

It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year?

Though it's hard for me to believe, December is here. If you turn on your radio or go to the shopping mall, you are undoubtedly starting to hear the classic holiday songs. I recently heard Andy Williams singing "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" on the radio, and I thought to myself... "*Is it?*" Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Solstice, or any combination of these, there is no avoiding the force of "The Holiday Season." It's easy to be cynical about this capitalistic, consumerist season, and it's easy to feel stressed out as well, with all the extra obligations that this time of year brings. But I suppose the song is right in spite of it all. There's a certain magic to this season, in spite of everything.

The biggest holiday celebration of the season for our congregation, traditionally, is Christmas (in the form of a lovely Christmas Eve Candlelight Service). This year is no exception. The only difference this year is that I will not be with you on Christmas Eve. As you know, I serve another congregation as well as this one, and it is "their turn" for me to lead the Christmas Eve service. How I wish I could be two places at once! I will miss you. But I can assure you that you will have a lovely evening, led by Unitarian Universalist ministerial candidate (and a pastor at Bernardston Unitarian) Eric Wasileski. Eric preached here in January 2010, and he will be in the pulpit this coming December 12 as well (see the "worship notes" in this newsletter for Eric's "bio blurb"). Eric is a friend of this congregation, having been moved to explore UU-ism years ago in part because he saw the "Support our troops, bring them home" banner on our church. He feels happy and honored that fate has led him to lead our Christmas Eve service this year.

Though I will not be with you on Christmas Eve, I will certainly be around during this wonderful season – *perhaps* the most wonderful time of the year! I hope that we will have a joyous time together. I want to close with the words of Rev. John Cummins:

"The days have grown short, and the dusk comes early in the afternoon! From time immemorial, people have kindled these days with fire and fed them with beauty, hope, and joy. Let's resolve to keep them loving and leisurely this year, with plenty of friendly letters, with more giving of ourselves, and less giving of things. Let there be – peace, good cheer, and open hearts. Let there be – time for children, for strangers, for the elderly, and for the forgotten. Above all, let there be a spirit of hope and expectancy, a readiness to believe the best of everything."

May it be so! A blessed season to one and all!

Peace,

Lara



CHURCH CALENDAR

Sunday, Dec. 5, 2010

10 a.m. ~ "Life after Shopping: My Pilgrimage to the Mall of America",
with Rev. Lara Hoke

Thursday, Dec. 9, 2010

7:00 p.m. ~ Alliance Meeting, "Who's in Your Back Yard--and Beyond?"
with Bill Byrne, Mass Wildlife
photographer

Sunday, Dec. 12, 2010

10 a.m. ~ "Pendulum", with Mr. Eric Wasileski, guest preacher

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2010

6:30 p. m. ~ Parish Committee Meeting

Sunday Dec. 19, 2010

4 p.m. ~ "An Apocryphal Christmas",
with Rev. Lara Hoke

Friday, Dec. 24, 2010

7:00 p. m. Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, with Mr. Eric Wasileski

Sunday, Dec. 26, 2010

10 a.m. ~ Peace Sunday:
with Joseph Goldstein

Sundays, 9:00 - 9:45 a.m.

Silent meditation in David Memorial

Worship Notes

The **December 5th** service comes to you just in time for the holidays! This past June, the annual Unitarian Universalist General Assembly was held in Minneapolis, MN. Rev. Lara Hoke went, and while she was there – against her better judgment – she decided to

make a pilgrimage to the Mall of America, the largest shopping mall in the USA. What did she find there? What did she learn? Join us on December 5 at 10:00 a.m. and find out! The sermon title is **"Life after Shopping: My Pilgrimage to the Mall of America"**. Debbie Kent will be back to play piano and organ. All are welcome! On Sunday, **December 12** at 10 a.m., our guest preacher tradition continues. Mr. Eric Wasileski will be back in the pulpit. The sermon title is **"Pendulum: A Response to the Religious Right"**. We will consider issues of great import, and how positions on these issues can swing. Eric is a seminarian at Andover Newton Theological School, and he is serving as a pastor of Bernardston Unitarian. He is the Treasurer of Chapter 95 of Veterans for Peace, and is currently doing Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at Baystate Medical Center. He resides in New Salem with his wife and children. Howard Apley will be back to play piano. Please join us! All are welcome!

On Sunday, **December 19**, Rev. Lara Hoke will lead **"An Apocryphal Christmas"** service. Every year, we hear the familiar nativity accounts from the New Testament gospels of Matthew and Luke. But did you know that there are other versions of the story? What can we learn from these apocryphal (or non-canonical) accounts? Join us at 10 a.m.! Debbie Kent will play organ and piano. All are welcome!

