

THE WINCHENDON UNITARIAN

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PASTOR INANNA ARTHEN, M.DIV, MINISTER

Church Telephone 978-297-0554

DECEMBER 2016

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE 11:00 A.M.

PO Box 218, Winchendon, MA 01475

**This is the Church of the Open Mind
This is the Church of the Helping Hands**

**This is the Church of the Loving Heart
This is the Church of the Caring Community**

Calendar of Church Events

Sunday, December 4

- 11:00 am - Sunday Worship with Pastor Inanna Arthen - "The Advent"
- 11:00 am - "Beginnings" RE Class
- 11:30 am - "Questings" RE Class

Monday, December 5

- 7:45 pm - AA Meeting

Thursday, December 8

- 5:30 pm - Our Neighbors Kitchen serves Lasagna

Saturday, December 10

- 4:00 pm - Holiday Open House, Tree Lighting and Carol Singing

Sunday, December 11

- 11:00 am - Sunday Worship - "Compassion"
- 11:00 am - "Beginnings" RE Class
- 11:30 am - "Questings" RE Class

Monday, December 12

- 7:45 pm - AA Meeting

Sunday, December 18

- 11:00 am - Sunday Worship with Pastor Inanna Arthen - "Winter Solstice"
- 11:00 am - RE classes "dress rehearsal" for Christmas Eve upstairs
- 12:00 pm - Governing Board meeting in the Parish Hall. All are welcome.

Monday, December 19

- 7:45 pm - AA Meeting

Thursday, December 22

- 5:30 pm - Our Neighbors Kitchen serves Beef Burgundy Christmas Dinner

Saturday, December 24

- 7:00 pm - Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Sunday, December 25

- Merry Christmas! No regular service this morning.

Monday, December 26

- 7:45 pm - AA Meeting

Sunday, January 1

- 11:00 am - Sunday Worship - Fire Communion Service (Intergenerational)

Monday, January 2

- 7:45 pm - AA Meeting

Sunday, January 8

- 11:00 am - Sunday Worship with Pastor Inanna Arthen
- 11:00 am - "Beginnings" RE Class
- 11:30 am - "Questings" RE Class

Monday, January 9

- 7:45 pm - AA Meeting

From Your Minister

As I write this, we only have 24 shopping days before Christmas—which is more than we used to have before Massachusetts repealed the Blue Laws. I'm looking forward to the Solstice, which I can hardly believe is only three weeks away. Where does the time go? The weather has been rainy and chilly, but so far we've only seen an inch of snow—down here. Mount Monadnock is already snow-capped.

We've had a busy month at UUCW, although slightly less busy for Our Neighbor's Kitchen. We served our traditional holiday turkey feast to a full hall of people on November 10, and it was wonderful to see the tables crowded and many familiar faces attending. By popular vote, we did not hold a dinner on Thanksgiving Day,

and we hope you all had a great holiday with your families and friends. We're back to doing both dinners in December; see below for details.

On Sunday, November 6 we shared a Chalice Circle service on the theme of "Life's Compasses." On November 13, I led a service that included some discussion time as a way of processing the results of the election: "Where Do We Go From Here?" On November 20, Dave Faucher led a Chalice Circle service on "The Absurdity of Certainty," in which we shared some thoughts about whether we can be certain of the outcome of things that happen. On November 27, I led a service for Thanksgiving weekend on the theme of "The Hidden Power of Gratitude."

On "Black Friday," November 25, we held our annual Toy Drive and Open House. We decorated the sanctuary and parish hall for the holidays and accepted toy donations, which were delivered to the Fire Department for distribution to families in need. Santa Claus put in a visit, waving to cars passing by, whose drivers cheerfully honked their horns and waved back. Thanks to all the generous people who donated toys—you'll brighten a lot of Christmas mornings.

Unitarian Universalist Church of Winchendon is now officially recognized as a Welcoming Congregation by the UUA. We'll be putting up a rainbow flag soon, and we want to get the word out that we're a friendly and safe space for all LGBTQ, QUILTBAG, and trans* persons in and around Winchendon. We always have been, of course, but now it's official! Please feel free to talk to me if you have any questions. I would like to host a post-election support and activism group at the church if there is interest in having one. We know that there are many challenges ahead. Please contact me if you'd like to participate in such a group.

