



Beacon on the Hill

The monthly newsletter of the
Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley

December 2021 – Vol. 80, Issue 12

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Journeying Together

Rev. Dr. Michelle Collins

Let's face it, the holidays aren't a happy and joyful time for everyone and aren't necessarily happy and joyful all of the time for nearly any of us. The "happy holidays" that someone casually shares with you can ring hollow because that's not how you're feeling at the time. In fact, the holidays can really suck sometimes too, and yet due to expectations from a variety of places, we have to keep pretending that they don't.

Losses can seem more acute during this season as we feel the disruption in traditions and rituals that were caused by the loss and as we miss our family members, friends, and loved ones when we gather. And to add to the challenges, those who are working hard to stay sober can find it particularly difficult with alcohol being so commonplace in holiday gatherings. Not to mention the feelings of stress and overwhelm that can also be present.

Being resilient and grounded can be more important than ever during the holiday season, but they can also be harder than ever this time of the year. Here are a few suggestions to help you stay resilient during this season:

- If you have a personal spiritual practice, make some extra time for doing it this month.
- The holiday times can reopen wounds of grief – give yourself permission to feel this sadness and grief if you need.
- Be aware of things that challenge your own boundaries, whether these are commitments and time, or people and expectations.
- What brings you fulfillment? Make time for a few extra of these types of things this month.
- Relish your moments of joy and wonder. They may be larger events with other people or smaller things that only you notice.
- Reflect on what helps to keep you grounded. These might be rituals, visualizations, time to yourself, or just about anything. Remember them when you feel yourself getting overwhelmed.

May you be blessed, during this season and always. Rev. Michelle

Worship Services in December

[Facebook Live](#) and [YouTube Live](#)

Theme for December: Opening to Joy

Sunday, December 5 at 11 am – Music Sunday. Bryan Baker leads the service. Worship Associate Deborah Schmidt.

Sunday, December 12 at 11 am – Let's Have Us Some Joy. Rev. Michelle Collins, preaching. Worship Associate Sarah Ward. There are many things that serve as nutrition and sustenance for us humans, and joy is certainly one of them. What sorts of things bring us joy? How can we go about filling our lives with joy? And how can we spread it around us in the world? Let's have us some joy to share today.

Sunday, December 19 at 11 am – Forgiveness & Remembrance: Sorrow & Joy Are Woven Fine. Rev. Michelle Collins, preaching. Worship Associate Karen Elliott. Of the many things in the world that are difficult, granting forgiveness is certainly high on the list. Forgiving others and forgiving ourselves. These are crucial parts of being at peace and of mending our relationships, and embracing them is both a deeply emotional act as well as a spiritual one. We'll delve into this today.

Tuesday, December 21 at 7 pm – Winter Solstice. Rev. Michelle Collins, preaching. Worship Associates Jason Russell and Bob Adams. 'Tis the longest night of the year in the northern hemisphere, a time filled with traditions and legends from many cultures and a turning point in the year. Join us for this special service at 7 pm.

Friday, December 24 – Christmas Eve: Let Heaven & Nature Sing (with Joy). Rev. Michelle Collins, preaching. Our Christmas Eve plans for this year are still being determined, dependent on the decisions at the board meeting on December 1. So keep your eyes out for announcements on what we'll be doing for the holiday!

Sunday, December 26 at 11 am – Ken Marino, preaching. Worship Associates Don Klose and Dayana Claghorn.

Virtual Coffee Hour immediately following worship on Sundays

After worship we invite you to switch over to Zoom for a time to connect “face to face.” The link to Virtual Coffee Hour is listed below, but we will also share it in the comments on the Facebook Live feed during worship.

Click [here](#) to join us:

Meeting ID: 332 046 821

Password: 810131

Good Neighbor for December

[Emeryville Citizens Assistance Program](#)'s (ECAP) mission is to provide food, household furnishings, care and compassion to those in need in Emeryville and the surrounding Bay Area communities.

Personal Theology

As we finish another year of COVID and uncertainty in our world, we have two speakers scheduled for December that you won't want to miss. We don't know as yet whether these programs will be in person but both will certainly be on Zoom.

December 5, 9:30 am – "Joy in Difficult Times" presented by James Baraz

James Baraz is well known to many members and friends of UUCB. He is a founding teacher of Spirit Rock Meditation Center and has taught mindfulness meditation since 1978. Since 2003, he has taught "Awakening Joy" classes and co-authored the book *Awakening Joy* with Shoshana Alexander. At Spirit Rock, James has started the Community Dharma Leader program, the Kalyana Mitta Network, helped create the Heavenly Messengers Training Program, and is a teacher-advisor to the Spirit Rock Family program. In recent years, he has been focusing on Dharma and Climate Change. Please mark your calendar for December 5 for this rare opportunity to hear James Baraz speak on a topic of current importance.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9137136420>

December 19, 9:30 am – "Building Bridges" presented by Kenneth Marino (Ministerial Intern)

