



THE COMMON

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF CASTINE

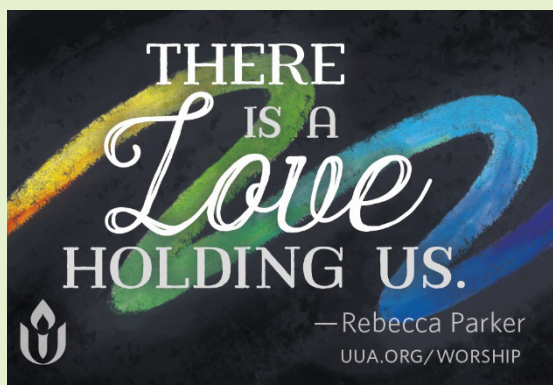
January 2021

Sundays in January 2021

We begin a new year. We cannot know all that lies ahead of us in 2021, but we can know two things. We know that the pandemic that changed our lives in 2020 continues and we are tired and anxious about its presence among us. We can also know that there is a Love holding us that will not let us go and that can give us rest and assurance, even in the presence of Covid-19.

For our Sundays in January, we will turn to the Hebrew scriptures, specifically to the Psalms, for guidance and wisdom. The Psalms are songs and poetry that speak to real human experience and real relationship with the Divine. One pastor characterized praying the Psalms as moving from rage to ecstasy. There is an assurance of Love in the Psalms that transcends the troubles we face.

We will be guided by a worship series created by Dr. Marcia McFee of the Worship Design Studio - "God Is Holding Your Life."



I have adapted this series slightly for our Unitarian Universalist interpretation. Where Christians might see that God is holding our lives, Unitarian Universalists might see that we are held by a universal love or a creative energy. However you experience the ground of being, this series is meant for you as a comfort, an assurance, and a way forward in a year when we may yet face the ravages of disease and its path of suffering. Through all these moments, we are reminded of the words of Rebecca Ann Parker: There Is a Love Holding Us.

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, January 2021



Here we are at the beginning of a new year. For the whole month of December, I read and heard about how we all just couldn't wait to close the door on 2020. I certainly

agree that 2020 had its challenges, most especially the coronavirus we came to call Covid-19. Yet, I hesitate to relegate all of 2020 to the dustbin of horrible times. There were good and wonderful moments for just about everyone in 2020 and we might do well to keep those memories alive alongside the not-so-great aspects of the year just ended.

January is often represented by the Roman god, Janus. Coming as it does at the turning of the year, the face of Janus seems appropriate. In Roman times, Janus was the god of beginnings, gates, transitions, duality, doorways, passages ... and endings. He is usually depicted as having two faces – looking to the past in age and to the future in youth. Janus presided over the beginning and ending of conflict, and hence, war and peace. He had functions pertaining to birth and to journeys and exchange - with travel, trade and commerce.

As the god of both endings and beginnings, I pause to allow his influence to work through me and look backward with clear vision at all that transpired in 2020, including the unexpected benefits of 'staying put' and reaching out through non-touch connections (on-line, on the phone and in the mailbox). We learned again that the most valuable thing in our lives is our relationships and that our relationships can bring

us tremendous joy and, when broken or ended, tremendous grief. We learned that relationships require care and attention, and we had time to provide that care in new and different ways. Many of us saw the end of relationships. People close to us died; some of illness and events that happen every year, and many as the result of Covid-19. The loss of those people in our lives feels extra deep because of the separations we've endured and the inability to memorialize and celebrate their lives by gathering with family and friends. We began new relationships. People were married. Children were born. Siblings found each other – for the first time or again.

Throughout this past year, I have been grateful for the many ways that our congregation has held together through all the ups and downs of our lives. Our Sunday zoom church has been wonderfully attended by our many regular 'year-round' members and by some who are not in Castine this time of year. We've deeply missed a few of our 'regulars' who cannot connect to the internet and zoom and we've kept these folks connected through phone calls and emails and a card in the mail now and then. We have kept up our commitment to No Neighbor Left Behind and our Opportunity Fund partners. We have given, together and individually, to the various town funds to assist people with financial hurdles in our Covid-19 world. Leadership roles are now filled by some members who are in Maine part of the year and who will participate in leadership via internet and zoom when they live elsewhere. Our shared ministry within our congregation and as it extends to our collaborative with Ellsworth and Belfast is strong and promises to be strong and vital as we ease into 2021.

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Lakeside Reflections, Continued

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I look forward, as we all do, to the time when the necessary restrictions on gathering and sharing together are lifted. As so many of us have said, “I want to hug people – lots.” We will hug again and that will be glorious. We will sing together again and that too will be glorious. We will have coffee hour and potluck and joint worship again and that too will be glorious. This year will probably see all these things return to ‘the way things were.’ This year will bring its own gifts and challenges.

