



The Flaming Chalice

THEOLOGICALLY DIVERSE • RADICALLY INCLUSIVE • JUSTICE CENTERED
Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church | December 2023 Newsletter



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December 3

Epigenetics

We have been trying to make the invisible, visible, the implicit, explicit as we explore what shapes our realities. This Sunday we will explore how epigenetics shape us. Is there such a thing as free will? *Rev. Elizabeth Sollie leads.*

December 10

Revelation Unsealed

Unitarian Universalism today defines itself not by a shared belief in a singular Truth, but by the commitments we make as we accompany each other on our individual paths to truth and meaning. Join guest preacher Karishma Gottfried and learn more about what our shared value that "revelation is unsealed" can mean for us today.

December 17

Article Two

By now most of you are aware that Unitarian Universalists will come together this summer to decide if we are updating our seven principles. Join us to hear the final proposal and to put this decision into context.

Rev. Elizabeth Sollie leads.

Thursday, December 21

Solstice

Join us for our Winter Solstice Gathering on Thursday (December 21) at 7pm! Take a sacred pause to appreciate this longest night and find joy in the coming of longer days ahead. Enjoy community, music, ritual and meditation as we connect with the natural rhythms of the earth.

Rev. Elizabeth Sollie & Darryl Ray lead.

Saturday, December 23

Blue Christmas

This year blue Christmas will be more of a support group than a service. We will gather to share what makes the holidays hard for us as specifically, vaguely or silently as we are comfortable and support one another through this complicated season.

December 24

All Ages Christmas Eve

Join us for an evening of singing, reflection and camaraderie. Service begins at 7:00. There will be no morning service. *Rev. Elizabeth Sollie leads.*

December 31

Fire Ceremony

Rev. Elizabeth Sollie leads.

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From the Minister

Rev. Elizabeth Sollie

You no longer feel like strangers to me. There are still people I have not met properly, but bit by bit you are becoming real to me—people beyond names and faces. People with stories and experiences and wisdom. It has been such an honor to start to get to know you.

The transition teams are deeply into their work now. The Heritage Team has interviewed a great many people. At our next meeting we will begin to tease out the threads. What do your individual experiences have in common? What is spoken and what is hinted at? It will be interesting to take a look. When we have finished looking at the individual experiences, we will be scheduling a whole congregation meeting to fill in a timeline. We will look at the ministers—their strengths and their shortcomings, but we will also delve into your relationship with those ministers—where were you strong partners and what were your shortcomings?



From the Minister

Rev. Elizabeth Sollie (cont.)

What brings those partnerships to life and what shuts them down? We will also look at the major justice undertakings, social highlights, conflicts and so on. Please start thinking about what you think is an important part of the story that should be lifted up. What parts of your story have shaped who you are today? What parts of your stories give you wings and what parts give you cement shoes?

The Present and Future Team is still wrestling with creating a process for this work. They are starting with the future with the notion that we can't analyze the effectiveness of our current work without knowing where we are heading. To begin, the team is trying to create a process to discover which values motivate this congregation and where you hope to be headed. They are wondering what sort of spiritual growth this congregation wants to invest in. They surfaced the wisdom that we are much more likely to find meaningful answers if we do this work with trust and vulnerability which requires that we have strong relationships. They are still working out how to invite you all into this work.

My invitation to you as we work on our heritage, our future and the promises we make to one another is to make it personal. Get out of the abstractions and the "they shoulds" and think about your own inner life. Leave behind the notion that if you have figured out what you don't believe your work here is done. How do you want to grow on your spiritual path? What are you personally willing to do to bring about the beloved community? What promises do you make to your community? How do you want to be transformed by your faith? How do you want wonder and love to crack you wide open?

Light and Hope in Face of the Unknown

A Time of Wonder

–Mileva Saulo Lewis

December is a time to celebrate and honor events from our Judean Christian heritage. Advent which begins on Sunday, 3 December with the lighting of the first of four candles. Those of the Jewish faith honor Hanukkah which begins at sundown on Thursday 7 December and ends the evening of Friday, 15 December. What can we learn from these century old traditions? What can be their meaning for us at this time and in this place?

The term Advent comes from the Latin language, *Adventus*, meaning "coming." The holiday's purpose and meaning are to look ahead to the coming of Christ to Earth, the birth of Jesus. Christ's arrival brought the dawn of a new covenant. This covenant that would be rooted in hope, love, compassion, peace and justice, the very same values that serve as the foundation of our living faith. Advent is a time of preparation for the new– perhaps letting go of the old, so that which is new has room to grow. We will light candles on each of the four Sundays of Advent leading up to, and on Christmas Day. The four candles represent hope, love, peace/justice and joy.



The symbols of Advent were developed in Germany. The Advent wreath first appeared in Germany in 1839. A Lutheran minister working at a mission for children created a wreath out of the wheel of a cart. He placed twenty small red candles on the outer portion of the wheel and four large white candles inside the ring. The red candles were lit on weekdays and the four white candles were lit on Sundays. Eventually, the Advent wreath was created out of evergreens, symbolizing everlasting life in the midst of winter and death as the evergreen is continuously green. The circle reminds us of God's unending love.

Hanukkah, sometimes called The Festival of Lights honors a small band of faithful but poorly armed Jews, led by Judah the Maccabee, who against all odds, defeated one of the mightiest armies on earth when they drove the Greeks from the land, and reclaimed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and rededicated it to the service of God. The Syrian Greeks tried to force the people of Israel to accept Greek culture and beliefs instead of mitzvah observance and belief in God. When they sought to light the Temple's Menorah (the seven-branched candelabrum), they found only a single cruse of olive oil that had escaped contamination by the Greeks. Miraculously, they lit the Menorah and the one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days, until new oil could be prepared under conditions of ritual purity.