Please join us on **December 24** at **7 p.m.** for our **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**. Come and enjoy a Christmas Eve filled with music. Community musicians and vocalists will share their talents, and Rene Lake-Gagliardi will be back to play the organ. We will sing beautiful carols together,

closing with our traditional singing of "Silent Night" by candlelight. Mr. Eric Wasileski (see notes for December 12) will lead the service. Please join us for a lovely and sacred evening. All are welcome!

On Sunday, **December 26**, we will have our third **Peace Sunday** of the year, and it's a special one. The speaker will be Mr. **Joseph Goldstein** of the Insight Meditation Society (IMS). According to the IMS website, Joseph "has been leading insight and lovingkindness meditation retreats worldwide since 1974. He is a cofounder of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, where he is one of the organization's guiding teachers. In 1989, together with several other teachers and students of insight meditation, he helped establish the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. Joseph first became interested in Buddhism as a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand in 1965. Since 1967 he has studied and practiced different forms of Buddhist meditation under eminent teachers from India, Burma and Tibet. He is the author of *A Heart Full of Peace*, *One Dharma: The Emerging Western Buddhism*, *Insight Meditation: The Practice of Freedom*, *The Experience of Insight*, and co-author of *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom* and *Insight Meditation: A Correspondence Course*." Don't miss it! Please join us at 10 a.m. All are welcome!

Notes from the Parish Committee

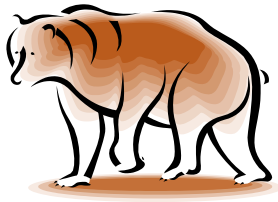
First, a huge thank you to Kay Berry for all her work in organizing the "Attic Treasures and Tea Room." Kay dreams big, and she always manages to put together a group of dedicated people

to make these fundraisers a success. They not only bring money to the church, but more importantly, they help our church to stay a vital part of the larger community. Thank you, Kay! I also want to personally thank Barbara Corey and Carly Clements for spending hours in the kitchen, so we could serve our Tea Room luncheon to a sell-out crowd.

We have begun our important Pledge Drive for the coming year, and this is also the time when we need to ask members to join committees to help the church continue to grow and thrive. Most committees are very flexible in terms of time commitments, and it's so important to have new volunteers join us to bring new ideas and perspectives, and also to give people a chance to take a break from committees on which they have served for years. For the past several years, we have not had a Nominating Committee, so the recruitment task has fallen on the Minister and the Parish Committee, and it has been very difficult for us to fill all the open positions. Please consider volunteering to be on a committee. You can send a note to Jill Berry, our church secretary, or can contact Rev. Hoke or anyone on the Parish Committee if you can help the church by being on a committee next year.

This year, the Lions will have a special Pancake Breakfast and visit from Santa in our church dining room. Bob Hall is in charge of making the pancakes, so we know the meal will be delicious! Kay will be filling the church with her special decorated trees, and our Christmas Eve service will fill our hearts with music. Happy Holidays!

Pam Chevalier,
Parish Committee Secretary



Petersham Branch Alliance

"Who's in Your Back Yard--and Beyond?"

Moose, black bear, bats, eagles--who's there?

On December 9 a special treat for all! Anyone who loves animals and good photography: women, men and children will enjoy this program, so save the date!

Petersham resident and Mass Wildlife photographer Bill Byrne will present a well illustrated program of natural history encounters along Massachusetts wetlands and hillsides. Osprey, eagles, bears, bats, reptiles, goshawk, moose, and much more, as well as some research updates, will be covered. Enjoying wildlife and living with wildlife can sometimes be a challenge. During the presentation, helpful guidelines will be offered with the hope that some of your question may be answered.

The lecture is sponsored by the Petersham Branch Alliance, a women's group, open to all, which has been sponsoring programs to enrich the history, culture, and education of the Petersham area since 1824.

Also on that night, we will draw the winner of the Raffle for Scholarships: Prizes are heating oil, a hand-knitted sweater and a \$50 gift certificate to Picasso's Restaurant. Tickets are available from Alliance members or on the night of Bill Byrne's program.

Anne Perkins



ATTIC TREASURES AND TEA ROOM

Our Attic Treasures and Tea Room was a fun day on November 6, 2010. We got to see old friends that we haven't seen for a while and also got to meet and feed new people.

