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The Monthly Newsletter for
The First Unitarian Church of Providence
Corner of Benefit and Benevolent Streets
Providence, Rhode Island

D E C E M B E R 2 0 0 8

All-Parish Events

Amnesty International Write-a-thon
Sunday, December 7

Annual Holiday Gift Drive
November 23 through December 14

All-Parish Supper
Friday, December 12

Christmas Eve Services
December 24 at 5:00p and 9:00p

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S T A F F

Rev. James Ishmael Ford, Minister
Cathy Seggel, Director of Religious Education
Posey Kooris, Administrator
Frederick Jodry, Music Director
Walter O. Sotelo, Administrative Assistant
Jaime Durango, Building Manager
Paul Webber, Evening Security
Tadesse Tsega, Sunday Building Manager

N E W S L E T T E R

Posey Kooris, Managing Editor
Susan Fisher, Editor
Carol Pentleton, Designer

Services in December

December 7 A Candle of Hope

10:30a

Rev. James Ishmael Ford

James has long felt that Amnesty International speaks to the deep spiritual hunger of human beings, of how we can reach out to one another and in doing so find our own true depth, meaning, and purpose. James will try to explore what that might mean. We will be welcoming new children into our community through a Child Dedication service.

Young people in preschool and older begin in the Meeting House, then go to their classes.

December 14 Hungering

10:30a

Rev. Dr. Donald C. Anderson

We welcome to our pulpit Donald Anderson, Executive Director of the Rhode Island State Council of Churches. Dr. Anderson will address the issues of hunger, both physical and spiritual. The service will also feature our traditional Common Threads dance.

This morning's offering is dedicated to the Rhode Island Community Food Bank (see page 9).

Young people in preschool and older begin in the Meeting House, then go to their classes.

December 21 A First Unitarian Christmas Pageant

10:30a

Rev. James Ishmael Ford and Cathy Seggel, DRE

In Puritan New England, Christmas was banned as a pagan holiday, thinly Christianized. In the nineteenth century, Unitarians thought that was a good reason to revive the holiday. Join us in what we hope will become a tradition of our congregation, a very Unitarian Universalist celebration of the birth of a human child – the baby Jesus. Cathy and James will guide our “pick-up” pageant, Fred Jodry will make sure the music is spectacular, and there will be special guest appearances.

Young people in preschool and older participate in worship in the Meeting House.

Nursery and Play Circle are open.

December 24 Christmas Eve Services

5:00p

A Service of Carols and Readings

A family-centered service featuring music by YME (our children's choir).

8:45p

Instrumental music for oboe, cello, and organ

9:00p

A Service of Carols and Readings

A reflective service featuring our adult choir, singing selections from Britten's “A Ceremony of Carols” and Kirke Mechem's “Seven Joys of Christmas” for harp and choir.

December 28 That Last Light

10:30a

Rev. James Ishmael Ford

James will reflect on the recently passed Hanukkah celebration, giving particular attention to the miracle of a lamp that has burned beyond all expectations.

No Sunday School classes. Nursery and Play Circle are open.



DEACONS' CORNER

Deacon's Corner

About 30 people attended the first Communion service conducted by Rev. James Ford on November 16. Two more Communion services are scheduled during the spring.

The Deacons contributed a Dining with the Deacons dinner to the Silent Auction on November 8, and response was good. Four seats are still available for this event on January 24, 2009. Tickets are \$50 each. Contact Janet Taylor at 401.751.7969 or jdtaylor39@cox.net.

– Paul Brule and Mary Kollar, *Senior Deacons*
Richard Boober, Nancy Weiss Fried,
Robert O. Jones, Janet Downing Taylor,
Mary El Finger, Judy Bowden,
David Bridgehouse, Russell Gifford

NEWS AND NOTES

Path to Membership

Saturday, January 10, 9:00a–12:00p

The Path to Membership class is for those interested in learning more about Unitarian Universalism – its values, history, and principles – and about First Unitarian and its programs and people. Current members of the congregation are also welcome to attend and meet newcomers.

The Path Class is led by Rev. James Ford, Cathy Seggel, DRE, and hosted by the Deacons, who will provide brunch. There will be an opportunity to join the congregation at the close of the class.

Registration required by Monday, January 5. Childcare is provided for those who reserve by January 5.

Contact: Walter Sotelo at 401.421.7970 or assist@firstunitarianprov.org. Indicate the age(s) of children you will bring.

WHEEL OF LIFE

Deepest condolences to Art, Terry, and Rob Lusignan and their family on the death of their son, Arthur Jason (A. J.) Lusignan, at the age of 28, and to Sean and Anne Connor on the recent death of Sean's mother, Ali Connor Bassett.

Congratulations to Hildy Meyers (sister of Julie Meyers) and her partner, Bev, on their marriage in California, just before the defeat of Proposition 8.

Healing thoughts for a speedy recovery to Paul Bowden, after triple by-pass surgery, and to Ron Lagueux, husband of Denise.



MONKEY MIND

Is it too late to throw in the once-popular “with apologies to Al Gore” when mentioning that Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web? I kind of hope so. Gore’s hyperbole was justly punctured at the time, but he has moved on from what seemed to be a time when he was trying to define himself in his own heart as much as to the American people, and his contributions these days are so substantial, so important, I’m almost embarrassed for mentioning it.

But I really want to hold up Berners-Lee. I find myself thinking about 1990, the last decade of the twentieth century, when Tim Berners-Lee, with his collaborator Robert Cailliau, published the formal proposal that laid out the idea. It was obviously a kairos moment, a moment of fulfillment, because pretty much the whole thing would be up and running within a year.

