

Resolution and Improvisation

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.

Resolution and improvisation could easily be opposites. Many people use the start of a new year to set intentions: this will be the year that I quit smoking, or read two books a month, or connect with friends more intentionally. These resolutions take planning and are often abandoned some time in February. After six or eight weeks, most people have an urge to break free of the constraints of a New Year's resolution — to improvise. This improvisation is, as often as not, the end of the resolution.

In music, and in preaching, there is less of a binary, zero-sum relationship between resolution and improvisation. Great music exists in the relationship between structure and content, as the 12-bar blues or the formal rules of a fugue provide the scaffold for great musicians to build on. Pure structure — resolution without improvisation — is a potentially valuable learning exercise, but it fails to capture the imagination. Pure improvisation, unattached to structure and not brought to some kind of resolution, can also miss the mark. Several years ago, when she was three, Ailish got a kid's accordion for Christmas. The resulting sounds were enthusiastic and unconstrained by any formal conventions but were not fun for everyone around the budding artist.

There is beauty in the interplay of form and content, improvisation leading to resolution. In music, resolution is a necessary piece of composition: a sense of where the music, even improvised, is moving towards. It is one of the things that allows a group of people to play together, with a shared

understanding of the scaffolding that each, in turn, can improvise on.

January is a time for resolutions, whether improvised at a party or carefully chosen as part of an annual ritual. When they work well, it is because we chose what rules we will hold ourselves to in the coming year, not for self-flagellation but for direction, so that we do not end up the equivalent of the three-year-old with a new accordion.

How does this relate to church?

There is a debate that has been going on longer than I (Oscar) have been alive. Can you believe anything and be a Unitarian Universalist? One possible answer, in good improvisational practice, is, "Yes, and."

Yes, Unitarian Universalism is a non-creedal faith. There is no test of what you must believe to be a part of our congregations. While it has taken different forms, the importance of individual conscience in discerning truth, over and above what the community decides is true, has been a part of our tradition for well over a century and a half. The UUA's recent move from a list of seven principles commonly held among us, to a list of values shared by many UUs, is a further move away from specific, commonly held propositions. Unitarian Universalists are diverse in belief — the first ten minutes in the receiving line on Sunday morning after a particularly theologically challenging sermon are a common reminder.

Yes, and. We are not the spiritual equivalent of three-year-olds with

accordions, playing with a flagrant disregard for formal convention and good taste. The key to our theological diversity is that we practice it *together*, in community. Rather than soloists, we practice religion with each other. What are the rules we follow? What is the resolution of our community, the thing that holds us together even in the midst of our improvisational approach to faith?

Covenant provides the chords of Unitarian Universalist faith, the equivalent of a 12-bar blues progression that allows different musicians to make music together. Statements like "We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically," or "We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression," are not constraints for their own sake, but the structure that allows us to make meaning and improvise together.

Like musicians, faith lives in the interplay between structure and content, resolution and improvisation, tradition and innovation. In the coming year, let us resolve to try some new things, while leaning on the shared agreements that help us make meaning together.

*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.



Just Words

Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair, Senior Minister

This time last year, I submitted my name to the Ministerial Search Team in St. Paul, asking to be considered as the next senior minister of Unity Church. It has been an eventful twelve months, with multiple interviews, candidating,

a ministerial start up, and now over seventy "getting to know you" meetings with congregants. As I mentioned at Unity's annual meeting in December, one of the hallmarks of the first year of a new ministry is its emphasis on building relationships: after the hustle of search and candidating, the first year of a settled ministry is a time to slow down, to deepen relationships and get to know each other. We have done that well through the fall and early winter, and it is work that will continue through this spring.

Rather than a long column this month, there are a few "getting to know you" questions that have often come up in small settings this fall, but that I have not had an opportunity to talk about at scale. Every minister approaches these areas differently, but here are some general rules that I follow:

- **Social Media:** I am fairly active on Facebook ([facebook.com/oscar.i.sinclair](https://www.facebook.com/oscar.i.sinclair)) and Bluesky ([@revsinclair](https://bsky.app/profile/revsinclair)). As a rule, I do not initiate contacts with congregants, but will happily "friend" anyone from the congregation I serve.
- **Hugging:** I like hugs! I am not as reserved as I sometimes come across! And, like social media but for different reasons, I generally do not *initiate* hugs or other physical contact with congregants. I do hug back though!
- **Meetings:** There is a link in my email signature, [and here](#), that allows anyone to put a one on one meeting onto my calendar. If you go through that link and see that a time is available, I am 1) working onsite at Unity Church and 2) not otherwise spoken for. I try to be careful to keep my calendar updated, but occasionally will have to move a meeting around when something comes up. I am also intentional about how many meetings I can take in a week, so know that if you see available times, I am happy to meet with you!

If there is a theme to these disparate notes it is this: I am pretty intentional about boundaries. The work of ministry is both a profession and a personal calling, and it requires some intentional thinking about how I show up when I am "on," and the line between private life and public view. In all of it, my goal is to be as present and authentically myself as possible, while still having a life outside of my professional role.

