Utuhu Cistinna Win*, who is Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota and a citizen of the Upper Sioux Community will be our guest. Teresa will share her healing journey of reclaiming her Dakota identity and sense of belonging through stories, language, land, power, and as she describes it, doing the deep work of becoming a good relative.

FEBRUARY: Land and Reparations

MARCH: Honoring the Treaties and Saving the Earth

APRIL: Truth Telling and Healing for Us as a White Congregation

### *Gun Sense Team*

## **Senator John Marty and Gun Safety Legislation**

Unity's Gun Sense Team is pleased to be sponsoring a Wellspring Wednesday presentation on January 4 (see page 8 for details) featuring State Senator John Marty (DFL – representing near north suburbs including parts of Roseville, Shoreview and Arden Hills).

Sen. Marty has introduced two bills pertaining to gun safety that will be before the Minnesota legislature during the 2023 session. In a recent presentation at Pilgrim House UU Fellowship, located in Sen. Marty's district, Sen. Marty set forth an analogy between safety regulations surrounding owning and operating cars versus those surrounding owning and operating guns. "We do not have a constitutional right to own and drive cars!" said Sen. Marty. "Unlike with car ownership, no state has regulations that would require all of the following as they pertain to gun ownership: training, testing, licensing, liability insurance, registration, safety requirements." Sen. Marty also cited background checks and waiting periods as ways beyond car ownership requirements that he believes could "make a game-changing difference in crime." "Our gun safety laws are weak," said Sen. Marty. "My proposed legislation would ban undetectable guns and 'ghost guns' and would require safe storage, reporting of loss and theft, and would restrict ammunition rounds. We must look at ways to keep us all safe from gun violence."

Please join us on January 4 and also visit our informational table in the Parish Hall on Sundays this winter as the legislative session is underway. If you would like to be on our email list or join us in our work, please contact Richard Burger at [rbmurger@yahoo.com](mailto:rbmurger@yahoo.com).

**Part 4**

# 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**

However many the film's historical inaccuracies, and centuries before Kepler and Galileo, the historical drama *Agora* (2009) offers a compelling account of ancient Alexandria in late 4th century Roman Egypt and the greatest female mathematician, philosopher, and astronomer of the ancient Greco-Roman world. As Hypatia searches the skies for order, investigating the flaws of the geocentric Ptolemaic system and the heliocentric model that challenges it, two slaves, Davus and Aspasius, serve as her research assistants:

Hypatia: *Ever since Plato, all of them — Aristarchus, Hipparchus, Ptolemy — they have all, all, all tried to reconcile their observations with circular orbits. But what if another shape is hiding in the heavens?*

Davus: *Another shape? Lady, there is no shape more pure than the circle; you taught us that.*

Hypatia: *I know, I know, but suppose — just suppose! — the purity of the circle has blinded us from seeing anything beyond it. I must begin all over with new eyes. I must rethink everything!... What if we dared to look at the world just as it is? Let us shed for a moment every preconceived idea. What shape would it show us?...*

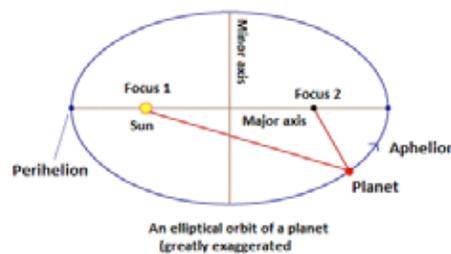
Aspasius: *You once said that the problem lies in the inconsistency of the Sun... The Sun must be at the center, since we revolve around it. And at the same time, in another position since our distance from it varies [during summer and winter]... But how could it occupy two positions at once?*

Hypatia: *Yes... how could it occupy two positions at once?... Oh Aspasius!... (Diagramming the earth's orbit in a sandpit) I want you to*

*imagine that this is the Earth. And that each of these flames represent the two extreme positions of the sun in relation to it, in winter and in summer. What would happen if both these positions were the two centers of one and the same circle?*

Aspasius: *But it isn't possible, mistress.*

Hypatia: *What do we know about a circle? We know that the center of a circle is always the same distance from any point along its perimeter... What if I divide the center into two, but what I keep constant is the sum of their two distances to the perimeter. Watch... as one segment increases the other segment decreases, and vice versa. Therefore the sum of the two is always going to be constant. Do you see that? Now, what if we apply this to the movement of the Earth? What figure will we obtain? An ellipse! With the sun at one of its foci. Because, what is a circle except a very special ellipse whose foci have joined so close together that they appear to be one.*