I love the fact that Berners-Lee would eventually find himself a Unitarian Universalist. And the most interesting thing to me, at least for this reflection, is how this astonishing advance in human communication has come to be called the Web.

The Web. I see the single most important contribution of Unitarian Universalism is how it upholds the spiritual principle of an “interdependent web” of all existence.

I’m moderately confident the term *World Wide Web* was coined by Berners-Lee before he became a UU. Still, whatever the details, I find that in his person there is a common touching point between these two usages of the metaphor “web” that is absolutely delightful. It reflects a deeper observation of how the world really is. The consequences of this observation – spiritually and, I feel, politically – are an endless well of wisdom.

As Denise Levertov sings to us:

Intricate and untraceable
weaving and interweaving,
dark strand with light:

Designed, beyond
All spiderly contrivance,
To link, not to entrap:

Elation, grief, joy, contrition,
entwined;
shaking, changing, forever
forming, transforming:

All praise, all praise to the great
web.

To which I gotta add, amen.
See you in church,



Rev. James Ishmael Ford, Minister
Office Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday,
9:00a–12:00p Appointments are recommended.
min@firstunitarianprov.org

Installation Service for Rev. James Ishmael Ford

Sunday, February 8 at 3:00p

In February, we will install the seventeenth settled minister in our 288-year history. This service marks the formal covenant between James Ford and our congregation. Rev. Laurel Hallman, Senior Minister at the First Unitarian Church of Dallas, will deliver the installation sermon, and our former interim minister, Rev. Diane Miller, will give the Charge to the Congregation. Local and denominational guests will join us for this milestone service of worship, celebration, and mutual commitment



SPIRITUAL
PATHWAYS

Stars in Her Bedroom

Early winter; time for bundling up, celebrating winter holidays, each in her or his own way, and finding ways to rest and go within. This time of year I usually share tips about simplifying winter holidays, ways that parents can teach children what is important. Sometimes, it is actually the young who remind their elders what is of value. In his daily meditations for all seasons, Earth Bound, Brian Nelson shares the following example:

Once upon a time, a two-year-old girl said she saw stars in her bedroom. Her mother went and looked and saw nothing. Was her little girl feverish? Having eye problems? Her father joined them and looked where she pointed. Nothing but empty air.

Or was it empty? When the parents focused closely, they saw dust motes – brilliant white pinpoints, drifting in the beam of sunshine from their daughter’s window. To her young understanding, these were stars!

Children often see such natural phenomena more easily than many of us. We adults tend to use nature as a sounding board, a place to meditate on our lives. But focus more closely and pay heed to the celestial right before your eyes.

This month, when winter holidays abound and the cold, darker days are really here, I will be trying to look through that little girl’s lens to see stars in my dust motes. Please let me know if you see any in yours. On these shorter days, you will also find me holding up possibilities for building a healthy, multigenerational faith community of wholeness. There is power when adults, youth, and children alike are welcomed to contribute to the life and ministry of the congregation.

Warm wishes,

Cathy Seggel, Director of Religious Education
401.421.7970
dre@firstunitarianprov.org
Office Hours: Monday–Friday and Sunday

Jill Cicero, DRE Assistant and Youth Advisor Extraordinaire, Begins a New Adventure!

Jill Cicero came to First Unitarian in 1993 and quickly became a leader in our young adult group. Her positive energy and enthusiastic spirit have been making a difference in our congregation ever since. Jill was a valued volunteer teacher in the preschool and fifth and sixth grades in the Sunday School before becoming a staff member. For more than six years she has been a fabulous, very-part-time Assistant to the DRE. Jill’s creative ideas and dedicated support have enriched our programs and made it possible for resources and events to flourish.

In mid-December, Jill and her partner, Michael Torres, will be heading to the west coast of Mexico to spend the winter months practicing yoga, surfing, fishing, writing, exploring, and, of course, improving their Spanish. Michael, a Miami native, is ready to get back to year-round sun, so the two may end up expatriates or perhaps settle in one of the southern U.S. states in the spring. The youth group has encouraged Jill to look into building a UU fellowship in Mexico. Jill tells us she will miss the church family, especially working closely with me, Posey, and our youth. She will keep us posted on her whereabouts and will certainly visit when she comes to see family and friends.

I cannot begin to measure Jill’s accomplishments in walking collaboratively with me through these past challenging, transitional years in our Spiritual Pathways Program. Thank you, Jill. I wish you every happiness on your new journey.

Shalom havayrah – peace, friend – till we meet again.

Cathy

NEWS AND NOTES

Chapel Themes

In response to parents requesting topics for conversations at home connected to their children’s experience in Sunday Chapel services, here are the planned topics for the message portion of our interactive ritual in the Chapel.

December 7 - Children and youth, preschool and older begin in the Meeting House for the Congregational Child Dedication Ceremony and then return to classrooms with their teachers.

December 14 - Children and youth, preschool and older begin in the Meeting House for our traditional Common Threads Dance, then return to classrooms with their teachers.

December 21 - Intergenerational Christmas Holiday Service in the Meeting House (nursery and toddler rooms are open)

December 28 – No Sunday School (Nursery and Play Circle are open)

January 4 – Welcoming 2009 with our hopes and dreams



HATS OFF!

To the many people who helped with the fall grounds cleanup on October 25.