The Wheel of Life

In Memoriam

Jeannie Spears

June 4, 1934 — November 30, 2024

Joan Velasquez

October 11, 1941 — December 4, 2024

Holding All Our Grief

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

To RSVP, ask questions, or to help with this gathering please contact Linda Kjerland at KjerlandLinda1@gmail.com or Signe Nestingen at Signe.Nestingen@gmail.com from Unity's Congregational Care Team.

Spiritual Care Training for Everyone

January 25 and February 15 | 9:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m.
Unity Church | Register: bit.ly/uucaretrain

Did you know that caring is a skill that can be taught and learned? Practiced and improved upon?

Rev. Karen Hutt will lead this series of two, four-hour workshops for people to build skills and deepen their practice of giving and receiving compassionate care for one another in times of joy, sorrow and transition.

Rev. Karen Hutt is a Unitarian Universalist minister, board certified chaplain and Clinical Pastoral Educator, and is the author of *The Call To Care: Essays by UU Chaplains* (available at Unity's Bookstall).

This training is open to congregants from Unity Church, White Bear UU Church and First Universalist. Attendance at both sessions is required for participation. Lunch is included. Questions? Please email Rev. Lara Cowtan at lara@unityunitarian.org.

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.

January 5: Tolling of Bells

Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair

Join us for Unity Church's annual service of remembrance for the members of our community who have passed away in the last year. Everyone will be invited to light a candle for someone they loved and lost in 2024.

January 12: The Growing Edge

Rev. Lara Cowtan

"Look well to the growing edge! All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born." — Howard Thurman

Often this phrase is used to explain a painful moment or failure, an uninvited or unwelcome "opportunity for growth." Yet, it is from these places of challenge that we do, indeed, emerge and develop, whether as planned or, more often, with an unexpected or creative outcome. We grow from places of strength, of hope and resilience, that once were edges themselves. Let us look to these edges together, that we may commit to a generative practice of being transformed.

January 19: Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Rev. Mary Katherine Morn

Founded in 1940, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) has served as a beacon of liberal religion in the world, and the possibilities that exist when we connect faith with action. On the day before the 2025 United States presidential inauguration, we will hear from Rev. Mary Katherine Morn, president of UUSC, about the work of the committee and the possibilities of this moment.

January 26: Yes, And

Rev. Dr. Oscar Sinclair

Music and ministry both exist in the relationship between structure and improvisation. This Sunday we will consider both, in an extemporaneous reflection from piano and pulpit.

Bring food for the foodshelf on Sundays!

During November, Unity Church donated 454 pounds of food to the foodshelf at Hallie Q. Brown. In January donations typically drop-off — so let's double our giving! Needs this month include non-perishable food items, toilet paper, paper towels, disinfectant wipes, all-purpose cleaner, shampoo, conditioner, body lotion and wash, and hand soap. Or, donate money to purchase fresh produce and meat: hallieqbrown.charityproud.org/donate.

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.

January 5: The Circle of Peace

The Circle of Peace works with Unity's Racial and Restorative Justice Team to end violence and promote racial healing through relationship building. It works by creating a safe space where people come together on a regular basis to share a meal and engage in respectful conversation. The Circle has had over 600 Monday meetings and meals at Unity. This collection will support these weekly gatherings. Unity Church members Russel and Sarah Balenger are the co-founders of the Circle of Peace. tcofm.org

January 12: Beyond Walls Urban Squash

Beyond Walls Urban Squash is an intensive program that combines squash playing, academic tutoring, and community service in a manner that successfully transforms underserved BIPOC youth. Trained tutors provide academic assistance and one-to-one instruction with the goal of closing the learning gap and developing personal skills that lead to positive futures. Students play squash three times a week with the goal of competing in regional and national events. This collection will support 2025 programming and travel for youth. Unity Church members Rene and Christoph Meyer-Grimberg nominated Beyond Walls. beyondwallsmn.org

January 19: Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)

On January 19 Rev. Mary Katherine Morn, president of the UUSC, will be our pulpit guest. This offering will support the work of the UUSC to advance human rights in partnership with an international community of grassroots organizations and advocates. uus.org

January 26: Ujamaa Place

Ujamaa Place is a direct service organization that stabilizes and transforms the lives of African American men, ages 18-30, by teaching them how to navigate inequality, poverty, and a criminal justice system built to perpetuate recidivism. Each man has an individual plan and works with trained coaches to achieve stable housing, increase educational attainment, secure and retain employment, reconnect with family, and eliminate contact with the penal system. This collection will help underwrite the monthly training expenses for Ujamaa men. ujamaaplace.org

To nominate an organization to receive the Sunday offering, please visit unityunitarian.org/sunday-offering.html.

Help Renew Unity's Ends Statements

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.



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.