A circle is an ellipse whose center only appears to be one, for what Hypatia discovers at the so-called center is a convergence of an interdependent multiplicity, a glimpse of a world far more complex than previously imagined. That the constant determining the shape and character of the cosmos turns out not to be a singular, self-contained, absolute point of reference but the sum and relationship of the many dynamic parts. The discovery is thematically thrilling and climactic within the film's

narrative, as Alexandria collapses into a stark, uncompromising religious absolutism and violence. But doesn't the discovery speak to the structuring of our own reality and the orbit of our shared life? Isn't this what Piaget discovered in observing the cognitive development of children, that the center of awareness multiplies from a singular focus to attending to the multiple attributes of an object or situation? Isn't this the complex feeling of "two-ness" in W.E.B. Du Bois' double consciousness, of occupying two positions at once? Isn't this the glimpse of another shape hiding in the heavens in James Baldwin's witness, that "Complexity is our only safety and love is the only key to our maturity"? For what else can reveal and embrace the hidden shape of our world in its spectacular complexity than love?

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

## 2023 Youth Musical

Unity's Youth Musical is a unique production created each year for Unity Church by Mary Blouin Auffert and Sandy Waterman. All youth in grades 6, 7, and 8 are invited to participate, and everyone who auditions will get a part.

Auditions will be held Tuesday, January 10, from 6:30-9:00 p.m., in the Foote Room. A mandatory parent/guardian meeting will be held in the Center Room during the same time as auditions.

Rehearsals begin January 12 and are held Sundays, 1:30-3:30 p.m., and Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7:00-8:30 p.m., at Unity Church.

Tech Week: March 5-8

Performances: March 9, 10, 11

Questions? Email Gabby Mead at [gabrielledmead@gmail.com](mailto:gabrielledmead@gmail.com).

# MUSIC MINISTRY / FELLOWSHIP GROUPS



## Music Notes

**Ahmed Anzaldúa, Director of Music Ministries**

In December I had the privilege of directing *El Mesías* with the Minnesota Orchestra and Border CrosSing. This is a mash-up of part one of Handel's *Messiah* and *Navidad Nuestra* by Ariel Ramírez. We also performed *Navidad Nuestra* with Unity's choirs. *Navidad Nuestra* is well known in much of Latin America, but it is very rarely heard here in the United States. I've been performing this work for several years and have become used to introducing it to American audiences.

Typically, when I talk about *Navidad Nuestra*, I refer to it as a cantata from Latin America that transplants the Christmas story to a modern South American setting. Six episodes from this story are set to music based on dance and song genres from the Andean region and accompanied with endemic Andean instruments. The text by poet Felix Luna is in a Spanish that uses regional slang and reflects Andean rural cultural norms and traditions; the Angel Gabriel is a gaucho, the Three Wise Men bring Jesus gifts of honey and alpaca wool, Mary is indigenous, and the Holy Family flees into the salt flats of the pampas rather than Egypt.

This year, I realized that in all these years presenting *El Mesías*, I've never once described Handel's *Messiah* in this way; in my mind, *Messiah* was somehow categorized as "normal" and required no special explanation, but *Navidad Nuestra* was "abnormal" and needed to be introduced. There is no real reason for this, considering that the Christmas story does not take place in 18th century Dublin, it takes place in what is now Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Palestine. The original story is as far removed from Handel's depiction in *Messiah* as it is from Ramirez' depiction in *Navidad Nuestra*... and yet I never felt that it needed to be explicitly said that part one of Handel's *Messiah* is "an oratorio that transplants the Christmas story to an 18th century European setting. That the story is set to music that is often based on Baroque dance forms and vocal genres, and is accompanied with a Baroque orchestra. That the text by Charles Jennens is based on the English of the King James Bible and closely reflects patriarchal, racial, and cultural norms of British society in the 1700s."

I constantly come across elements in my work where the assumption is that the default is white and that Brown and Black are exceptions. This is especially true when it comes to the Christmas story. I am constantly surprised by how natural a White Christmas feels to me and how alien this story feels when it features characters who are all Brown and takes place in my own ancestral lands.

## Fellowship Groups

For more conversation about getting connected, contact Laura Park at [laura@unityunitarian.org](mailto:laura@unityunitarian.org).

