

# Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo

December 2023  
Gather - Inspire - Transform



## **Musings**

Rev. Cathy Harrington, Interim Minister

### ***What does it mean to be a people of Mystery?***

This December, we are taught that to be a people of mystery requires humility and mindfulness. Thich Nhat Hanh offered instruction to his students as a meditation: *See the apple in your hand as the body of the Cosmos*. It reminded me of an experience from several years ago.

I had the privilege of accompanying Roshi Bernie Glassman and over 100 people from around the world on a Bearing Witness retreat at the Nazi extermination camps at Auschwitz/Birkenau in Poland. It was the 17th year Bernie had led a retreat at Auschwitz, and this year there was an effort through scholarships to include young adults. The point of these retreats to bear witness. Much of our day was spent in silent meditation while four people around the circle read names of those who had died there. We each took a turn but still after five days could not get through the millions of names of those murdered in the Holocaust from 1939-1944.

One of the participants in my reflection group was a young peace activist from Bethlehem, Palestine. Dina was there to try to understand the hearts and the minds of the Israeli people who have driven the Palestinian people from their homes and seized their land. She decided she could not keep hating the enemy because she believed that the solution to the problem must include communication and understanding on both sides.

Dina was passionate, and wise for her age. Each day we spent several hours sitting in meditation on the railroad tracks beneath the guard towers, barbed wire fences, and the train car that served as a memorial to the selection site where hundreds of thousands of Jews, gypsies, and others were chosen to immediate death in the gas chambers or work duty. Those prisoners chosen for work were fed thin soup (about 300 calories per day) and given very little water to drink. Many died from starvation and illness. We were given a bowl to use and keep for soup. Every day at 1 PM we would walk outside the gates to eat a bowl of soup. We did not eat or drink inside the camp out of respect for those who died here without adequate food and water.

When we returned in the evening to our lodging, we were fed by the culinary staff at the Center for Prayer and Dialogue. Our rooms were warm, and our beds were comfortable. The food was hot, nutritious, and plentiful. We were hungry, and Dina observed that a lot of food was being taken but not eaten. She called it "throwing food." She spoke of an American woman who took two bites out of an apple and left the rest on her plate. When she asked her if she was going to finish the apple, the woman replied, "Oh, that. I'm done with it."

Dina was livid. Every morning at 7 AM, we met in small council groups, and when it was Dina's turn to speak, she expressed her frustration at the wastefulness; "It was very difficult for me to obtain a VISA to travel to

be here. In my country an apple is a rare delicacy. When we get to eat an apple, we appreciate it. Wasting food here is a disgrace and an insult to everyone in the world that is hungry.”

Our hearts are with the people in Palestine and Israel, and it feels right to live our lives more humbly and mindful. May we be generous out of our abundance. In the words of Shelby Spong, “May we live fully and love wastefully.”

In faith and love, Cathy

---

## **Pulpit Previews**

### **December 3: The Spirit of Advent by Rev. Cathy Harrington**

Hebrew scholar, Walter Bruggemann explains the Advent season as “an abrupt disruption in our 'ordinary time'...utterly new year, new time, new life. Everything begins again...” With ancient pagan roots, Advent is a time of hope, peace, light, and love. John Dominic Crossan urges us to take the message of Advent and Christmas seriously without taking the stories literally. He wrote, “Taking the message of Christmas seriously, invites us to become the manger that gives birth to hope and love.”

### **December 10: The Miracle of Hanukkah by Rev. Cathy Harrington**

The story of Hanukkah represents freedom from oppression for Jews, but the miracle is that the oil that could last only one day, lasted eight days. The Talmud says that “it is important to advertise the miracle” ([jewishhistory.org](http://jewishhistory.org)).

### **December 13: Blue Christmas Vespers Service 6 pm**

Join Dr. Jessie Downs, Rev. Cathy Harrington, and Christopher Sierzchula for a contemplative service of reflection, remembrance, hope, and healing.

### **December 17: Mystery by Rev. Cathy Harrington**

Rachel Naomi Remen once said that life is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be lived. How different would our lives be if we could open our minds to awe and unknowing?

### **December 24: No Rehearse Christmas Pageant for All Ages**

We are going to recreate the old story of the birth of Jesus by giving it our own slant. And, since we take the story of Hanukkah seriously, this will be a story of freedom and liberation. And drawing on our own Universalist heritage, we are going to make this a story of hope for all people.