I had a lot to feel thankful for this Thanksgiving weekend—not least of which is the amazing kindness of ordinary people.

I moved to Winchendon from Pepperell on July 28. But my happiness at achieving this years-long goal was marred by the fact that I arrived here missing something. I'd taken in my dad's very shy cat, Charlie, when my dad passed away in October, 2015. Dad was devoted to Charlie—and vice versa—and I promised Dad that Charlie would always have a good home with me. Charlie was a "one person cat" and after nine and half months was just starting to warm up to me. He was also used to being outside most of the time, which I didn't allow. At some point in the involved process

of wrestling a recalcitrant refrigerator out of the house and into a POD unit, Charlie managed to escape.

For weeks after that, I only heard from a couple of people who spotted him, and I saw him once—he ran away from me. But I finally was encouraged to put some flyers around and talk to my former neighbors. That was when I learned some things—and not just about Charlie.

I lived in Pepperell for 27 years, but I never got to know most of my neighbors. But now I was getting calls and information from people I'd rarely or never talked to. Charlie, it turned out, never ventured more than a hundred yards away from my old house. (The new buyer was extensively renovating it, and maybe Charlie thought I would eventually come back.) He was hanging out on the street behind my house, which is why my closest neighbors hadn't seen him much. One neighbor said Charlie was often snoozing or hunting in his many sheds. Another one said Charlie showed up to eat the food they put out for a feral cat. Several people told me I could park in their driveways any time I came down to look for Charlie.

Finally, neighbors just one door down from my old house called me to say Charlie was settling in at their place and eating there every day. That meant we had a chance of trapping him. He wouldn't let anyone, including me, near him although he'd sit and listen while I talked to him. It took more than a week, but on "Black Friday" we managed to trap him. My neighbor refused to accept anything more in return for her help than my copious thanks.

I'm overjoyed to have Charlie home safe—and in very good condition, which says something about how much food and shelter he was finding around the neighborhood. Mr. Wild'n'Free must have been getting lonely, because it only took him a day or two to calm down and start sleeping on my lap. (He still hisses at the trap.) He rejoins my three rescue kitties and another shy cat I took in for an older person who passed away, who also took months to warm up to me but finally did. I'm running a kitty retirement home.

But all of this has given me cause for a lot of humble reflection about the unexpected kindness of other people—and how common it really is.

We're often cynical about human nature. Before the election, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks wrote, "Moral capital is the set of shared habits, norms, institutions and values that make common life possible. Left to our own, we human beings have an impressive capacity for selfishness. Unadorned, the struggle for

power has a tendency to become barbaric.” I’ve read many expressions of that point of view. But it doesn’t square with a few basic facts, starting with the fact that we wouldn’t have a civilized society of any kind if it had to be laboriously enforced on human beings (every day, everywhere) from outside authorities. People have natural tendencies toward empathy, community, altruism and nurturing—studies with infants demonstrate this. People can lose those tendencies, but that makes them broken human beings, and it’s the broken state, not the humane one, which is abnormal. We devour upsetting and negative news, and disregard positive stories of courage, charity and acceptance. But this is because the upsetting and negative commands our attention with its abnormality; the positive, we take for granted, precisely because it is so much more common. The most cynical I would be is to say that as social mammals, we’re born hard-wired to create social networks, cooperate, and care for the young and helpless. We can’t stop ourselves, it’s an instinct.

But why is that a bad thing? We’re good because it’s in our DNA. We’re good until something makes us otherwise. And we *always* have a choice.

One of those choices is to increase the amount of goodness and kindness in the world, and place more value on the kindness of others by passing on those stories. The more abnormal, and deviant, and unacceptable we make cruelty and hatred appear, the less

likely we are to tolerate it, allow it to escalate, or fail to prevent it. After all, when we speak of “the rebirth of light from the darkness,” what brighter light can we mean than the fiery, passionate light of pure love that burns in our hearts? Isn’t that the *true* “reason for the season?”