Welcome Words

Philippa Anastos, Membership Coordinator and Program Assistant

I remain amazed by the way creativity is a spiritual practice for so many at Unity Church. This past year brought us countless changes. We welcomed new friends and family, grieved members of our community, and faced change with fear, hope, and — most of all — creativity. From the beautiful art on our walls to the ingenuity of staff and congregants, we find grace in the moment-to-moment unfolding of our collective journey. This year, may we open ourselves to new possibilities, fostering a community where every idea is an offering and every expression is a step toward growth.

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!

January 5: Religious Education and Faith Formation

January 12: Membership 101

January 19: Congregational and Pastoral Care

January 26: Worship and the Liturgical Year

Committing to Unity

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

Have you completed all of the Finding Yourself at Unity sessions? Has Unity Church become your faith home? Would you like to sign the membership book? If the answer to these questions is "yes," please join our senior minister, Rev. Oscar Sinclair, and our membership coordinator, Philippa Anastos, on January 14. Participants will share their faith journeys, learn about the commitments of membership at Unity Church, and sign the membership book.

Volunteer to Give Rides

We're looking for volunteers to give fellow community members rides to church. Your kindness and support will help others connect and participate. If you're able to assist, please consider volunteering today! For more information, contact Philippa Anastos, Membership Coordinator and Program Assistant, philippa@unityunitarian.org or 651-228-1456 x110.

BELOVED COMMUNITY STAFF TEAM

The Aspect Ratio of Race and Class

Rev. KP Hong, Beloved Community Staff Team

[Transcript of a talk presented as part of a larger report on ministries at the 153rd Annual Meeting of the Congregation on Saturday, December 7, 2024. Some details have been edited for readability.]

The journalist and author on technology, Nicholas Carr, made an intriguing observation recently: “The aspect ratio of our lives has changed.” In September of 1930, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences held one of their most consequential meetings to standardize the aspect ratio of the movie screen, the proportion of width and height of an image or video frame for motion pictures. That standard would not only influence the technical and artistic aspects of filmmaking but shape the viewing experience of audiences for decades to come.

The attendees at the meeting were offered various aspect ratios to consider, but a horizontal screen was taken as a given. The reasoning? Because traditional landscape and narrative paintings were almost always horizontal in orientation, a more natural orientation for the telling of stories. Furthermore, human vision is itself horizontal. With the lateral placement of our eyes, our horizontal field of vision spans about 180 degrees while our vertical field is limited to about 130 degrees. The horizontal bias also makes evolutionary sense, with more opportunities and threats presented by the land than the vertical sky. A species like ours benefits from a broad landscape view, and a horizontally composed image feels truer to our human point of view, something closer to the reality of the broad and encompassing world we actually inhabit.

So imagine being forced to wear blinders and seeing the world in a narrow portrait view. Not only would the portrait view feel cramped and claustrophobic, it might even pose a danger in constraining our wider perception of reality. Consider the smartphone, our handheld devices

designed to be held vertically, in portrait mode. According to studies, we look at our phone in portrait mode more than 90% of the time, even when viewing horizontally composed photos and videos. When the phones were first introduced, people routinely complained about feeling constricted and unnatural. But as the phone became our primary screen, we all got used to the narrowing field of view, cropping reality and its wider complexity to fit the size of our solitary screens.

The aspect ratio of our lives has changed. It has narrowed, not just on our smartphones but on many fronts, from the *polarization* of our political life to *individualization* as a defining feature of contemporary life to the epidemic of loneliness and the search for deep belonging. The aspect ratio of our lives has narrowed, as complex, multifaceted social narratives get cropped and manipulated to fit into one narrow established perspective or another. But in his magisterial work, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), rather than narrowing the aspect ratio to racism alone, W.E.B. Du Bois expanded its frame to the conflict between capitalism and labor, to a class struggle and how racism is time and time again manufactured by the oligarchs and capitalists to keep the masses divided. In the evolution of his racial justice work, Martin Luther King, Jr., found himself in Memphis supporting a labor strike, his aspect ratio expanding to capture the deep connections between capitalist exploitation and racial oppression and both tied to the militarism of the United States.

As the Beloved Community Staff Team attended to the many fronts of Unity’s antiracist multicultural work this past year, what became increasingly clear

was the work of enlarging the aspect ratio of our prophetic imagination, the importance of complicating the narrative and reviving complexity amid false simplicities manipulated to fit one narrow established perspective or another. *Foremost among complexities is the fact that racial oppression and economic exploitation have always been entwined in capitalism.* We forget that George Floyd was unemployed and allegedly using counterfeit money, that Eric Garner was selling untaxed cigarettes to earn a living, that Walter Scott was under warrant for delinquent child support payments, that Breonna Taylor lived in gentrifying zones where police sweeps regularly cleared the neighborhood for real estate valuation. Countless fatal police encounters result from minor infractions like broken taillights or unpaid tickets which are symptoms of economic hardship more than real threat to public safety. The fact that so many resort to criminalized forms of work to make a living remains critically important for understanding the common class predicament of policing today.

Racism alone cannot fully explain the expansive carceral power produced by capitalist class society, relentless in securing conditions for compounded growth. A singular focus on race only serves the interests of neoliberal capitalism by reducing the question of obscene economic inequality to skin color and a distorted politics of identity, while obstructing discussions about healthcare, homeownership, unionization, progressive taxation, deregulation, privatization, childcare, education, and more.