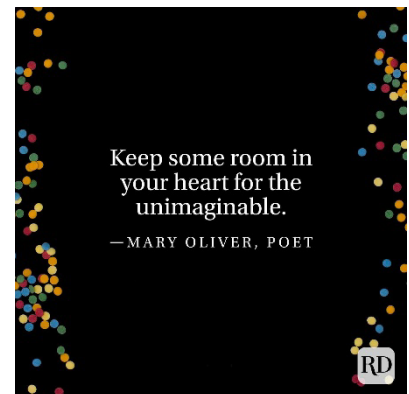
Janus rules over new beginnings, passages, doorways, and the start of journeys. I am looking toward 2021 and all that it will bring. I hope to honor the beauty and the wonder that surrounds us every day. I want to be able to keep a balance of hope and determination when things don’t go as I hoped or planned. A friend of mine said that she cannot make a resolution for 2021 after all

the discord and unexpected turns of 2020, so she had set a goal of maintaining intention and attention. I like that. Intention and attention. What will your intentions be this

year? What do you want to give your special and sustained attention? For me, I think I will take forward what I see looking back – the value and importance of relationships.

Happy New Year. May your year be filled with beauty and wonder and loving relationships.

Namaste, *Margaret*



Pandemic Poem

We miss movies and fine dining
And our zooms have left us pining
For hugs and human touch
From those we love so much.

But what should we take to heart
From the time we’ve been apart?
Even though it’s made us sad,
Are there lessons to be had?

When Covid’s conquered, shall we return
To past behavior, or did we learn
That we took too much for granted,
That everything is slanted

Toward those both rich and white,
That “might” often does make “right”,
That even a pandemic disease
Affects people to different degrees

Depending on wealth and race?
Or is it just too hard to face?
Will we step up or will we hide?
We must very soon decide.

Sue Huseman
Unity, Maine

From Your Collaborative Ministry Team Intern

Dancing the Old Year Goodbye

In a dance retreat I attended recently (over Zoom! Who knew that was possible a year ago?), the instructor asked us to revisit 2020 in dance.

“Focus on your spine,” he directed. “What’s ‘in back’ of you? What has this year been like? What are you carrying that you want to let go?”

He had us start at the end of the year, with the most recent months, and then move backward in time...through the fall...and then the summer...the springtime months of May, April, March...and finally, the first two months of 2020 that now seem so long ago.

I was surprised by the recollections that surfaced as I danced the past year. “I left home in 2020!” was the first one that came. Somehow I hadn’t realized the impact until I danced it in that moment.

I remembered the months of preparation, focused largely on getting my house ready to rent; but also on saying goodbye, to people, to places, to the familiar routines of my life.

My months as your collaborative intern minister have been anything but routine! What they’ve been is rich, full, rewarding. Overwhelming at times (that sense of overwhelm came back as I danced September and October), but always a gift, a once-in-a-lifetime opening into dreams I barely knew I had.

I am very grateful. I can’t imagine a more loving and supportive community than I have found here. In all three of our congregations. In our fabulous ministers (I don’t have words enough to

sing their praises). In the collaborative model that is both a challenge and a joy.

As I danced the big transition from Northwest Arkansas to Maine, I had the sense of a hand behind my back, a warm, supportive force propelling me forward. A current that’s been both guiding and supporting me in this endeavor.

What is that force? Is it the friends and family who support me in my personal life? The people in my home congregation who saw a minister and let me practice on them? The outpouring of support I’ve found here? My years of effort and desire, of preparation and study? My own efficacy, something I’ve struggled to accept? My privilege as an educated white woman with some financial means? The hand of Divine Mystery?

I believe it is all of those things, working in concert to create a life. I am blessed indeed.

As I danced further back in the year, I revisited the strangeness that this pandemic year has been. I remembered that I couldn’t even say goodbye to my dearest friend in the way I wanted to—although she did break her quarantine protocol and hug me at the end.

I remembered two deaths — not apparently Covid related (although with hindsight, we’re not so sure). They were both elderly people with underlying conditions that I helped care for last winter. Walking with them through their dying is a loss I still grieve.

I danced for the many losses of this pandemic year — the lives lost, the livelihoods, the *normalcy*

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From Your CMT Intern, Continued

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we take for granted, all our lives upended like never before. I danced for the collective worry, the isolation, the loneliness, the fear.

And also for the community formed over Zoom, the opportunities created, the relationships deepened, the resilience and grace with which we've gotten through the year.

I danced to create space in which new realities can emerge. A whole new year! Whatever that will bring.

Won't you join me in dancing in the year to come?