To all of you, I wish a Happy Holidays, whatever you celebrate, with all my heart.

Pastor Inanna Arthen

Our Neighbors Kitchen

We have two delicious dinners planned for December!

On Thursday, December 8, we’ll be serving Lasagna with meat sauce, salad and dessert, cooked by Pastor Inanna Arthen and assistants.

On Thursday, December 22, we’ll pull out all the stops for our annual Christmas Dinner of Beef Burgundy (or *Boeuf Bourguignon* to the French!), side dishes and dessert, all prepared by our Chef extraordinaire Dave Faucher and assistants.

Come enjoy these hearty meals guaranteed to vanquish the early winter chill and raise your holiday spirits! We even have a decorated tree down in the hall.

Dinner is served at 5:30 p.m. We can always use more volunteers! If you’d like to help with set-up, come



WOW! Here we are sitting at the end of the calendar year and I can’t imagine how the time has simply flown past us! In the Pine Room, the RE kids and I have been busy preparing for our Christmas eve play. Parts have been assigned, practices have begun, but still there is time for singing, and crafting and making our space one of shared experiences. We talk about our lives, we celebrate one another’s joys, and support each other through sorrows. As Unitarian Universalists, we believe that taking care of each other is an important part of our faith journey. We show that in class, and we show it when we’re living our lives outside of church too.

Please come visit with us! We love meeting new friends, and there is always space at our table for more.

Our Christmas eve service will be at 7 p.m. on 12/24/16, and there will be no RE on Sunday, 12/25/16. There will also be no RE class on 1/1/17, but we will hold an intergenerational service that morning, all are invited to break in the New Year with us, as we burn away the dregs of the old year, and welcome in the new. (Details found elsewhere in our Newsletter) It is a service that our kids very much enjoy participating in...and we know you’ll love it too. We’ll be back to normal RE classes on 1/8/17!

Peace and light,

Kirsty Erikson
Lead RE Teacher

Spiritual Calendar

- December 6: Saint Nicholas' Day (Christian).** Feast Day of St. Nicholas, considered the patron saint of children and one of the models for "Santa Claus" and the tradition of gift-giving at Christmas.
- December 13: Saint Lucy's Day (Christian).** Feast Day of St. Lucy, which is referenced in Christian writings as early as the 4th Century CE. Saint Lucy was said to carry food to Christians hiding from persecution in the catacombs, wearing a wreath of lights so her hands would be free to carry the food. In Scandinavian countries, young women process wearing wreaths of lighted candles on their heads and carrying breads and sweets. In parts of Italy, St. Lucy brings gifts to children. She is the patron saint of Syracuse, in Sicily. Before calendar reforms, December 13 coincided with the Winter Solstice. St. Lucy's name derives from *lux*, meaning "light."
- December 21: Winter Solstice/Yule (Pagan).** The Winter Solstice is marked by some kind of celebration of light, fire and/or the Sun in nearly every culture. Astronomically, the Solstice is the moment when the Sun reaches its lowest point in the noonday sky, and the longest night of the year. Modern Pagans observe Solstice as the rebirth of the "Oak King" who reigns at summer, the renewal of light from the darkness and the perseverance of life over death. Some Pagans burn a Yule Log all night, host parties and feasts, and hold rituals to welcome the Sun's return.
- December 25: Christmas Day (Christian).** Celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. As the second most important feast day in Christianity, after Easter, Christmas has a more checkered past. Many Protestant sects believed that Christmas was essentially a Pagan holiday, and it was famously banned in New England by the Puritans (but celebrated on the sly anyway). As a secular holiday to celebrate children, family and generosity, our modern Christmas evolved into the form we know during Victorian times and the early 20th Century. Nearly all Christian denominations observe it now, and it is the only purely sectarian religious holiday that is also a federal holiday in the United States.
- December 25: Beginning of Hanukkah (Jewish).** A festival of lights commemorating a minor miracle in Jewish history: at the rededication of the Temple at the time of the Maccabean Revolt, priests were left with one day's worth of oil for the sacred lamp, but the lamp continued to burn for eight days until a new supply of oil was acquired. Hanukkah lasts for eight days and begins on a different date each year, based on the Jewish lunar calendar. A nine-branched candelabrum called a *menorah* is lit with an additional candle each night. Jews also celebrate Hanukkah with games and prayer services.
- December 26: Saint Stephen's Day (Christian).** When the old carol sings that King Wenceslas "looked out upon the Feast of Stephen," this is the day it means. St. Stephen, who was stoned to death, is considered the first Christian martyr. Customs for this day survived into modern times in Wales, Ireland, and parts of Europe. Many of them seem to be relics of Solstice traditions invoking generosity, wearing masks and costumes, dancing, and performing rituals for good luck. December 26 is also known as "Boxing Day" in the U.K. and Commonwealth countries—one explanation for this being that boxes of food and gifts would be distributed to tradespeople and servants by the well-to-do.