What are the stories about money and wealth that frame our relationship with money? Our values, policies, and economic imagination about debt,

Continued on page 8...

WELLSPRING WEDNESDAY

January 15

Dinner: Corn chowder, green bean and quinoa salad, baguette, dessert

CO2 Pipelines in Minnesota: The Fossil Fuel Industry's (Quiet) Game Plan Parish Hall and Zoom

Summit Carbon Solutions aims to build thousands of miles of pipelines to carry carbon dioxide that is captured from ethanol plants. Where will it go? North Dakota for storage or to be used by oil drillers to pump out the billions of barrels of oil that remain underground but are difficult to reach? Come hear Sara Wolff from Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light and Peg Furshong from CURE, a rurally-focused Minnesota organization that protects and restores resilient communities and landscapes. They'll unpack what the pipelines mean for our communities and climate progress, and share what we can do to shift the trajectory at the state and federal level.

Parents of Teens | Robbins Parlor

Each stage of parenting brings unique joys and challenges, and leveraging the wisdom of our village helps us all. Join this first meeting of the Parents of Teens group, led by Gail Mulcahey, and explore techniques to help us maintain our equilibrium and connect with our teens. The focus this week is on Colleen O'Grady's book, *Dial Down the Drama*. Come, even if you don't have the book yet!

Lectio Divina | Zoom (Gannett Room)

Join a sacred experience of listening, contemplating, and responding to inspirational texts and contemporary poetry. Zoom from the Gannett Room on Wednesdays.

Justice Learning Partners | Zoom

In order to dismantle oppression, one must be able to identify it, as Ibram X. Kendi reminds us. Come to this next JLP meeting to hear from the fall groups, learn more about the program, get resources for reflection (discussion guides provided), and sign up for a partner or group. Questions? Contact Shelley at library@unityunitarian.org.

Beginner Violin | Choir Room

Join Mayra Mendoza for beginning violin lessons appropriate for all ages. Email mayraquitzia@hotmail.com by 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday to ensure a lesson.

January 22

Dinner: Chicken tenders, mashed potatoes, veggie crudites, ranch dressing, dessert

Fraud Prevention | Parish Hall and Zoom

Join Andrew Prokop for resources and up-to-date information to help safeguard against identity theft and other scams. The talk will include information on how to spot and avoid scams, how to protect yourself and your family, and what you should do if you think you've become a victim of a scam.

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

A fun, reflective group of people working to build multifaith and multicultural community as they navigate the complexity of being an adult.

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.

Indigenous Justice Team Meeting and Book Read Introduction | Room TBD

Join the Indigenous Justice Team's monthly meeting and the first of several discussions about Sarah Augustine's book, *The Land is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* (see page 10 for more details).

Beginner Violin (see January 15)

Dinner: 5:45 p.m.

Chapel service: 6:45 p.m.

Programming: 7:10 p.m.

Childcare provided!

Details at unityunitarian.org/wellspring-wednesday.html.

January 29

Dinner: Swedish vegetarian meatballs, egg noodles, roasted broccoli, dessert

Introduction to Zen Buddhist Meditation | Parish Hall (no Zoom)

Rev. KP Hong will offer an introductory session to Buddhist meditation, what it is and what it is not. As with various practices that have been secularized, instrumentalized, and deracinated in the marketplace of spirituality, meditation has become a generic term whose meaning is less clear in proportion to the hype it generates. A method of stress reduction, controlling thoughts and feelings, retraining the brain, being here-and-now, method of therapy, paying attention, path of personal happiness, and more? What is Buddhist meditation beyond the myriad forms of self-improvement, self-actualization, or simply even self-involvement? This session grounds meditation in Buddhist practice and invites participants to explore this pathless path.

Considering Five Theological Questions | Room TBD

Explore one of five questions at the heart of systematic theology. These same questions guide the church's religious education program. This session will explore the question: *How do we live in the face of death and loss?* Come prepared to engage in personal reflection and share your responses with those gathered. We will examine the next question on February 26. All those who would like to formulate their thoughts into a credo statement, just as our youth do for Coming of Age, are invited to compose one and share it with us in a final session on March 26.

Beginner Violin (see January 15)

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

A Spiritual Practice to Feed Your Soul: Lectio Divina

Join us for a sacred experience of listening, contemplating, and responding to inspirational texts. Though the spiritual practice of Lectio Divina is centuries-old, typically utilizing Scripture, Unitarian Universalists use contemporary poetry. Participants report that Lectio Divina is “rejuvenating” and “insightful.” Each second Wednesday and fourth Tuesday of the month at 7:10 p.m. on Zoom; or Zoom from the Gannett Room at Unity on Wednesdays. All are welcome! Led by Lisa Wersal or Shelley Butler. Questions? Contact Shelley at library@unityunitarian.org.