Bettina

From Your Ministerial Intern

“The Bad Year” (ver. 2)

This past year—2020, was a lot to take. It was a rollercoaster of emotion as we had our lives upended with Coronavirus, and normalcy left far behind, somewhere in March or April. I want to talk about the fact that the year has been a trauma that we need to come to terms with, we need to let go of any feelings we have about the year, and just see it be as something that has come and gone, because that is what life does. We have long been talking about what a horrible year 2020 has been, and yes it has been traumatic, but labeling it as “bad” makes it seem as if when the ball drops on 2021, everything is going to be resolved, and whatever hurts we had in the previous year are going to be healed. They, unfortunately, are not going to be. We must still come through the feelings we have about what has happened so far and find peace with it.

In crafting a sermon for the beginning of the year, I found several quotes that jumped out at me about letting go—why we do not do it, and why we need to. But the one that really got me, but

that did not fit into my sermon as I have been piecing it together is this:

“No matter how much suffering you went through, you never wanted to let go of those memories.”

—Haruki Murakami

I do not know the author, and I do not know the context, but I feel like the message it gets across is sharp. It is hard to let go of the memories of things that hurt, that tried you, that scarred you. And we keep this baggage close, and memorialize it, not recognizing how much harm it may still be inflicting by us doing this. I wonder how much of the past year we will do this about. 2020 will become a memorialized year of the great pandemic, and it will solidify in our memories as a worst time, that we cannot bare to repeat again.

But what if we let go of the *value judgment* of the year and just recognize how we have grown around the obstacles it posed. Further, doing this may help us brace for the reality that there is no clean, clear end to what we like to think of as

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From Your Ministerial Intern, Continued

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“2020”. Facing the realities of time, and current predicaments letting go of attachment to 2020, and judgment of it, allows us to heal hurt around the memories therein this time.

I lost 2 beloved individuals in 2020. One, a friend, died causally related to the coronavirus; the other, my grandmother, passed in a predicament of ordinary surgery gone wrong. My natural inclination is to curse this year, and want nothing more than it to change, so that the trauma will be left behind in another year, and so that a new day will bring about something new, something radiant, something to resolve these pains. But nothing in 2021 will bring back either my friend or my grandmother, I know this, nor will it necessarily make the pain of their loss any better. I know this deep down, but something in me still just wants that celebration of a new year, a new beginning; particularly to what we all hope is the end to Coronavirus.

As of December, a vaccine has begun, and finally it exists here too in the US, it exists. And how effective it is, and how bad the side effects are is yet to be seen.

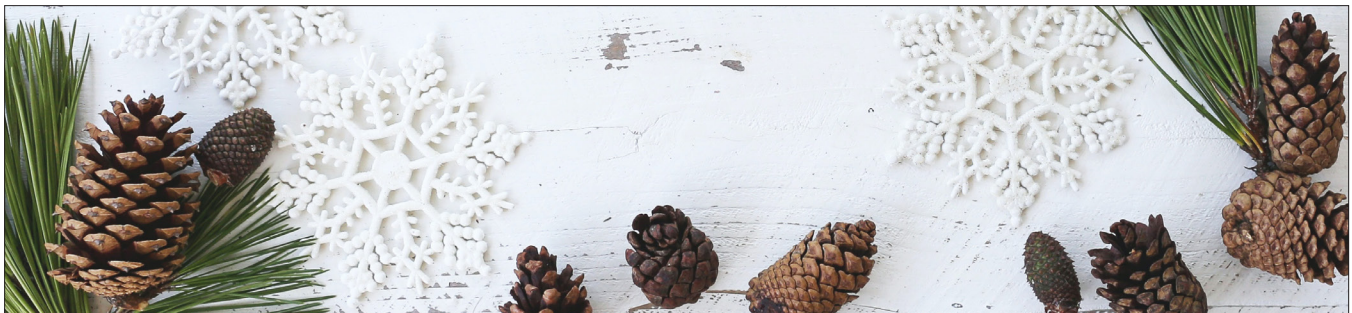
But it exists.

There is hope. Really, there always has been hope. Yes, there is hope related to 2020.

Trying not to see the year as *bad* has made me recognize how much of what I am viewing as bad/good is just an illusion of human definition. It makes me be realistic of my expectations for a new year, and it makes me have hope that things can change (at any time). I will try not to call 2020 a *bad* year. To do so only gives it more power and makes it more painful. Maybe I should see it as the *difficult* time, or a *trying* time. Or perhaps, “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” just like it always is.