to the church between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. If you want to help with serving, come at around 5:15 p.m. so we can go over any special protocols for the night's menu. Clean-up starts around 6:15 p.m. and is usually done shortly after 7:00 p.m. Volunteers have a chance to sit down and share the meal and fellowship.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

UUCW will host our annual Christmas Eve Candlelight Service on Saturday, December 24 at 7:00

p.m. Join us for this traditional service that includes readings of the Nativity Story, carol singing, a presentation by the RE kids, and passing candlelight around the sanctuary. Everyone is welcome at this lovely prelude to Christmas Day.

We will not have regular worship service on Sunday, December 25. On Sunday, January 1, we'll have an intergenerational "Fire Communion Service" in which we release the old and welcome new hopes and opportunities for 2017. All are welcome!

This Month in UU History

December 25, 1642: Sir Isaac Newton was born in Woolsthorpe, Lincolnshire in England. He was a mathematical genius who invented calculus and contributed to theories of optics. A professor at Cambridge University, Newton served in Parliament and held several government posts. Edmund Halley said that Newton was “so near the gods [sic] that a man cannot nearer go,” and Lord Henry Brougham said “his genius was never exercised but for the discovery of truth, the instruction of mankind, and the illustration of the wisdom of the creator.” Newton’s writings reveal his Unitarian beliefs, which were illegal in England in his day (the last execution for heresy in England was in 1696).

December 25, 1924: Unitarian Rod Serling was born in Syracuse, NY. He was a prolific writer for television, best known for *The Twilight Zone* and *Night Gallery*. His writings addressed social issues such as capital punishment, prejudice, identity and censorship. He won three Emmy Awards for his early television dramas. Serling supported the UUA and the ACLU and belonged to the Community Church (Unitarian) of Santa Monica, CA.

Holiday Open House and Tree Lighting on December 10

On Saturday, December 10, UUCW will host our annual Tree Lighting, Carol Sing and Open House from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Join us as we sing some favorite carols, light the tree in front of the church and share some hot beverages and snacks downstairs. Our sanctuary will be open for visitors, and Pastor Inanna Arthen will be on hand to answer any of your questions about the church or Unitarian Universalism. Take a break from holiday errands and stop by!

December Birthdays

Eben Gordon	December 3
Julie S. Gambill	December 15
Brian Dickens	December 20
Joseph Sackett, Jr.	December 21
Scott Gambill	December 31



(If I'm missing any birthdays, please let me know!)

Caring Connections

UUCW is a caring congregation. We reach out to each other to offer caring and we remember each other's joys and concerns. Please let Inanna know if you would like to visit other members and friends, deliver flowers or an occasional meal, act as a greeter for Sunday services, offer a ride to church, or make any other “caring connection.” Please let us know if you or someone close to you is in need of such a “caring connection” from us. You can call Inanna directly at 978-297-1730 (home) or 508-572-1624 (cell).

Change of Address?

We want to stay in touch! If you change your address, either U. S. Mail or email, please let us know. Email dfaucher@on24seven.com or send a written note to the church at P. O. Box 218, Winchendon, MA 01475. Thanks!

UUCW Online

<http://uucw.ncmuuc.org>

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