Unity Church Youth Musical

The musical is a unique production created each year for Unity Church by Mary Blouin Auffert and Sandy Waterman. All middle schoolers (grades 6, 7 and 8) are invited, and everyone who auditions gets a part.

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 12 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! Berry Farrington (berryfarrington@hotmail.com), Jen Schultz (jenny_mn@yahoo.com), Eric Weber (eric.weber1@yahoo.com).

Writing: A Spiritual Practice

Discovering Your Anti-oppression Heart

How do our faith practice and antiracist/anti-oppression work embrace and connect to one another? Unity Church talks about a double helix model of spiritual practice and antiracist/anti-oppression work. But some of us may have asked ourselves, “How do these intertwined levels and columns work? How is this double helix a practice, and not just a description?” Can I understand it in my heart, not just my head?” For some, the answer may be the practice of writing the double helix.

In this series of eight sessions facilitated by Unity Church member LauraSue Schlatter, we will write in response to prompts designed to help participants “write the double helix” in any genre, sharing our work without critique. Eight Thursday sessions, every two weeks, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Anderson Library: January 23, February 6 and 20, March 6 and 20, April 3 and 17, May 1. Space is limited and pre-registration is required: <https://bit.ly/writingdblhelix>.

Dying for Beginners... Again!

Last year's multi-part series on aspects of death and dying returns, in a shorter and more focused form, this February. Mark your calendar for Wellspring Wednesday on February 5, 12 and 19, for a three-part workshop with practical tips on how to prepare for the end.

Unity-UUA Common Read 2025

Authentic Selves: Celebrating Trans and Nonbinary People and Their Families

Read in January and attend the workshop and discussion on February 22, 2025. *Authentic Selves* is available in the Unity Bookstall!

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: January 6 and 20, 7:00-9:00 p.m., Zoom. Discuss a range of topics, offer support, and connect.

Men's Retirement Circle: Monday, January 13 and 27, 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 Friday of the month, 9:30-11:00 a.m., Crothers Room, bring your knitting, stitching, etc.

Unity Book Club: second Tuesday of the month, 7:00-8:30 p.m., Zoom
January 14: *While The World Watched* by Carolyn Maull McKinstry
February 11: *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles

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



New Year — New Books — Another Chance to Get it Right

Shelley Butler, Library-Bookstall Team

Turning the page on the calendar to a new year always fills me with hope, though I admit this year it is a little more of challenge to hang on to it. Yet, I keep playing in my mind one of my all-time favorite songs by Steve Earl and sung by [Joan Baez](#), that includes this:

I receive the blessings
That every day on Earth's another chance to get it right
Let this little light of mine shine and rage
Against the night

So, hopefully by now, we've all washed our socks, as Rev. Oscar reminded us to do, and we're ready for another chance. In the Anderson Library and the Bookstall, we've added some important new works for this new year:

Trans Kids, Our Kids: Stories and Resources From the Frontline of the Movement for Transgender Youth by Jasmine Beach-Ferrara, et al: By contextualizing and sharing these stories, as well as offering resources and next steps, *Trans Kids* aims to both narrativize the pain and fear experienced by everyday Americans in this cultural moment, as well as highlighting the courage, hope, and resilience of transgender and LGBTQ+ youth, their families, and the people who support them.

Acts of Resistance: The Power of Art to Create a Better World by Amber Massie-Blomfield: Inspiring change by looking at the remarkable links between artists, musicians, and filmmakers to organizations and communities; Blomfield shows how art has "shifted history on its axis" in movements such as environmentalism, feminism, anti-fascism, and several others.

By the Fire We Carry: The Generations-Long Fight for Justice on Native Land by Rebecca Nagle: On several lists of best books of 2024 and longlisted for the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction, Nagle weaves the story of injustice with legal victories, as well as historic and continuing battles for Native rights and justice.

We Will Rest by Tricia Hersey, the author of *Rest is Resistance*: A not-so-subtle reminder to avoid burnout and care for ourselves.

Unity-UUA Common Read continues in January and February: Read now *Authentic Selves: Celebrating Trans and Nonbinary People and Their Families* by Peggy Gillespie and attend program in February. Available in the Bookstall.

Justice Learning Partners — Wednesday, January 15: Join others interested in deepening their understanding of justice by signing up for a Justice Learning Partner group. Come on January 15 to learn more about it. On Zoom, register here: <https://bit.ly/JLBJan25>.

In The Justice Database | bit.ly/JusticeData

Transforming Families Minnesota

A volunteer-based peer network of families in which transgender, gender non-conforming, and questioning youth, and their families come together to support each other in a safe, welcoming space.



Continued from page 5...

spending, saving, investing, scarcity, abundance, enoughness? We have been living in the imagination of rich white capitalists for most of our history. What are other imaginaries that tell a different story? And how can we tell a better story of money? These are some of the questions guiding the work of the revitalized Development Ministry Team.

