



THE COMMON

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF CASTINE

February 2021

Sundays in February

Soul Matters Theme: Beloved Community

February 7

Guest minister: Rev. Dr. Mellen Kennedy "Rumi: A Poet for Our Times"

Worship Associate: Intern Vanessa Williams

Musician: Ian Brenner-Simpson

February 14

Rev. Margaret Beckman

Worship Associate: Intern Bettina Lehovec

Musician: Colleen Fitzgerald

February 21

Intern Vanessa Williams "Love Like God"

Worship Associate: Margaret Beckman

Musicians: Chris Poulin & Julie Gardner

February 28

Reverend Margaret Beckman

Worship Associate: Intern Vanessa Williams

Musician: Colleen Fitzgerald

Our Mission

To establish and promote an open and welcoming congregation that supports and sustains the spiritual, ethical, intellectual and overall well being of our members while serving our broader communities.

Contact Us

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For questions or comments about *The Common* or to submit items for this newsletter, please contact Jean Lamontanaro at jean.lamontanaro@gmail.com.

Lakeside Reflections, February 2021

A few weeks ago, I was meeting with my Northern New England UU minister colleagues and I mentioned how much I like winter sunlight; the way it is low and comes almost horizontally. Winter light has a softness unlike the high bright sunlight of summer. A few days later, I got this gem of a poem written by Kenneth Patton in my email from one of our Vermont ministers.



“Winter is the candid season, the cold anatomical stripping of the year, the autopsy of summer’s body. Now we know if we love all of life, the framework and the rough carpentry beneath, the decorations and flowers and leaves, the plumbing and the wiring to be seen only when painted plaster is torn from the walls, the master-work beneath life’s masterpiece.”

Kenneth Patton
All Blessedness: A Book of Psalms
 (Meeting House Press, 1975)

Beneath the ice lies the life that lives within the rock formations. Hidden from view for the duration of this season, moss and lichens and grasses and tiny pink and yellow wildflowers await their glorious return in spring. For now, the ice commands our attention. It has its own stark and rugged beauty. It forms in the daytime

warmth of the low sun and the freezing cold nights. The runoff from a winter rain is halted in a still life that captures the sun and reflects it back in unique formations that are here today and will soon be gone forever.

One of the gifts of this winter of our isolation is extended time spent with our natural world. Alone or with a family member or friend, we make our way out of the confines of home where we now go to work and go to school and do our volunteer activities and show up for Sunday zoom church – in addition to all the things that have always made home a warm and loving place. Now, we need to escape. We need to breathe the cold clean air of winter. We need to feel the nip of 24 degree air on our cheeks. We need to reach for our sunglasses because the snow is so bright. We need to walk, or run, or ski, or snowshoe, or take a drive. We slow down our worry and cares and bask in the beauty of creation. We let her majesty and grace restore and replenish our soul. Following the counsel of Wendell Berry, we go into nature for a time and rest.

May your days of worry and stress be calmed by time with nature - apart from all that reminds us that there is indeed cause for concern and work to be done. May you find a way to lie down with the wood drake and come into the peace of the wild things for a time. May winter’s low light fall across your brow and soften the lines forming there. May you find delight and invigoration in your sauntering through the woods or across the field or simply down the street. May you notice the spectacular display of sunrise and sunset on these winter days. May you, for a time, rest in the grace of the world and be free.

Namaste, *Margaret*



The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

—Wendell Berry

From Your Collaborative Ministry Team Intern

Conflict and Caring in Beloved Community,

The Soul Matters small group packet for February begins with a quote from Henri Nouwen, who paraphrased someone else in saying, “Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives.”

Nouwen knew something about community life. A Catholic priest, prolific writer, and beloved spiritual guide, he spent the last ten years of his life living in the L’Arche community in Toronto. This is an intentional community where people with and without intellectual disabilities share life together.

Nouwen served as minister of L’Arche Toronto, learning more about love in those ten years than in the previous four decades of religious formation and service, he said.

The people who lived in L’Arche didn’t care about the carefully constructed façade of a pious man. His impressive list of credentials — Nouwen taught at Yale and Harvard for many years — meant nothing to them. What mattered was how he showed up in his day-to-day interactions.

They held up a mirror, showing him things he might prefer not to see in himself. One morning, on his way to a council meeting, a resident stopped him, wanting to speak.

Preoccupied, Nouwen brushed off the request. Later, the man telephoned.

“He was angry and he said that I preached beautiful theories about the Christian life that I never lived up to, and that I, supposedly a man of

prayer, was selfish and rude.” (Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing*, p. 9)

I can imagine those words were hard to hear. But Nouwen recognized the truth in them. He recognized the gulf between his idealized self and the self that shows up in everyday life.

Often the hardest moments in our relationships are the most important, because they reflect our growing edges. They show us where we need to learn and grow.