This season then is one of hope, wonder, love, and also a time of curiosity and for waiting and listening. I don't know about you, but this is not always easy for me. We as a congregation are using this Interim Time with Rev. Sollie not only to wonder what could be, but also to wait listen. Rather than waiting being passive, consider the concept of "active waiting."

Light and Hope in Face of the Unknown

A Time of Wonder (cont.)

My friend, the Rev. Margaret Chamberlin, helped me to see a new perspective: I quote:

I wonder if waiting is hard, because we tend to think about waiting as something that is passive and helpless and therefore not of value. The theologian Henri Nouwen had another idea about this. He articulated the idea of “active waiting.” Nouwen wrote “If we wait in the conviction that a seed has been planted and that something has already begun, it changes the way we wait.

Active waiting implies being fully present to the moment with the conviction that something is happening where we are and that we want to be present to it. A waiting person is someone who is present to the moment, believing that this moment is the moment.”

How do we wait when there is so much uncertainty and chaos in our world? We wait, listen, and reflect on how we as a spiritual community can grow into doing all that we can to reduce the chaos, to be a healing presence in a hurting world. *What sustains me is a sense, or at least the hope ... that WE are not alone on this pilgrimage, but WE are in the company of friends who will pick us up from time to time, dust us off, and point us in our chosen direction. What sustains me is the conviction that this journey in which WE find ourselves, will bring its own rewards, regardless of the destination, that sacredness is somehow imbedded in the process itself.*

–Adapted from *The Gift of Faith*, by the Rev. Randall Balmer, Professor in Religion, Dartmouth College.



Around the Starr King Hearth

The winds of our time often blow briskly. Whether we feel energized or stressed by the pace (or both), our modern Bay Area life can feel overwhelming. Like a tumbleweed running ahead of the storm, our next commitment often comes over the horizon before we regain our footing from our previous tasks.

As we enter the chilly and dark winter months, I encourage you to listen to the Earth's seasonal rhythm in Winter's inward turn and stillness. It reminds us to let some matters lie fallow, to repair our tools and recharge ourselves, and to dream and plan our next steps on our journeys.

Our sixth Unitarian Universalist source embraces the wisdom of Earth-based spirituality, including the beliefs of Indigenous peoples, European agricultural societies, the pagan Wheel of the Year, the Druid groves, and many others worldwide. Shared elements in these Earth-based spiritualities include connecting to the rhythms in the yearly cycle of seasons, acknowledging the need for collective stewardship, and accepting our finite place in the ongoing circle of life.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the wisdom learned from life's rhythms can be found in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, written some three hundred years before the birth of Jesus. Pete Seeger - a folksinger, peace activist, and Unitarian - set the words of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 to music in the 1950s, including the following phrases:

“To everything, there is a season [...]
A time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, a time to reap that which is planted [...]
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance [...]
A time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak [...]
and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

And so, we come now to Winter. After the last metaphorical harvests and hauls of the year, it is time for us to let the soil rest, mend our fishing nets by the fire, and Kondo our shelves as we “go out with the old and in with the new. “Perhaps you will be inspired to reflect on recent achievements and plan your next goals, to help your family practice more self-care, or to make time to turn inwards with self-compassion to heal and cultivate resilience. The winter season offers us time for repair and renewal ahead of the vibrant rush of spring.

Around the Starr King Hearth

(cont.)

The RE group kept busy having fun in November:

- The class learned about Unitarian Henry David Thoreau and then enjoyed following his example by spending time outside writing in their nature journals.
- We revisited animal homes, observing the monarch caterpillars in the garden, which were aptly named Chubby, Pencil, and Junior.
- Fun was had by all when Liana Klausmeyer visited our class to teach us some improv techniques.
- We discussed hospitality as an essential part of creating a welcoming home and that UUs particularly value the concept of hospitality in our faith home. The kids made table cards for the snack table in the Fellowship Hall to practice hospitality by welcoming all to join us in community.
- The families also enjoyed a special event led by Liz Nelson where the kids traced their hands onto fabric to be added to the Starr King children's handprints quilt.
- We wrapped up the month talking about gratitude and performing skits in the multi-gen service, Stone Soup, a fun reminder that we can enjoy life more when we work together.

Many thanks to the wonderful families and RE friends who make the magic happen. Next, we move into the winter holidays to celebrate the triumph of good, the annual turning of the year, and to await the renewal of light and hope.

-Tanya Webster, DRE



Ongoing Activities

- Masks are optional.
- Eating & drinking are permitted in the Fellowship Hall
- Singing without masks is permitted
- Encourage gathering in all indoor and outdoor settings.

We will continue to provide:

- Virtual worship as an option as well as for meetings
- KN95 mask for your use

Evening Meditation	Every Wednesday 7:00-8:30 pm, on Zoom. Open to all. Visitors welcome. Contact: Diane Meyerson
Board Meeting	First Tuesday of the month, 3:30–5:00 pm on Zoom. Open to all. Contact: Mileva Saulo Lewis
Peace and Justice Action Team	Second Sunday of the month after worship (after a 15-20 minute break) in a hybrid model via Zoom using the same link as the service.
Starr King Singers	Sundays before the service from 9:30-10:00 a.m.
Starr King Choir	Every Monday 7:00-8:00 pm. Contact: Linli Wang at music@starrking.org
Small Group Ministry	Contact: Terry Hunt (hunt.terence@gmail.com) or Mileva Saulo Lewis (milevalewis@comcast.net)
Adult RE	Check our website for upcoming opportunities: https://starrking.org/adult-programs