To our Coffee Hour providers last month: Betty Finn, Tom Getz, Amy Dolan, Judy Bowden, Russell Gifford, Anne Connor, Roberta Groch, Beth Armstrong, Suzanne Craig, Pat Tonnessen, Marilyn Eanet, Barbara Gloria, Mary Frappier, Rachel Morrison, Jacqui Nye, Cathy Orloff, Irene Allen, Susan Harrison, Mary Finger, Fran Bidwell, Melissa Guillet, Mary Kollar, The Village Bank Committee, Nancy Shand, Gerry Spremulli, and all of you who brought something in to surprise us.

To the parents who chaperoned the Youth Group sleepover.

To the readers at the All Soul’s Service: Chelsea Waite, Jesse Cohen, Ava Ginsburg, and Sam Taber.

To Rich Hawkes for drumming at our Chapel services.

All those who hosted the 15 “Cuppas with James” this fall: Ruth Arellana, Suzanne Bowman, Doris and David Bridgehouse, Shirley DiMatteo and Mel Shelley, Marilyn Eanet, Arte Ezikovich, Mary Finger, Mary Frappier, Judy Harf, Helen Haynes, Janet Noble and Al McGinn, Martha R. Sanders and Bill S. Rice, Gerry and Dave Spremulli, and Bill and Susan Twaddell.

MONEY MATTERS

Income and Expenditures Are On Target

We closed the first quarter of the current fiscal year (July–September) with passable results, even though pledge income slipped somewhat from a year ago – from \$66,458 to \$64,803 for the same quarter last year, with the sharpest decline in September.

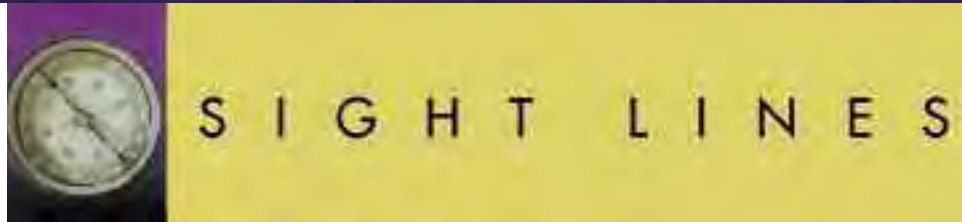
However, in October, despite the increasingly gloomy financial picture nationally, First Unitarian looked better than might have been predicted. Income from pledges was \$24,236, up significantly from \$17,426 in October 2007. The result is that, at the four-month mark, pledge income was 29.9 percent of the total pledge income budgeted for the year (\$297,350), about the same percent as last year.

Operating expenses for the first four months totaled \$181,555, or 30.3 percent of our total annual budget (\$599,294) for the current fiscal year.

— Tony Allen, Treasurer

Year-end Pledge Payments

Don't forget that your contributions to the church (pledge and non-pledge) are tax-deductible. If you haven't already done so, please consider bringing your pledge payments up to date in December to take advantage of the deduction on your tax return. Notices of total contributions to the church for the 2008 calendar year will be mailed in January to everyone who has made a "contribution of record" during the year.



Three things this month:

First, what began on Wall Street is making its way to Hope Street. We have people in our congregation who depend on their retirement savings and are seeing those savings seriously eroded. Others are confronting layoffs. The challenge for our congregation in the days ahead will be to find meaningful ways to respond as this thing rolls through our lives.

Second, there is progress to report on a number fronts in our congregation:

- The PruComm hired Katy Killilea in mid-November to serve as our first Membership Coordinator. She started right in to her work, with the initial charge of focusing like a laser on our program to welcome newcomers on Sundays. See more from Katy elsewhere in this newsletter.
- Our minister, James Ford, has been holding discussions with a number of people in order to get the Lay Ministry program launched. Expect an announcement soon on this.
- Irene Allen has opened our new Atrium Bookstore. The bookstall sells books from the Beacon Press, Skinner House, and other UU-oriented publishers. It's open every Sunday during Coffee Hour. Proceeds support our church. Stop by.
- And, as long as we are talking about money, the UU Idol fundraiser was a big success in November. Our 2008 UU Idol is Ryk McIntyre, who bowled everyone over with his performance poetry. The event raised over \$5,000 in support of the work and the ministries of our congregation.


All of these things reflect goals that our congregation set for itself last spring.

January through April tends to be the time when we chart the course for the next church year. First through our annual canvass and then through our budgeting process, we set the priorities that will shape the new church year.

We are a growing and vibrant congregation. So it's no surprise that there are many ideas among us for new initiatives and new possibilities. But, as somebody once observed, "Things on the Wish List are many. Things on the Priorities List are few." In December, PruComm members and committee chairs will start discussions about priorities for next year. In January, a Congregational Conversation is scheduled. While the specific topic for that all-congregation discussion has yet to be finalized, certainly an open discussion on looking ahead and setting priorities would be a good topic.

Finally, the Nominating Committee has begun work on a slate of church leaders for next year. Positions that will need to be filled include the President Elect, two Prudential Committee positions, two Deacon positions, and three positions on the Nominating Committee. If you are interested or know of someone you think would be particularly well suited to serve, contact either of the co-chairs of the Nominating Committee: Ted Martin (tedmartin@cox.net) or Bill Twaddell (sbtwaddell@verizon.net).

Good things,



Cy O'Neil, President
 pres@firstunitarianprov.org
 401.272.9454



TOGETHER IN FELLOWSHIP

The Holiday All Parish Supper - Friday, December 12

Everyone, young and old and in between, is invited to join us for our monthly potluck suppers.

5:45p Social Hour: Bring hors d'oeuvres to share and wine for your own party if you wish.