But just as a focus on racism alone frames an inadequate aspect ratio, neither does a singular focus on class address the multiple forms of racism that have historically and specifically harmed communities of color. This is what Ta-Nehisi Coates pointed out to the Bernie Sanders campaign when making his case for reparations, that "Jim Crow and its legacy were not merely problems of *disproportionate poverty*." Such a view misses the way in which centuries of racism have hammered inequality so deep into American society that general solutions will not suffice. A rising tide will not lift all boats, not the boats that have been chained and tied down and wedged among the rocks. Without special repairs for descendants of chattel slavery, enacted alongside general efforts, the rising tide cannot help those boats.

What is needed is not shoe-horning our history of injustice into either race or class — especially as our nation's racial composition complexifies — but to see and engage more complexly, intersectionally, and courageously. What is needed is a much larger aspect ratio, a larger focus and truer framing that imagines a cross-racial solidarity and movement that can match the complexities of our world today. These are the generative edges as we step toward the Ends Renewal process and the prophetic horizon of our shared ministry.



Archives Team

Inquiring Minds, or Hearing Arthur Foote



Archival boxes at the Gale Family Library, MNHS

The Archives Team continues to collect and organize boxes of Unity Church items such as sermons, reports, minutes, and publications like *This Week at Unity* and the *commUNITY* newsletter. We send them to the Minnesota Historical Society's Gale Family Library (MNHS) periodically to document the ongoing story of Unity Church.

People at Unity Church have asked how to access the items at MNHS. Because the online catalog has many layers, it's a suitable time to provide a tutorial on how to identify and view items in the collection:

1. Click or type this link to the Unity finding aid at mnhs.org/library/findaids/00896.xml (bookmark the link to come back easily).
2. To scan all the catalog records, use the up or down arrows on your keyboard to move through the finding aid.
3. To find items about a particular topic, press the control and "f" keys simultaneously. For example, enter the words **Eliot Wing** (caps not necessary) to see materials about this addition to the church building. That search results in four hits, which will be highlighted as you move through the finding aid using the up or down arrows next to the search box.

MNHS has digitized some items, focusing on sermons recorded at Unity Church. For example, you can hear former minister Arthur Foote by using the process above. Simply enter **digital Foote** in the search box. You can listen to the digitized sermon from anywhere using your device.

To see the items you've identified, head to the Gale Family Library on level two of the Minnesota History Center, 345 W Kellogg Blvd. Take the box numbers of the materials you'd like to see. The librarians will bring you the requested materials.

Reach out to an Archives Team member with questions about searching the congregational materials at MNHS. There's a gold mine of Unity Church stories!

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

January Parish Hall Artists

Artists reception will be held on Friday, January 10, from 3:30-5:30 p.m., in Parish Hall.

Joe Schur

The work presented in this exhibit is a continuation of my exploring my personal history as well as discovering and using new or altered art making techniques. In the pieces presented there is a focus on memories, objects with meaning and connections between life experiences. While these references are particular and specific to me, your interpretation as a viewer will also be particular and specific to you and will, in effect, "finish" the work.

In producing these physical objects, I use a variety of materials and methods including drawing, painting, collage, photographs, personal objects I have acquired, and found objects from many sources.

The process of art-making is both planned and playful, I will have a general idea of a theme and then, from a messy work surface and from stored materials, put together a collection of marks, impressions and objects consistent with that theme. Sometimes I will later add materials to the art work as I did for this exhibition. Most of the assemblages (a surface that is constructed of three-dimensional elements projecting out from the surface to produce a new combination of objects and marks) in this exhibit were completed during the last two years but several have been recently altered specifically for this exhibit.

My intention in these works is to create a sense of wonder for both myself and the viewer. I'm hoping you will wonder what the work means to you as well as have a sense of awe and surprise that draws you in for just a few moments. I will be delighted if you find seeing and responding to the work enlivening and curious.

Kathy Schur

This is an opportunity to share my art and life journey with my husband. Watercolor painting has brought me much joy and has opened my eyes to the world around me — a vast space filled with colors, shapes and beauty which I try to share in my paintings. My work has been enhanced by my involvement in the Minnesota Watercolor Society of which I am a Signature Member. I was raised in a suburb of Detroit and after moving around some and a stint in Peace Corp, have been in Minnesota many years. My husband, Joe, and I raised our children here and found community in Unity. My paintings are inspired by the landscapes and people I have seen and wonderful teachers and a community of painters who share and critique my work, especially my Tuesday painters. Included in the show are some paintings from Michigan and now Minnesota, my home for the last 40 years. This Midwest landscape of forest and plains and lakes and cities inspires me as well as the many places I have traveled to and lived.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH MINISTRY TEAMS

Gun Violence Prevention Team

Bob Albrecht, Gun Violence Prevention Team

One recent Sunday in Parish Hall, those visiting the Gun Violence Prevention Team table were asked to write on cards about ways in which they had been personally impacted by gun violence. Many heartbreaking stories from those in our own community were posted on a board — on just that single morning. Here are their words.

“My mother’s friend was killed in a hate-based mass shooting.”

“A person I’ve known since elementary school who struggled with mental illness shot his family and himself including his two children.”

“My son and his friends were carjacked at gunpoint and forced to lie on the ground in the snow. My son and his friends will carry that trauma forever.”