### **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service 9 pm Lessons and Carols**

A reception will follow the service in the Parish Hall. You are invited to bring holiday treats to share.



## Religious Education & Faith Development News



Greetings from the Religious Education Ministry!

Jess Pond, Director of Religious Education

Hello UUCB!

Religious Education classes will be on holiday break December 24 and December 31.

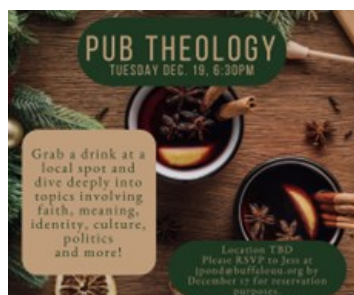
Register for Religious Education here: <https://forms.gle/4pCR9vikK9fAJgrA9>

Check out the Lifespan Religious Education Calendar here: <https://shorturl.at/fKRST>

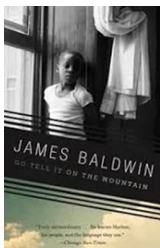
We can always use more volunteers in RE, especially for the Youth Group. If you're interested in volunteering, please email me at [jpond@buffalouu.org](mailto:jpond@buffalouu.org).

We have lots of festivities coming up this month!

Sundays, December 3 & December 10	Newcomer Class, Library, 12:00-1:30 Are you new to Unitarian Universalism or UUCB and want to learn a bit about both, or are you interested in becoming a member? Come to the Newcomer
Sunday, December 10	SuUpper Sunday, Parish Hall, after service Second Sundays are SuUpper Sundays! If your children or youth would like to volunteer to setup, serve soup, or cleanup, please let Jess know at
Saturday, December 16	Holiday Potluck, Parish Hall, 5:00-8:00 Bring your favorite recipe from your holiday tradition! Share good food, games, and music with the RE community.
Tuesday, December 19	Pub Theology, location TBD, 6:30-8:00 Grab a drink at a local spot and dive into topics of faith, meaning, identity, culture, and more! Please RSVP to Jess by December 17 for reservation purposes.
Friday, December 22	Winter Solstice Service, Sanctuary, 7:00-8:00 Advent is a time of searching for light in the dark. The Pagan tradition of Yule is a celebration of the return of the sun. We will be guided by music, readings, and ritual inspired by the Earth-centered traditions that celebrate this time of year.
Sunday, December 24	Christmas Eve Family Service, Sanctuary, 10:30am
Saturday, January 3	Bulletin Board Decorating Party, Parish Hall, 1:00-3:00 The RE community has been invited to decorate the monthly worship theme bulletin board in the Parish Hall for the month of January! The theme for January is "Liberating Love". Come help decorate the bulletin board and show what "Liberating Love" means to you!

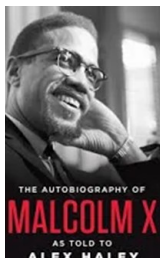


## Adult Faith Development



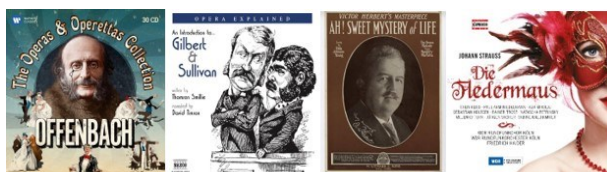
### **Happy Holidays from the UUCB Banned Book Club with Mary Lou and Sharon.**

Are you looking for books to give this year? Give your friends and family a banned book. A good place to start is <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/decade2019>. Another site is USA.org and their article from Sept., 2023, titled: Why you should read these 51 banned books now



Taking a holiday break this month; we pick up again in January 2024 with James Baldwin's Go Tell It On The Mountain. February will be Alex Haley and Malcolm X's The Autobiography of Malcolm X. March: Patricia McCormick, Sold. April: Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses. In May, we finish of the year with Alison Bechdel's Fun Home.

We meet the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month in the Marge Gardner Room, 7:00-8:30pm. All are welcome. Join us at any time. For more information, contact Mary Lou Hill and Sharon



### **TWO HEARTS IN ¾ TIME: THE WORLD OF OPERETTA, MICHAEL HARRIS, INSTRUCTOR**

Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, 695 Elmwood Avenue; Buffalo, NY 14222

Wednesdays, 9:30-11:30 a.m., Cost: \$10 per session

To register, send your check (made payable to UUCB) to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo; 695 Elmwood Avenue; Buffalo, NY 14222. [Put 'Operetta Course' on memo line of check.] For information, call 716-885-2136, or email us at [office@buffalouu.org](mailto:office@buffalouu.org).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the language of love was theatrically expressed by the operetta. It was the vehicle not just for high romance, but also for social satire & extravagant fantasy. We will salute the great melodic geniuses of the operetta form, including Jacques Offenbach, Arthur Sullivan (with W.S. Gilbert), Johann Strauss II, Victor Herbert and Sigmund Romberg. Each class will leave you with a song in your heart!