6:15p Potluck Dinner: Please bring a dish to share that serves at least 8 people. You can bring a main dish, a vegetable, a salad, or a dessert.

7:45p Program: Program in the Meeting House: "A Child's Christmas in Wales"

Join us for this special holiday celebration featuring the Aurea Ensemble's presentation of "A Child's Christmas in Wales." This beloved story by Dylan Thomas will be narrated by actors Nigel Gore and Chris Turner and will include musical interludes of old English carols and holiday chamber music from the baroque era. Fred Jodry, singer and harpsichordist, Charles and Consuelo Sherba, Catherine Winterstein, and Jing Li on string instruments, and Chris Turner, harmonica, will perform. This will be an enjoyable evening for adults and also for children in elementary through high school.

Heavily discounted tickets for the performance will be available for sale in the Parish House on the evening of December 12 for people who attend the supper.

Childcare for infants and young children will be available for those who sign up in advance: call Jim Estey at 401.351.1748.

Reservations for the Parish Supper are strongly requested: fill out the sign-up form the Meeting House Times on Sundays, see Jim Estey at Coffee Hour, or call the church office at 401.421.7970.

January All-Parish Supper — Friday, January 16

(Please note the date: a week later than usual)

Our first All-Parish Supper of the New Year 2009 look at "The Current Recession and Rhode Island's Economic Future." We are clearly in a recession. Why did it happen and, more importantly, how should we as people and as a nation respond? Our presenter, Dr. Edinaldo Tebaldi, Professor of Economics at Bryant University, will discuss these issues and the impact of the recession on the Rhode Island economy and the prospects for the state's economic future. Professor Tebaldi is a popular lecturer who has an uncanny ability to explain complex economics in understandable, laymen's terms. You won't want to miss this program!

Fellowship News

The Fellowship Committee has been widening the range of opportunities for meaningful connections in our community. We've added a "second-choice" option for the most of our monthly Saturday Social potlucks for adults: in the spring, we'll expand the age range with a dinner for parents and their 9- to 14-year-old children. Fellowship and light refreshments will be offered following each of the Christmas Eve services, and it's likely we'll have a New Year's Eve party (it's being negotiated – please let us know if you're interested).

Our most exciting addition will take place on January 3: up to 20 simultaneous Round-the-Table Dinners for seven to ten adults, offering multiple opportunities for interesting connections and conversations over a cooperative meal. Everyone is invited – and if you've never attended a church social event, we especially encourage you to sign up. Reservation forms will be in The Meeting House Times until December 21, the last day to reserve.

— The Fellowship Committee: Carol Adams, chair; Jim Estey, Mary Frappier, Kate Menard, Janet Noble, Gerry and Dave Spremulli

SATURDAY SOCIALS

These Saturday evening potluck suppers are for adults – newcomers, old-timers, and in-betweeners – who would like to meet new friends in the congregation.

Reservations: Space is limited and reservations are required. To reserve space and select a menu item to bring, call Kate Menard at 401.437.6322.

Saturday, December 6

Host: Mary Frappier
210 Highland Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island
6:00–9:00p

If you would like to host a future Saturday Social potluck dinner, please contact Carol Adams at 401.433.4365 or carol.adams6@cox.net.

WOMEN'S ALLIANCE

**A Conversation with
John Michael Richardson**

Monday, December 1

11:00a **Program:** The multi-talented John Michael Richardson, well known for his jewelry design, will speak to us about that work as well as his experiences at 2nd Story Theatre, both as an actor and as chef at the Downstairs restaurant. Everyone is welcome.

12:00p **Catered luncheon** (\$9, or bring a sandwich)



OUR LARGER FAITH

Upcoming Musical Events at Bell Street Chapel
 Sunday, December 7, 2008. Jesse Holstein, violin, Heath Marlow, cello, and Jeff Louie, piano (from Providence String Quartet) will perform at 3 PM to raise money for the Community MusicWorks Fred Kelley Memorial Scholarship fund. Donations are welcomed. On their program will be the Mendelssohn D-minor and Tchaikovsky A-minor piano trios.

Saturday, December 20, 2008. The Providence String Quartet will perform at 7 PM. Cost is \$15. Proceeds will be split between the PSQ and Bell Street. Program to be determined.
Atrium Bookstore Now Open Every Sunday

NEWS AND NOTES

The Atrium Bookstore is off to a roaring start. The opening on Sunday, November 16, brought lots of interested customers and browsers. The bookstore looks forward to helping First Unitarian friends and members find the perfect gift for the coming holiday season.

The Atrium Bookstore offers books on a variety of topics including daily meditations, Buddhism, Bible studies, inspiration, environmental concerns, poetry, global values, family life and rituals, and stories for children. Suggestions are welcome for specific titles, authors, or general topics; based on our initial success and customer requests, the selection has already been expanded to include more titles directly related to Unitarian Universalism. Preference will be given to titles available through the UUA Bookstore in Boston. All profits go to First Unitarian.

Further information: Irene Allen at iallen112@aol.com

Winter Storm Cancellation

In case of extreme weather, the minister and staff decide if the Sunday worship service will be cancelled. A decision will be made by 7:00a on Sunday morning and conveyed to TV channels 10 and 12, and radio stations WJAR, WHJJ, WPRI, WWBB, WHJY, and WSNE.

If church is open during a storm, no one should make heroic efforts to get to church. Use your best judgment about whether it is safe to drive or come on foot. If the City of Providence announces a ban on street parking, remember that parking will be extremely limited.