“My teenage son fled from a shooter at Mall of America.”

“A cousin died at age 12 during a game of Russian Roulette.”

“In high school in St. Paul in 1976 a friend attempted suicide. By some miracle he survived.”

“My good friend’s son killed himself with a gun the day his mom passed. It was double heartbreak. I so wished I could have prevented it — and his pain.”

“My kids grew up with active shooter drills all through school. It’s a real presence in their lives.”

“My grandfather used a gun to end his life a few months before I was born.”

“I will never forget the Sandy Hook massacre of young children. That’s when I became involved in efforts to stem gun violence.”

“My dear friend’s nephew was caught in gang crossfire in downtown Minneapolis and died the night before his graduation from University of St. Thomas.”

“The 1981 shooting of Jim Brady during an assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan started me on my journey to find ways to curb gun violence.”

Our collective voice, in this our day and time, throughout the community and at the legislative level is crucial. Please join us for the next meeting of the Gun Violence Prevention Team on Thursday, January 16, at 3:30 p.m., in the Gannett Room and on Zoom.

Housing Justice Team

Be a Weekend Warrior: Groups of 3-6 adults are needed for weekend meal teams at Provincial House in Saint Paul. Volunteers assist with serving meals, visiting with guests, and clean up. For details and to sign up visit bit.ly/ucuph.

Asylum and Faithful Hospitality: Families seeking asylum in our community face an overflow in emergency shelters. The Faithful Hospitality initiative partners with local houses of worship to provide shelter for these families.

If you have questions about these volunteer opportunities, please contact Janice Gestner at janicemgg@comcast.net.

Indigenous Justice Team Schedule and Book Read

Beth Peterson, Indigenous Justice Team

In an effort to make its meetings more convenient to more folks, the Indigenous Justice Team will be holding their monthly meeting during Wellspring Wednesdays beginning in January. On January 22 we will introduce our spring book read, *The Land is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* by Sarah Augustine. We will meet to discuss the book in sections on February 12 and 26, and March 12 and 26, and look forward to a lively book discussion with you.

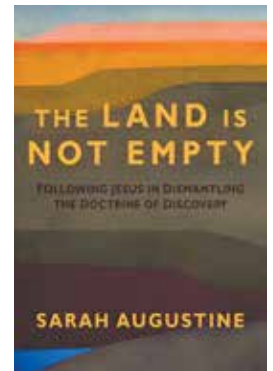
Sarah Augustine is a Tewa pueblo descendent, co-founder and executive director of the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, which held its annual meeting at Unity Church last summer. In her work Sarah addresses the harm done by the Doctrine of Discovery, which continues to be relied upon in U.S. law. As a member of the Mennonite denomination, Sarah believes strongly in the obligation of the Christian Church to reverse the effects of that doctrine. The Mennonites have long been allies in the fight for social justice in multiple settings (they issued perhaps the earliest challenge to slavery in the U.S. in 1688).

About the book, Luis Tapia Rubio writes in *Anabaptist Witness*:

Legitimized by the church and justified by a misreading of Scripture, the Doctrine of Discovery says a land can be considered “empty” and therefore free for the taking if inhabited by “heathens, pagans, and infidels.” Augustine reframes the colonization of North America as she investigates ways that the Doctrine of Discovery continues to devastate indigenous cultures, and even the planet itself, as it justifies exploitation of both natural resources and people. Augustine’s work is a powerful call to reckon with the root causes of a legacy that continues to have devastating effects on indigenous peoples around the globe and a call to recognize how all of our lives and our choices are interwoven.

Sarah will be returning to Minnesota in the spring, holding events in various locations, including in the Twin Cities on April 4-5 (additional information about those events will be announced as they are finalized). Our Indigenous Justice Community Outreach Ministry Team will host a private discussion about the book with Sarah at Unity Church on April 5 for anyone who has read the book.

The Land is Not Empty is available in the Anderson Library and for sale at the Unity Bookstall.





Practice Perfect

Drew Danielson, Coordinator of Youth and Campus Ministries

Unity Church youth think they are perfect. I concluded that a number of years ago when I introduced a question for group discussion: “What is your New Year’s resolution?” They gave me blank stares.

“What, you don’t have anything you’d like to change about yourself, nothing you want to do better?”

A senior raised her hand “What is a New Year’s resolution?” Incredulous, I pressed the group and learned they truly didn’t know what I was talking about, or if they did have a vague understanding of the New Year practice, it wasn’t something they or their families did.

“It’s not realistic,” stated one.

“They are made to be broken, so what’s the point?” asked another.

Turns out they don’t think they are perfect, they just have a skeptical, and I suppose more mature or logical response to the idea of being pushed to arbitrarily determine there is something you need to fix about yourself and then decide right there what you will swear to do differently or better. I did think they were letting themselves off too easily, so I asked a different question. “OK, how about if we tell someone else a resolution they should make?”