### **Remaining Classes for 2023:**

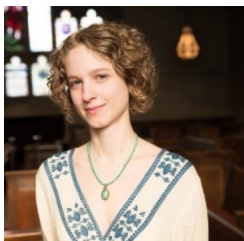
Session Thirteen (December 6): And This Is My Beloved – Robert Wright and George Forrest

Session Fourteen (December 13): Exit Music – Operetta's Last Gasps (Candide, She Loves Me, A Little Night Music & On the Twentieth Century)



## Music Notes

Dr. Jessie Downs, Music Director



The holidays at UUCB will overflow with music to help you get into the spirit of the season, whatever that spirit may be for you! You can come out to one of our Sunday services for celebrations of Advent, Hannukah, Winter Solstice, and Christmas Eve; join the Wednesday evening “Blue Christmas” service for some spiritual solace; or attend one of our special Saturday events for a bit of extra musical fun.

**To kick things off, on Sunday December 3<sup>rd</sup>**, soloists Michael Harris and Helen Lowry, along with pianist Christopher Sierzchula, will share special wintery offerings that capture different perspectives on the season. As the Prelude and Postlude, Chris will play first the mellow “Thanksgiving,” then the playful “Joy” from George Winston’s Christmas Album. At the Offertory, Michael will sing the cheery Sheldon Harnick song “Christmas Gifts” and as the Reflection, Helen will sing the melancholic aria “Why Must the Winter Come So Soon” from Vanessa by Samuel Barber.

**On Saturday December 9<sup>th</sup> at 7pm**, join Jessie Downs and her students for a low-key fall studio recital. Soloists Taryn Goehrig and Helen, along with choir members Rachel Clark, Beth White, and Phil Nicolai will share songs and arias that they’ve recently decided to take for a spin as they continue to expand their repertoire and technique.

**On Sunday December 10<sup>th</sup>**, the UUCB Choir and Chris will help to kick off the festival of Hannukah. As the Prelude and Postlude, Chris will share solo piano numbers in honor of the festivities. As the Offertory and Reflection, the Choir will sing first the danceable Ladino “Ocho Kandelikas,” followed by the more reflective prayer “Sim Shalom” featuring Michael Harris and our organ.

**On Wednesday December 13<sup>th</sup>**, a subset of the choir will share two holiday tunes on the local news, so stay tuned to Daytime Buffalo on Channel 4 to hear our feature! That evening, if you’re in need of a reflective space to process the more challenging emotions of the season, join Reverend Cathy, Jessie, and Chris for a “Blue Christmas” service at 6pm, with a piano version of the titular Elvis Presley tune, as well as W.A. Mozart’s “Ach, ich fühls” and Dolly Parton’s “Hard Candy Christmas.”

**On Saturday December 16<sup>th</sup>**, invite your friends to come to the Choir’s carol-a-long at 1pm in the Parish Hall. You’ll be able to grab lyric sheets and sing along to well-known tunes, as well as share some hot cocoa and cookies afterward. At 2pm, this month’s Casual Concert guests the Jay/Sharptet will play an hour of jazzy music in the Sanctuary.

**On Sunday December 17<sup>th</sup>**, Michael, Taryn, Shaun Doyle, and Chris will help us celebrate the Winter Solstice. Michael will begin the service with “The Shortest Day of the Year” from The Boys from Syracuse. At the Offertory, Taryn will sing “Gefor’ne Tränen (Frozen Tears)” from Winterreise (A Winter’s Journey) by Franz Schubert. As the Reflection, Shaun will sing “Sending you Light” by Melanie DeMore, and Chris will finish out the service with a pianistic Postlude.

**Christmas Eve is a Sunday this year, so on December 24<sup>th</sup>**, you will have two opportunities to get into the Christmas spirit. At 10:30am, come out to join in the “no-rehearsal” holiday pageant and to hear Chris play

sprightly tunes by Vince Guaraldi. The UUCB Chamber Choir will also share a special jazzy number that we all know and love. At 9pm that same day, join the choir for their annual Candlelight Service, with UUCB traditional set pieces as well as three new numbers – all either composed or arranged by the great English choral composer John Rutter.