CONGREGATIONAL
NEWS AND EVENTS**Greetings from Our New Membership Coordinator – Katy Killilea**

I am so happy to be joining the staff of First Unitarian as Membership Coordinator. I stepped into this is a new, part-time position on November 10.

The responsibilities of this position have been described to me like this: “Develop and implement procedures and practices for welcoming newcomers, assist newcomers toward becoming members, and integrate new members into the active life of the church.” So, what will the work of a Membership Coordinator look like? What you might notice me doing most at first is learning about what’s already happening. I’ll be gathering information from committees, individual volunteers, and the staff – so many people are already passionately involved in making this a welcoming place.

It’s an honor for me to be your very first Membership Coordinator. I’m really enjoying meeting everyone and gathering your insights and ideas, and I look forward to all of the work ahead. Please help me get started by sharing your ideas, either in person or via my brand-spankin’ new email address: mem@firstunitarianprov.org.

— Katy Killilea

Katy and her husband, Joe, and their two young boys came to First Unitarian five years ago. Katy has been active in the church ever since, teaching fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, volunteering with the food pantry, and serving on the Membership Committee.

Youth Building Bridges between Providence and Szentegyhaza

The Transylvania Partnership Committee is currently working to help foster relationships between the youth in our church and those in our partner church in Szentegyhaza, Transylvania. A number of interested young people at First Unitarian have already signed up to be Pen Pals. We will soon be matching them up with counterparts in Transylvania. Exchanges may occur on the Internet or through good old-fashioned letter writing, using snail mail. Either way, our youth will be talking to one another and forging relationships. Who knows what can develop – maybe a life-long friendship with another UU across the world! If your child is interested in having a pen pal, contact Betty Finn at 401.726.1867 or bettyfnn99@yahoo.com.

In the New Year we’ll also begin planning for a second visit to our partner church next summer.

The Transylvania Partnership Committee meets on the second Sunday of each month after the service. All are welcome to participate.

Announcing Our New and Improved Website!

Now there’s a new way to stay informed about First Unitarian – just visit www.firstunitarianprov.org to find out what’s happening each Sunday, to read about news and upcoming events, and to download the latest newsletter and Resource Book. The new website is also a place to learn more about our history, our faith, and our shared ministries. In addition to helpful information about lifespan faith development, worship, and ways to get involved, the new website also includes a section specifically for newcomers – a convenient and appealing place to send folks who might be curious about who we are and what we offer.

The website is definitely better and brighter than ever before and will continue to be kept fresh and relevant with regular updates and enhancements. Check it out!



GROWING IN WISDOM AND SPIRIT

Benevolent Street Zendo: An Ongoing Zen Meditation Group

Every Monday at 7:00p

Boundless Way is an interfaith Zen community, maintaining close connections with the Soto Zen Buddhist Association and the American Zen Teachers Association. (All three of its senior teachers, including our minister, James Ford, are also Unitarian Universalists.) Everyone is welcome. Brief instruction will be available to those who come at 6:45p.

Leaders: Jan Seymour-Ford and James Ford at benevolentstreetzendo@gmail.com

We are a member community of the Boundless Way Zen Sangha. More information: www.boundlesswayzen.org

Knitting Connection

Every Tuesday, 7:00p-9:00p

Join others in the congregation for an evening of knitting/crocheting and conversation. Bring your own project or work on our group project: knitting warm items for immigrant families in Olneyville. Beginners are always welcome!

No registration necessary.

Contact: Julie Meyers at kelmey@cox.net

UU Women

Second Tuesday, December 9, 7:00p

Topic: Fathers and Daughters

"When it comes to little girls, God the father has nothing on father, the god. It's an awesome responsibility." — Frank Pittman

A father influences his daughter in many important ways. Besides being her first hero, he provides security, defines "maleness," and aids in her development of self-esteem and independence. We will examine the ways in which our fathers define who we are.

No registration necessary.

Contact: Terri Smith at 401.941.6865 or essceetee123@yahoo.com

Reimagining Religion

*Second and fourth Tuesdays,
December 9 and 23, at 7:00p*

Reimagining Religion is an ongoing attempt to employ the best recent scholarship in coming to grips with issues raised by radically new developments in the study of religion and thereby achieving a fuller appreciation of what religious literacy entails in the twenty-first century. The group currently discussing the need to enunciate a "non-mythical" world theology, drawing on Lloyd Geering's autobiography, *Wrestling with God*.

No registration necessary.

Contact: Tom Hall at 401.647.2925 or tw2nd@aol.com

Green Sanctuary at First Unitarian

Second Sunday, December 14, 9:30a

A Green Sanctuary congregation lives its commitment to the Earth by creating a sustainable lifestyle for its members as individuals and as a faith community. Sustainable living is about more than material comfort; it is about choosing to live in a way that nurtures life, builds relationships, and rejects material consumption as the sole determinant of happiness. Our program goals include building awareness of societal environmental issues and injustices, motivating community action, and fostering a connection between spiritual practice and environmental consciousness.

No registration necessary.

Contact: Bekah Greenwald at bekah@apeiron.org or 401.521.3446

Spiritual Cinema

No meeting in December

These viewings and discussions of wonderful movies that have only limited distribution will resume on the third Sunday in January. For information about the Spiritual Cinema program, visit www.spiritualcinema.com.

Contact: Marilyn Eanet at 401.433.1299 or meanet@cox.net; or Maureen Johanson at 508.557.1173

UUMeN

Second Sunday, December 14, 7:00p-9:00p

Topic: Defining Ourselves

We are defined by so many external factors in our lives – our professions, our sexual orientation, our politics, our religion . . . But how do we want to be defined? How do we describe ourselves to others? How do others see us and then define us? This discussion will offer each of us an opportunity to share and to reconsider our self-definitions. All interested men are welcome.