This is a form of spiritual practice. Friendship. Parenting. Marriage. Co-housing. All those relationships that call us to practice our values, day after day, with real-life people that we care about.

Congregational life presents the same opportunity. A congregation comprises many people and personalities with differing opinions, goals, strategies, and styles. Many of us find both deep fulfillment *and* frustration in our engagement with the church.

So we get to practice showing up with kindness and forbearance. We practice communicating through our conflicts. We practice putting relationships above the need to be right. We practice compromise, and we practice standing our ground. We practice naming our own truth alongside the truth of others.

Systems theory reminds us that we don’t live in a vacuum. All elements of our communities are connected. We can label someone else the problem, but the likelihood is that we are a part of it, too.

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From Your CMT Intern, Continued

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Nouwen continued his quote this way:
 “Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives. ...That person is always in your community somewhere; in the eyes of others, you might be that person.”

We improve the system as a whole by working on our own part within it. That’s true for the larger community, as well — the state, the nation, the world. There will always be people who push our buttons. Whole swathes of populations we don’t agree with. Yet instead of distancing ourselves, pulling in and closing rank, we can stay curious. Stay connected. And work on our own ability to hear, to speak truth, to love.

It’s not easy. It’s messy. And it’s life.

I’ll end with this quote by the Reverend Amy Zucker Morgenstern, who reminds us that “teachers are everywhere.”

“In every person we meet, especially those who cause us discomfort, we find an opportunity for us to grow, to learn, to go further along the path of transformation that is our purpose in life. Every single one is our teacher. May the next [month] bring you many such moments of meeting that help you become the person you want to be, and may you welcome them with joy.”

With love,
 Bettina

From Your Ministerial Intern

Breathe in Life

January was a monumental month in so in many regards. For many of us, coming at the heels of what has almost been a year with no the Covid-19 pandemic, it is necessary to try to stop and take a breath. But we need a deep breath, not a fast gulping for air breath. But rather, a slow deep breath. We need to breathe.

That is the irony of this past year, we have all been cocooned in isolation, but in doing so we are constantly in a rush. A rush to figure things out, a rush to make the next zoom meeting, a

rush to get kids configured in home or hybrid schooling, a rush to try to outpace whatever next swing life has to throw at us.

In this time of deep winter, I urge you to take a moment to just breathe. Reflect on how much you have come through thus far. Be humbled, be amazed in all you have come through; And breathe. Breathe not just to catch your breath, but breathe for the wonder that is air rushing through your lungs, filling you with life.

Vanessa Williams, 1/30/2021

From the Congregation

Eve Stwertka would like to thank all the kind friends who recently sent her cards and expressions of support. She’s gradually recovering

from a back fracture and pneumonia, and sends her best wishes for an excellent new year to all members of our congregation.

Religious Education

This month the RE children began receiving The Week jr. And not a minute too soon! This magazine will come weekly to each household that participates in RE for the next 12 weeks. It explains current events and explores important issues in a way that informs and allows kids to form their own opinions. I'm looking forward to hearing what the kids have to say. Of course, I continue to write to the kiddos and send corny jokes. Thanks so much for your jokes! They were awful in the best way! Silas especially loved this one:

*What did the shark say when he ate a clownfish?
Tastes funny!*

Thanks Christy!

In an effort to expand my horizons I attended a meeting of the Midcoast RE leaders via Zoom. What a lovely group of women! They were warm and welcoming. Each of them runs their RE program very differently. Ours was not the only one that wasn't using any screen time/Zoom. But some programs are ONLY using Zoom for RE. Each community is different. I look forward to learning from this group.

Finally, I'm excited to begin a book group with Vanessa in February! We are beginning with *Wintering* by Katherine May. I listened to this book on Audible and it was just what I needed. I hope you will join us for a light, reassuring read and a welcoming, stimulating discussion. I hope to see you there!

Warmly,
Jess

March is Women's History Month

Let's celebrate Women Making History in March!

During Sunday morning worship for the month of March, we will recognize and celebrate the ways in which women have been making essential contributions to life in all sorts of times and ways.

YOUR PART of Women's History Month:

Please send me names, pictures, and stories of women who are currently making history. I will use your contributions in various ways depending on what you send me, so please contribute. These women can be already famous, not yet famous or women you know about whose contributions are creating our history right now. Whether it's being a member of the NASA moon space team, a poet, a politician, a human (and all life rights) activist, a teacher, a grandmother, a transwoman breaking through glass ceilings, a researcher in the tropics, or your most awesome friend or family member, send me your thoughts – and a picture of her if you can.

Send your contributions to: minister@uucastine.org and put Women's History in the subject line. Deadline for contributions is **February 26th**. It will come faster than you think so do it NOW... And, Thank You!