**Afterthoughts** offers time following the 9:00 service to discuss the service.

**Caregivers Group** meets on the third Thursday of the month.

**Evergreen Quilters:** This quilting group meets the second Tuesday of the month, 7:00-9:00 p.m. and fourth Saturday of the month.

**Families Living with Mental Health Challenges** meets the first Saturday of each month, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

**Kung Fu** meets Saturday mornings, 9:00-10:00 a.m., online via Zoom. Email [barney.kujawski@gmail.com](mailto:barney.kujawski@gmail.com) to receive the link.

**Living With Grief Group** meets on the third Tuesday of the month.

**Men's Coffee Group** meets every other Wednesday at 9:00 a.m. for light-hearted conversation.

**Men's Conversation Group** meets Monday, January 16 and 30, from 7:00-9:00 p.m.

**Men's Retirement Circle:** Monday, January 9 and 23, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

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

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

**Textile Arts Group** meets online the first and third Wednesday of each month from 7:00-8:30 p.m. Bring your knitting, embroidery, etc.

**Unity Book Club** meets the second Tuesday of the month, 7:00-8:30 p.m. January 10: *The Flag and the Cross* by Philip S. Gorski

**Women in Retirement** meets on the second and fourth Thursday of each month, from 1:00-3:00 p.m., in the Center Room. Social hour at noon!

**Young Adult Group** (ages 18-35) — all are welcome. Email [kp@unityunitarian.org](mailto:kp@unityunitarian.org) for details.

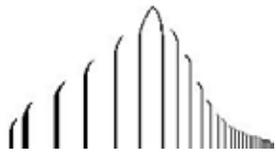
## One Voice Mixed Chorus presents *Generation*

Join One Voice Mixed Chorus for *Generation*, a concert exploring intergenerational relationships across our LGBTQ+ community. From AIDS to Instagram, the concert weaves together songs and stories of identity, change, and resilience.



*Generation* marks Jane Ramseyer Miller's final concerts as One Voice's Artistic Director, after her legacy of 27 years! Join us the hour before each concert for interactive lobby activities, including the Tretter LGBTQ Historical Display.

Please enjoy 15% off tickets to the January 22 performance at The Ordway in St. Paul! Enter promo code FAITH when selecting your seats before checkout. To reserve tickets and learn more about One Voice visit [onevoicemn.org](http://onevoicemn.org).



# UNITY CHURCH—UNITARIAN

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REV. KP HONG, DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION  
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## Mindful Self-Compassion

**Monday, January 9 • 6:30-8:00 p.m. Foote Room**

Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) is a mindfulness-based, skills-training program that enables us to meet a range of difficult emotions, including self-criticism and shame, with a kind and loving heart. This in-person introduction to Mindful Self-Compassion will involve a brief presentation and an opportunity to learn a core MSC practice. Information about MSC programs, both in-person and online, will also be available. All are welcome, and meditation experience is not required to participate. To register for this free offering, please contact Jenny at [jennywilson1@yahoo.com](mailto:jennywilson1@yahoo.com).

Jenny Wilson, MSW, LICSW is a psychotherapist and MSC trained teacher. She has a private practice in Saint Paul and has been a member of Unity Church for over 25 years.

## Join a Chalice Circle



Chalice Circles offer a way to connect with a small group of Unity Church members through the spiritual practice of guided conversation. The circles are designed to nurture spiritual growth through deep sharing, disciplined listening, and heartfelt appreciation for what each participant has to share. Mid-year circles run from January through June. Please register at <https://www.unityunitarian.org/chalice-circle-registration.html>.

Available days and times include:

- Fourth Monday of each month, 1:00-2:30 p.m., online via Zoom
- Fourth Wednesday of each month, 1:00-2:30 p.m., in-person at Unity Church

## A Spiritual Practice to Feed Your Soul: Lectio Divina

**Second Wednesday (January 11) // Fourth Tuesday (January 25)**  
**7:00-8:30 p.m. • Online via Zoom, register: [bit.ly/lectio22-23](https://bit.ly/lectio22-23)**

Following a centuries-old Benedictine spiritual practice of contemplative reading, a chosen poem is read aloud, as attendees are encouraged to lift up what they heard and how the poem spoke to them. A different poem at each session. A rich way to receive poetry's gifts in a small group setting. Led by Lisa Wersal or Shelley Butler.