Probably because it sounded like worlds more fun, that they could get into! And though we did play around with that a bit, and did manage to insult and rip on each other quite well, we also managed to turn the conversation to making skillful, insightful suggestions to one another. They found it easier to be critical and advise someone other than themselves, which I think is simply true. It’s so much easier to see what someone else can do better than to fairly and honestly critique ourselves.

But is that a bad thing? It’s not — not if we can agree on our intentions and agree it’s something we can practice together. That Tower Club group had developed a comfort level with each other, that included listening to each other share about their beliefs, their hopes, their challenges and their confusions. Bottom line, they cared about each other.

The best thing to come out of that discussion, the thing that carried over into future time together, is the willingness and ability to make resolutions as a group. We don’t always call it that exactly, but they do it all the time. “We resolve to keep showing up. We resolve to listen and be careful about our judgment. We agree there is something we need to care about, to do something about.” That sounds pretty UU. What is also UU is they know that carrying through will be complex and rife with disagreement, that they will have to experiment and critique and improvise the whole time. That will be our most valuable practice.

I still want to resolve to eat fewer donuts on Sunday!



Music Notes

Ahmed Anzaldúa, Director of Music Ministries

January is a month for resolutions and, in fact, that is part of the month’s worship theme. As you consider your resolutions for the year ahead, consider joining a choir! The music ministry at Unity

Church offers the opportunity to sing in choirs for all ages, levels of experience, abilities, and time commitments. It is a wonderful way to connect with your faith while also serving your church community. Singing in choir is more than just a musical experience; it has many other benefits, which might align with some of your resolutions for 2025.

Is your resolution for the coming year to do more to improve your mental health? Singing is a reliable way of getting your body to release endorphins. Making music helps reduce anxiety and stress, and doing it with other people creates a sense of purpose and moments of joy. If you want to improve your emotional well-being in 2025, join a choir!

Is your resolution to get in shape? Singing is exercise. It enhances your breathing technique, improves posture, and strengthens your core and lungs. If you want to improve your overall physical health in 2025, join a choir!

Perhaps your resolution is to meet more people and improve your social connections. Well, guess what, choirs are founded on community! If there is one thing that singing in a choir does is that it helps you build friendships. If you want to feel less alone and work together with others to create something beautiful in 2025, join a choir!

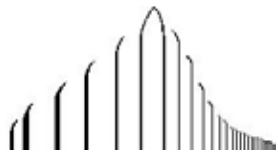
Is your resolution to learn new things and stimulate your brain? Reading and Sudoku can do that, but few things challenge your brain like learning new music. The process of rehearsing and internalizing music in a choir can sharpen your focus and has been proven to improve memory. Singing in choir will also expose you to cultures and traditions outside of your own, broadening your experience and enriching your worldview. If you want to become a more intelligent, learned individual in 2025, join a choir!

Maybe you want to be more confident and self-assured? Singing in a choir is great for that! Singing in front of other people is a great way to feel a sense of accomplishment and self-worth. As you get better at singing and overcome new challenges, you will notice a difference in your confidence and self-esteem. If you want to be more confident in 2025, join a choir!

Time & (Trans)formation

Sunday, January 12 | The O’Shaughnessy Auditorium

One Voice Mixed Chorus explores the ways in which we use our time, for ourselves and our community, and the power of transformation of ourselves, ideas, and connection. Tickets at onevoicemn.org.



UNITY CHURCH-UNITARIAN

Sanctuary Entrance: 733 Portland Avenue | Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
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
Mary Baremore, Chair, Board of Trustees

NON-PROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
TWIN CITIES MN
PERMIT NO. 1141

**TIME SENSITIVE
MATERIAL**

Transformative Experience: Travel to Bolivia



Mano a Mano seeks to improve health and well-being in marginalized Bolivian communities. Over 150 Unity Church members have traveled to Bolivia to visit the schools, health clinics, and water projects built in partnership with community residents; to help distribute medical and school supplies collected in Minnesota; and to engage with its ecological agriculture training project.

To find out how you can join the next trip, May 5-15, 2025, come to an information session on January 5, at 10:15 a.m., in the Gannett Room, and 12:30 p.m., in the Foote Room, or Sunday, February 2, at 10:15 a.m., in the Gannett Room, and 12:30 p.m., in the DeCramer Room. If cannot attend a session and you have questions or want to learn more, please contact Ann Mabbott at amabbott@hamline.edu.

Holiday Regifting Sale

*Donate your unwanted treasures!
Shop for fabulous regifted bargains!
Regift... and rejoice!*

Sunday, January 12 | Parish Hall

Did Santa bring something that's not your size, your style, or your idea of fun?



Donate your new but unwanted gift to Unity Church! We'll sell it to someone else, turning your discards into cash. All proceeds from the Regifting Sale benefit the work of the Community Outreach Ministry Team that supports Mano a Mano International Partners. Mano a Mano builds clinics, schools and infrastructure, and trains teachers, doctors and subsistence farmers in rural Bolivia.

How it works: Bring your unused new (or indistinguishable from new) items to the regifting tables on Sunday, January 12, before either service. We'll sell items at a discount at the Regifting Sale.

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.