I will let go of 2020, in my encapsulation of 365 days as a bad period of my life. For regardless of how difficult it has been, or how painful, it still is 365 days of my life; 365 days that I do not get to repeat. I can reflect on it, I can experience fear, pain, sadness, joy, happiness, et cetera about it, but it is still a piece of my life. This is what the quote I singled out picks up on – no matter the suffering it is a part of our lives, it is a part of us. We do not get to recreate this time. But, I feel we can hold these memories, but not hold attachments to them that will only scar us more. Thus, I will try to remember this time, that we call 2020, I will know the challenges faced, but I will let 2020 go. I will pray for easier tides as we go forward into the future, but I will be aware, from the lessons this time has taught me, and that this time has taught us all.

Vanessa Williams, 12/26/2020



Updates from our Partner Church at Aquino, Negros Oriental, Republic of the Philippines

Aquino has been coping with Covid restrictions and disruptions as all of us. Jane, our Aquino coordinator, must travel over a dubious road, probably on a scooter, to reach Canlaon City to send an email from a café with internet service. I have been asking for details on their situation and for assurance that our money was reaching them. Here are some of her responses.

The schools in and around Aquino opened in October versus June; education however was through distant learning. As laptops and internet service are scarce, the students have been learning through a “modular type.” Parents pick up the modules at the schools, the children do the assignments, then the parents return the package.

Our UU Board and UU Partner Church Committee want our Dollars for Scholars (DFS) program which supports the education of 35 students to continue during this pandemic by the best means possible. If education is disrupted and families are suffering, the money should be utilized to help these families cope, we all agreed.

Usually, the DFS money is spent on tuition (education is not free on this island), school uniforms, and school supplies. The American dollar is still bountiful there. This year the parents or grandparents were given the money to purchase food and clothes for the children. Uniforms of course were not needed.

As for Covid 19 infections, “there are some of our members that got sick but it’s just a simple flu, cough and fever, but it can be cured right away, we take a rest, drink medicine and eat nutritious

food, and it will be okay. Maybe just because of our weather every December, it is so cold, that’s why maybe we got sick. But don’t worry everything will be okay.”

“Every Sunday we are still have our worship but we need to follow social distancing and always wearing face mask. We divide into three and we have a different church schedule every Sunday.”

Uucc also sends \$800 for a feeding program which must include protein enriched meals at least once a week. This was temporarily stopped because of the pandemic. The leadership at Aquino met and suggested “what if we continue this feeding, only their parents can go to the church and get the food for thier (sic) children every Sunday... Even in a simple way we can help them feed thier (sic) empty stomach.” Jane asked, “Is this Okay Elaine?” My reply was yes!

As done in the past, \$100 was sent to provide Christmas gifts for the children. Postage from the USA to the Philippines is excessive; therefore, dollars are sent which converts to nearly four times as much buying power than here. Jane wrote, “we don’t have Christmas party this December because of our protocol no social gathering. Food instead will be purchased, and each family will be given a food bag after the Sunday service.”

Jane ended with,
“Have a merry Christmas everyone and God bless. Thank you so much!”

Elaine Gerard,
Chair of Partner Church Committee

Religious Education

Happy New Year!

The RE Program has been chugging along. In December the kids received a card from me in the shape of a bear. His two arms close together across his chest like a hug! Very cute. I'm happy to say I have now ordered 12 weeks of The Week jr. for each household that doesn't already receive it. This should get us through the winter with lots to talk about. I'll be telling the families about it in their January note from me. One of the most highly anticipated aspects of these cards has been the corny jokes I often include. December's biggest hit was:

What did the snowman say to the other snowman?

Do you smell carrots?

If you know a great groaner please send it to me at jessicarollerson01@gmail.com and I'll share it with the kids. I can't think of a better balm for our souls than some silliness!

Jessica Rollerson



Holiday Meal Boxes

COVID – 19 Needs

Late this summer we (Maine Community Foundation) asked COVID – 19 Emergency Response Fund grantees about the most pressing needs they anticipated for the populations they serve.” (source: MAINE TIES, Fall 2020)

Of the nine pressing needs, FOOD had the most responses at 50%. Next was a very broad category of General Social Service at 29%.

It is gratifying to be able to be a part of community based efforts addressing food insecurity. Of all the wonderful programs underway, UUCC took the lead for Holiday Meal Boxes, with support from churches and individuals of Orland, Castine and Penobscot to Deer Isle and towns in between.

Each box was large enough to provide a number of healthy meals.

For Thanksgiving we delivered 58 boxes with a complete turkey dinner costing \$1,210.64. For Christmas we delivered 62 boxes with a complete ham dinner costing \$1,555.20.

The service support of Trade Winds and their willingness to provide certain items at a loss to fit our budget was appreciated.

Donations more than covered our cost with room for additional contributions available to support the food program of the Castine Area Relief Fund.

Yes, together we can make a difference.

May we all enjoy PEACE with GOODWILL for all in the years ahead.

Gil Tenney