We had five tables of items for the church to sell as well as a 50/50 raffle and two Barbara Ellis watercolors, which were part of a silent auction. Mary Brunelle, Betty and Gordon Davis, Warren and Dot Johannson, and Kay Berry also set up tables with wonderful 'stuff'. We also sold some older tables, wood folding chairs, metal folding chairs, and old tray stands that were stored in the basement.

Those people helping make this event successful included Norman LaPointe, John, Jen, and Jill Berry, Ann, John, and Annie LePoer, Betty Davis, Penny Blum, Lara Hoke, Lee Ann LaRue, Lia Dorian, Mary Brunelle, Helen and Russ Kennedy, Pam Chevalier, Emily Arnold, Kathy Ballou, Doris Coolidge, Sue Hellen, Arthur and Anne Perkins, and Kay Berry.

The Tea Room was a great success. Pam Chevalier assisted by Barbara Corey, Carly Clements, and Diane and Allison Barnes provided an elegant luncheon with the church china, silver place settings, and lovely flowers on the tables. Soup, tea sandwiches,

assorted teas and coffees, and wonderful desserts were on the menu. Very little food was left. Some people came with their hats from a bygone era and all enjoyed eating their lunch with friends and people they had just met.

Thank you to all who donated time and food.

A very special thank you goes to the Ellen Moriarty family for the Barbara Ellis watercolors. JoAnn LePoer and Tally Lent were the people lucky enough to take the pictures home.

Rexine Barnes won the 50/50 raffle and donated part of the winnings back to the church.

Thank you Rexine.

We made over \$1100 and plan to do another flea market and tea room in the future.

Kay Berry



YOGA WITH LINDA

December 2010

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10 a.m.:

Dec. 2, 7, 9, 14, 16 and 21

NO CLASSES Dec. 23, 28 & 30

\$5 per class

**** Please note:**

**There will be no Wednesday classes
through the fall and winter.**

For more information, contact Linda at:

lckabo@verizon.net

978-434-1598

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES AT REGIONAL UU CHURCHES

All are welcome!

First Parish Church, Ashby – 7 p.m.

Service features a Nativity Pageant and a candlelight circle that closes our evening together.

First Church Unitarian, Athol,

7 p.m. Candlelight Ceremony of Lessons and Carols followed by the Minister's Christmas tea.

First Parish Church Unitarian

Universalist, Fitchburg – 5 p.m.

Several carols, a short homily, a story for the children.

First Church Unitarian Universalist of Leominster – 4 p.m.

Candlelight service with carols and other music. Building of the Crèche with the Children and a short message.

First Congregational Parish, Unitarian, in Petersham – 7 p.m.

Candlelight service featuring carols and special musical performances as well as a short homily.

**Unitarian Universalist Church of
Winchendon – 7 p.m.** Carols, candles, a children's performance, with a short homily.

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS SERVICE

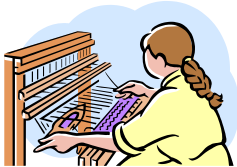
Unitarian Universalist Society of

Gardner – Dec. 26, 6 p.m. – Christmas Evensong, "Candles and Carols."

Free Piano

We need to move out the piano in the Davis Memorial and will give it to anyone willing to move it. It needs some work. Please call Kay Berry at 978-724-6610 if interested.

Thank you.



Petersham Holiday Craft Show

Dec. 11 & 12

10 am to 4 pm

Petersham Town Hall

Care Packages

The Peace Group will continue sending care packages to the service people on a regular basis. Contributions are welcome, as are donations for postage for the packages.

Addresses for the soldiers to whom we are sending packages are available at the Davis Memorial.

There will be baskets for donations in the front entry of the church, and also in the Davis Memorial

New Directory

We are planning to revise and reprint the Church Directory this fall. If any of you have new addresses, or

additions or corrections to be made to the directory, please send them to the church office. There is a printed copy of the current directory available in the church dining room for making changes.

Newsletter

Material for the newsletter may be emailed to the firstparishnt@verizon.net, or can be placed in the wall file outside the Church office. Please make a note stating that the item is for the newsletter, or you can mail your item to: First Congregational Parish, News Team, PO Box 305, Petersham, MA 01366.

Friendly Reminder: Please send in your newsletter items **on or before** the **Monthly Deadline Date, which can be found on the front page of the newsletter.**

Our church newsletter is edited and mailed by volunteers. We are always happy and grateful to receive contributions towards the expenses of paper, printing and mailing, as well as general news and news of families.

Thank You,
The Newsletter Team,
Kay Berry
Don Eaton
Robert Hall
Kathy Ballou ~ Editor

If you would like to receive your newsletter electronically instead of by regular mail, please email us at firstparishnt@verizon.net and let us know.
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