No registration necessary.

December facilitator: Lenny Bento
401.467.7753

Gaia's Hearth

Gaia's Hearth was formed to create a harmonious spiritual environment for nature-based traditions to worship together. There are a wide variety of paths and traditions within Paganism. We welcome people of all paths to join us.

Cornerstones of Wicca

Thursdays, December 4 and 18, 7:00p-8:30p

This ongoing class offers instruction in the basic tenets of Wicca as well as the practical techniques of magical work for an intensive, homework-oriented experience. Our members come from varied magical backgrounds and experiences.

Registration requested.

Leader/contact: Diane Donnelly
at dianednnly@yahoo.com

Sylvan Circle

Second Sunday, December 14, 12:30p-1:30p

At this family-friendly gathering, we all share, learn, and teach each other as we pass around a talking stick and explore all types of traditions. Each meeting starts with the Celtic Tree of the month (December's tree: the elder) and then "branch out" to explore and honor each other's paths. Children are welcome to participate, as sometimes they are the best teachers.

No registration necessary.

Leader/contact: Arte Ezikovich nimuix@cox.net

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Ushers Are Always Needed!

Ushering on a Sunday morning is a wonderful way to get involved, meet people, and be part of our worship service. Ushers greet people as they arrive for the service, help them with questions, and take the offering from the congregation. To find out how you can sign up, contact Michael Currier at 617.680.6083 or mpcurrier@gmail.com.

Community Food Share Food Pantry

Our monthly food pantry serves needy people in the Providence area. Each third Monday afternoon, we set up our "grocery store" in the Atrium, help clients select food items, and clean up afterwards. Our next distribution day is Monday, December 17. To get involved, contact Elesá Amand at 401.253.9602 or Sara Slate at 401.435.2039.

Coffee Hour Bakers Co-op

Coffee Hour is a cooperative effort. Each Sunday we need 6 to 8 people to bake or buy goodies to keep up with the ravenous crowd. Janet Downing Taylor is signing up goodies providers for December and December – look for her in the first parlor during Coffee Hour.

Habitat for Humanity Work Group

Our Habitat Work Group volunteers once a month with the Providence Habitat chapter. Volunteers of all skill levels are welcome – the only requirements are a willingness and ability to do physical work, and minimum age of 16. Our next work day is December 15. Sign-up is required as space on each month's crew is limited. Contact Peter Van Erp at 401.351.4881 or petervanerp@cox.net.



Annual Amnesty International Write-a-thon

Sunday, December 7, 1:00p–5:00p in the Parish House

Picture a chain of flaming torches stretching across the United States and the whole world. These torches of human freedom began from a matchbox that was tossed into a prison cell during the darkest days of World War II. On the matchbox was written one word, coraggio (courage); the match it contained lit the candle of hope, the symbol of Amnesty International: a single candle, surrounded by barbed wire, burning with a tiny flame.



In lighting our own Candle of Hope on Sunday, December 7, Providence will join hundreds of other communities worldwide in celebrating International Human Rights Day. This year, we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the world's first human rights treaty, adopted by the UN in December 1948.

Our guest speakers this year are Grace Akallo, a former girl soldier from Uganda, and Mohamed el-Jahmi, who is campaigning tirelessly on behalf of his 67-year-old brother, Fathi el-Jahmi, a prisoner of conscience in solitary confinement in Libya.

We will provide all the materials for you to write appeals on behalf of Fathi and other prisoners of conscience in other countries. Our appeal works: prisoners have been freed because of our letters. Refreshments and prizes make this event festive and fun, as well as deeply meaningful. This event is suitable for young people and families.

Co-sponsored by the World Affairs Committee and the Providence chapter of Amnesty International.

Knitting Connection Reaches Out to Olneyville Latino Immigrant Families



Every Tuesday night for the last three years, a group of knitters has been meeting at the church to spend a few hours together knitting and talking. Each year, we have selected a group project to work on (although people are free to work on their own projects as well). Past projects have included knitting afghans for Katrina victims; making hats, mittens, and scarves for our own "Mitten Tree" outside our church for anyone to take during the cold winter months; and prayer/peace shawls for women from the Middle East.

We recently selected our project for this year: we will be knitting warm items (scarves, hats, mittens, sweaters, baby blankets) for Latino immigrant families in Olneyville. Our connection is through the nonprofit organization English for Action, which teaches English language, leadership development, and community-building classes to promote social and economic justice (information at EnglishforAction.org). Olneyville is the lowest-income neighborhood in Providence, so these families will appreciate our efforts. In this time when immigrants hear and feel so much negativity, it will be great to be able to show them our support.

Anyone can help in this project; you can donate money for yarn, make items on your own time, or join us in the knitting group on Tuesday evenings from 7:00 to 9:00p. We have basic knitting patterns to share or you can use your own patterns.

For more information: contact Julie Meyers at kelmey@cox.net or 401.725.4611



GETTING INVOLVED



Making First Unitarian a "Welcoming Congregation"

The Unitarian Universalist Association grants Welcoming Congregation status to UU churches that are committed to creating a safe and welcoming spiritual community for bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender (BGLT) people. Most First Unitarian members and friends would agree that we are already open and welcoming. Why do we need to jump through the UUA's hoops to make it official?