**Finally, on Sunday December 31<sup>st</sup>**, join Fran Manly, Shaun, Michael, and James Burgess for a ceremony in which we will wave goodbye to 2023 and ring in the new year ahead.

## Announcements, Events and Opportunities, Oh My!

### Social Justice Ministry

#### December Share the Plate

Our partner is Family Promise, a unique homeless shelter for families, including men and teen boys, who are searching for permanent housing. FP provides not just shelter, but connections to supportive services, assistance with apartment deposits, and the chance to rebuild confidence. In the past year, Family Promise helped 45 families, six families at a time with a 97% success rate.

Thanks to all of you who took gift tags for our Family Promise family. Wrapped gifts may be returned to the tree in the sanctuary on Dec. 3 or 10. Be sure to attach a gift tag with the recipient's name and tag #. We will make sure we have all the gifts on the 10th and then will deliver them on the 16th. If you'd like to help with either of these tasks we could use you. Contact [mariaLtesta@gmail.com](mailto:mariaLtesta@gmail.com).

#### Decorating the Mitten Tree

We will be decorating the mitten tree on December 3. Please bring warm mittens, hats, scarves that will be donated to Journeys End for new arrivals. We will also accept new and gently used coats of all sizes.



The **UAIM (Universal Access & Inclusion Ministry)** team is planning a workshop in 2024 on [Neurodiversity](#). We would like to have a panel discussion composed of people who identify as being neurodiverse.

If you would like to be on the panel, please contact Ginny Vaughan at [wixsonsg@gmail.com](mailto:wixsonsg@gmail.com).

### Pulpit Flowers



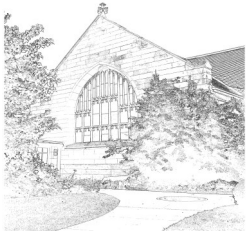
Please consider ordering flowers for the pulpit. Slots for the New Year are completely available, so reserve your desired date now. The cost is \$50. You can take your flowers home, and return the plastic pot to be recycled if you like. Or you can choose to donate the flowers to a local hospital. To place an order, simply email **Sandra Bissontz** at [smp1127@yahoo.com](mailto:smp1127@yahoo.com).



We gather in loving community, inspiring one another,  
to transform ourselves, to create a more just and compassionate world.



The Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo,  
695 Elmwood Ave., Buffalo, New York 14222  
716-885-2136, [www.buffalouu.org](http://www.buffalouu.org)

<p><b>Interim Minister:</b> Rev. Dr. Cathy Harrington <a href="mailto:minister@buffalouu.org">minister@buffalouu.org</a></p>	<p><b>Administrator of Facilities and Communication:</b> Jennifer Cunningham <a href="mailto:office@buffalouu.org">office@buffalouu.org</a></p>	<p><b>Director of Religious Education:</b> Jessica Pond <a href="mailto:jpond@buffalouu.org">jpond@buffalouu.org</a></p>	<p><b>Music Director:</b> Dr. Jessie Downs <a href="mailto:jdowns@buffalouu.org">jdowns@buffalouu.org</a></p>
<p><b>Pastoral Care &amp; Support Network:</b> Ginny Vaughan 716-768-1077 <a href="mailto:wixsonsg@gmail.com">wixsonsg@gmail.com</a></p>	<p><b>Gatekeeper:</b> Sara Kirkland <a href="mailto:office@buffalouu.org">office@buffalouu.org</a></p>	<p><b>Administrator for Finance:</b> Donna Sentz <a href="mailto:donnasentz@buffalouu.org">donnasentz@buffalouu.org</a></p>	<p><b>Organist/ Accompanist:</b> Chris Sierzchula</p>
<p><b>Nursery Care Coordinator:</b> Luna Schlaak</p>		<p><b>Monthly Newsletter</b> (submissions due by the 15th) <a href="mailto:newsletter@buffalouu.org">newsletter@buffalouu.org</a></p> <p><b>Weekly Announcements (E-Blast)</b> (submissions due by NOON Wednesday) <a href="mailto:announcements@buffalouu.org">announcements@buffalouu.org</a></p>	



**A chalice alit since 1831**

A sanctuary on the National Registry of Historic Places