By formally becoming a Welcoming Congregation, First Unitarian shows the Providence community that we committed to justice and equality for all. It gives us the moral authority to take stands on legal issues that affect BGLT people, including marriage equality. It shows the world we stand up on issues of oppression in Rhode Island. It gives us credibility as we reach out to the larger community and welcome new members.

A Welcoming Congregation Committee has formed to work toward earning this status from the UUA as part of our social justice witness in the Providence community. Are you interested in joining this project? There are many ways to participate!

For more information, call or email:

Brian Paradis at 617.827.2335 or briananddeacon@comcast.net

Michael Currier at 617.680.6083 or mpcurrier@gmail.com

Jan Seymour-Ford at 401.305.5361 or seymourford@gmail.com

December 14 Sunday Offering Will Benefit the RI Community Food Bank

Eight years ago, a committee met to explore the idea of a food pantry at First Unitarian Church and chose at that time to become a member of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank (RICFB). Today, First Unitarian's Community Food Share Pantry is part of the Food Bank's network of over 300 member agencies that include food pantries, soup kitchens, group homes, meal sites, and many other human service providers.

We are proud to be affiliated with the RICFB. During these difficult economic times, the RICFB needs even more revenue to help our neighbors in need. The Community Food Share Committee has chosen the Rhode Island Community Food Bank to receive the offering from the church service on December 14.

First Unitarian's food pantry has grown from serving a handful of households back in 2000 to currently serving between 75 and 150 households on the third Monday of every month. An average distribution involves 1,500 to 3,000 pounds of canned and dried goods, juice, fresh produce, bread, and toiletries. Each household leaves with multiple bags containing about three to four days worth of groceries.

From the beginning, the Community Food Share Pantry has been supported financially by our founder and benefactor, Dino Germani. When he died, in 2005, he left a trust to ensure that the Community Food Share Pantry, as well as our relationship with the RI Community Food Bank, would continue.

To sign up to help or get more information, contact either Elesa Amand at 401.253.9602 or Sara Slate at 401.435.2039.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Printer Cartridge Recycling Program

Recycle your printer cartridges – and help out First Unitarian! Just put your empty cartridges in the collection box in the Atrium – the church receives cash for the empty cartridges, which are recycled into new, compatible ones. You can buy these remanufactured cartridges at up to 80% savings at www.inksmile.com. Contact Posey Kooris at 401.421.7970 or admin@firstunitarianprov.org.

Support Camp Street Ministries

If you shop at Eastside Marketplace, you can donate your receipts to help Camp Street Ministries in Providence. The Women's Alliance provides a box in the Atrium where you can leave your receipts, which are collected periodically and taken to Camp Street. Camp Street receives, from Eastside Marketplace, 1 percent of the total of the donated receipts to support their programming.

NEWS AND NOTES

Darfur Relief Fund-Raiser a Success

Thank you to the many members and friends of the congregation who contributed so generously to our Darfur Relief fund-raiser on November 14. We raised more than \$2,000! The money is being sent to support the fine work of Doctors Without Borders in Sudan.

Special thanks to the people who planned and prepared the delicious African dinner for the Parish Supper before the program. We are especially grateful to Nancy Weiss-Fried and Judy Bowden who headed the event, and their team of food preparers: Nan Godet, Dianne Mailloux, Janet Noble, and Rebecca Alberg.



Women’s Alliance Holiday Sale

Every Sunday before Christmas

The Women’s Alliance will be selling their homemade hot chocolate mix, spiced nuts, and honey – and don’t forget their Fair Trade Coffee – all make great holiday gifts. Look for their table in the Atrium during Coffee Hour. Proceeds go to Alliance outreach programs.

Junior High Offers UUSC Holiday Cards

Every Sunday before Christmas

Our seventh/eighth-grade class will be selling beautiful greeting cards from the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee at the RE table in the Atrium during Coffee Hour. Cards will be available each Sunday until December 21 or until all the cards are sold. Proceeds benefit the social justice efforts of the UUSC.

Greening the Holidays with Green Sanctuary

Sundays, December 6 and 13, 12:15p–1:15p

Looking for new spiritual pathways to celebrate this holiday season? First Unitarian’s Green Sanctuary group can help you bring meaning and a sense of connection back to your holiday experience. On Sundays in December, join Green Sanctuary and a series of special presenters to explore holiday preparations, gift giving, and food preparation that reduce your eco-footprint. Families are most welcome.

Registration is required.

Contact: Bekah Greenwald at

bekah@apeiron.org or call 401.338.4126

Opportunities to Buy Gifts with a UU Flare

The Church of the Larger Fellowship Store has a wide variety of chalice pendants perfect for the holidays to give to family members or to thank staff and volunteers. CLF also has note and holiday cards. Purchases from the CLF Shop allow the CLF to support small congregations with worship and RE resources. Until January 2009, the CLF will give a 20% discount when people mention their district by name. Go to: www.clfuu.org and select “CLF Shop.”

A Church of the Younger Fellowship membership can keep young adults who are away from home at college, military, or volunteer service programs connected with their UU faith. Information about CYF and membership at <http://www.uucyf.org/>



Sharing Seasonal Joy with Our Neighbors – Our Annual Gift Drive

November 23 to December 14

The Annual Gift Drive is one way our congregation reaches out to help families in the Rhode Island community. Gifts will be distributed through the International Institute Rhode Island (IIRI) and Camp Street Ministries, both based in Providence. In keeping with First Unitarian tradition, our Senior High Youth Group and their advisors will facilitate the project.

Recipient’s names can be picked up in the Atrium during Coffee Hour on Sunday mornings from November 23 through December 7. All gifts must be brought in by December 14 for delivery to the agencies in time for their holiday parties and breaks.

Gift cards are most appreciated. As Keith Cooper, Refugee Skills Coordinator at the IIRI, says, “Since refugees’ needs are so basic, a gift card allows them to buy their own winter clothes (gloves, hats, socks, long underwear) or other essentials and avoids leaving them with gifts that are inappropriate for either their culture, education level, or circumstances. I know gift cards may not be as exciting to give as other things, but they make a big difference in people’s lives, as we see first hand!”

Since most of this population depends on public transportation, please purchase gift cards to stores such as K-Mart, Walmart, Payless, Price Rite, or Ocean State Job Lot. Fancy envelopes and gift bags are not necessary; however, feel free to insert gift cards in personalized holiday cards.

Baking for the December Food Share Pantry

Sunday, December 14

The First Unitarian Community Food Share Pantry wants to provide our client families with homemade quick breads (pumpkin, apple, cinnamon, etc.) on the December 15 distribution day. Classes in our Sunday school will be baking loaves with their teachers over the next few weeks. And your contribution will be most appreciated! Simply bake and wrap (in plastic wrap or baggies) small individual loaves and drop them off at the Food Pantry table in the Atrium during Coffee Hour on Sunday, December 14.

Christmas Memorial Flowers

Flowers may be ordered by filling in this form and returning it to the Church Office, One Benevolent Street, Providence, RI 02906, by Sunday, December 14, 2008.

In Memory of (please print first and last name of each person)

Given by _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Please make check payable to First Unitarian Church and indicate that the donation is for Christmas memorial flowers. Do NOT put completed forms in the Sunday collection. Suggested donation is \$20.00 minimum for each name.

THIS MONTH @ FIRST UNITARIAN

December 2008

"Let him who would enjoy a good future waste none of his present." — Roger Babson

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<u>1</u> Women's Alliance 11:00a Benevolent Street Zendo 7:00p Nominating Committee 7:00p	<u>2</u> Knitters 7:00p	<u>3</u> Prudential Committee 6:00p	<u>4</u> Deacons 6:00p Wicca 7:00p Stewardship Committee 7:00p	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u> Saturday Social Supper
	<u>7</u> Sunday Service 10:30a Teacher Lunch 12:00p Green Sanctuary 12:15p Gaia's Hearth 12:15p Write-a-thon 1:00-5:00p	<u>8</u> Religious Education Committee 6:00p Benevolent Street Zendo 7:00p	<u>9</u> Re-imagining Religion 7:00p UU Women 7:00p Knitters 7:00p	<u>10</u> Worship Committee 6:30p	<u>11</u> Stewardship Committee 7:00p	<u>12</u> Parish Supper 5:45p
<u>14</u> Green Sanctuary 9:30a Sunday Service 10:30a Transylvania 12:00p Green Sanctuary 12:15p Sylvan Circle 12:30p UU Men 7:00p	<u>15</u> Food Pantry 4:00p Benevolent Street Zendo 7:00p	<u>16</u> Knitters 7:00p	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u> Wicca 7:00p	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>21</u> Sunday Service 10:30a Gaia's Hearth Solstice 12:15p	<u>22</u> Benevolent Street Zendo 7:00p	<u>23</u> Executive Committee 7:00p Knitters 7:00p Re-imagining Religion 7:00p	<u>24</u> CHRISTMAS EVE Family Centered Service 5:00p Instrumental Music 8:45p Service of Carols and Readings 9:00p	<u>25</u> CHRISTMAS DAY	<u>26</u> Church Office Closed	<u>27</u>
<u>28</u> Sunday Service 10:30a No Church School Nursery/Playschool open	<u>29</u> Church Office Closed Benevolent Street Zendo 7:00p	<u>30</u> Church Office Closed Knitters 7:00p	<u>31</u> NEW YEARS EVE			

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UU Got Talent? You Bet!!

On November 8, *UU Got Talent?* definitely put the “fun” back in fund-raising! The event netted \$5,400 for the work of the church.

In the afternoon, 85 people enjoyed the Youth Talentpalooza, featuring performances by Amy Alberg, L. J. Bento, Rachel Carson, Rosemary Dean, Crystal Evans, Lily Ginsberg, Alex Hinton, Nathan Schneider, Sam Taber, and Abby Wilhelm. Special recognition and hearty thanks to Judy Bowden for her outstanding commitment to making this event a success.

The evening event began with a silent auction offering 40 items ranging from store and restaurant gift certificates to theater passes to weekend vacation retreats. As bidders browsed and mingled, they were treated to delicious hors d'oeuvres prepared by Nancy Weiss-Fried and passed by a group of gracious volunteers.

The highlight of the evening was the UU Idol talent competition, hosted by the ridiculously humorous and insightful MC's, Brian Paradis and Michael Currier. Participants were Strong Wheelhouse Quartet (David and June House, Stew and Beth Armstrong, Jackie and Phip Wheelock); Martin Lazzareschi, instrumental guitar; Joe Grady, vocals with acoustic guitar; Ryk McIntyre, dramatic poetry reading; Michael Dawkins, piano solo (first runner-up); Neil Bartholomew, oboe and vocal jazz standards; Brad Hyson, acoustic guitar-original songs; Rod Luther, piano jazz standards (second runner-up); and Barbara Slater, vocals. (Steve McCloy was unable to perform due to illness.) The audience voted – at a dollar a vote – for their favorites.

And our UU Idol is . . . Ryk McIntyre!