Ken Marino is from New York and completed his Master of Divinity degree at Drew University. He previously lived in the Bay Area in the 1990s while working for Bank of America. He is an author, musician, yoga teacher, and a Reiki Master. He also has a Master of Arts degree in Music and has taught writing as well as music. Please take this opportunity to get to know more about our Ministerial Intern and hear his thoughts about Building Bridges.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9137136420>

Special Events and Announcements

- **Board Listening Presence:** Beth Pollard. She can be reached at: beth.poll@sbcglobal.net or (510) 812-6284.
- Come to UUCB on **Saturday, Dec. 11**, between 10 am and 2 pm to drop off donations for our food and clothing drives, visit a little, peruse a mini version of our annual holiday gifts and decorations sale, and pick up donation forms for an upcoming auction! Contact annharlow@pacbell.net for more info or to offer to help with any of these projects.
- The **Honoring Indigenous Peoples Group** shares some Books to Read and links to two informative and powerful videos highlighting Indigenous leaders and suggestions of actions to take as our church community continues our work in being in right relations with Indigenous peoples. And, of course, our [HIP blog](#), for lots of information and inspiration with regard to local and

national Indigenous communities! [Click here to access resources.](#)

- **Grief and Anxiety Support for the Holidays:** For over twenty-five years, UUCB's Adult Education/Exploration program has offered classes and workshops that support the exploration of Unitarian Universalist values from diverse faiths, philosophies and various wisdom traditions.

As we move through our lives, developing psychologically, emotionally and sacredly, we sometimes keenly feel a need – especially during heightened emotional times – for support we can readily access: from music, chanting, poetry, books, rituals, conversations, and imagery.

Below you will find materials compiled by members of UUCB's Adult Education/Exploration, Membership and Worship Associate teams to support all of us in our human experiences of Grief and Loss or Stress/Anxiety during this Holiday season. Email adulted@uucb.org with questions or suggestions.

[Experiencing Grief and Loss](#)

[Experiencing Stress and Anxiety](#)

Opening Task Force – Update

You better watch out! Those words from the popular Christmas song may be a good guiding principle for our holiday times together. COVID has not gone away. It is still with us and, especially for the unvaccinated, a serious threat to health.

Boosters may soon be available to all persons over the age of 18. Public health professionals are suggesting that such a booster may be advised. In addition to vaccinations, as we hopefully gather more with family and friends, the successful public health protocols of masking, physical distancing and hand washing with folks we may not have seen in too long a time can still serve us well in having a COVID-free experience.

Safety protocols remain in place at the church and signage upon entrance to the main building helps to remind us of the importance of honoring those protocols. We rely on everyone in our community to stay at home when they have any symptoms of contagious disease, and we are glad that technology makes it possible for us to keep our connections even when physically separate.

Following the science and our UU values, by the time you read this column, the Opening Task Force will have drafted recommended vaccination policies for participation in person on the church campus for Sunday services and prime time programming, and forwarded them to the Board of Trustees for a decision at their

December 1 meeting. We hope that action moves us forward to the time when we can gather safely and happily together.

Blessings for your holiday season.

OTF (Opening Task Force) Members: Patrick Cullinane (Chair), Sheldon Jones, Greg Lemieux, Lisa Maynard, Tess O'Riva, ED, and Rev. Michelle Collins

From the Board of Trustees

Beth Pollard, President

At its meeting on the first day of December, the Board of Trustees will consider questions of safety and inclusivity in the context of gathering in person to worship together in our current state of COVID life.

Our opening words of worship service include a statement of being a welcoming congregation. What does welcoming look like when there is a contagious virus in our community at-large? Thus far it has meant welcoming members and visitors from near and far through virtual streaming. What is welcoming like when we look to worship together in person under the cloud of COVID-19?

Our congregation adopted a covenant of right relations to guide our behavior; how does this inform whether we should require vaccinations? What about children? What about our most health-vulnerable? And if we require vaccinations, do we need to see proof? And so on with questions.

These past weeks we have been carrying all these questions and more. Questions that are not easy or comfortable when we consider risks of and feelings around exclusion and health – physical and mental, cravings for in-person connection, and not creating wedges between and among ourselves – including generational. There are practical considerations too, like congregants stepping up to volunteer to help implement safe gathering protocols.

As Board president, I've had my experiences of worry about the decision itself and its consequences for the health, vitality and mission of our congregation now and into the future – what the Board is entrusted to serve.

And then our insightful and compassionate Board Vice President Helen Tinsley-Jones asked me the straightforward question, "How are you doing with all of this?" It was in the moment my answer hit me: **I have faith.** Faith in UUCB's covenant, faith in our Board of Trustees covenant for working together, and faith in Unitarian Universalism itself. Which in this time for me means having faith that our UUCB Board of Trustees and community will find our way through this complex issue.

It is not possible to agree with all church decisions or even what others who are part of the same group believe is the best path. Which makes having faith all that much more relevant and important. Faith that choices that emerge from our Board questioning, reflecting, deliberating and deciding will set the best path forward that we can create at this time, until it is time to re-visit our direction at the next crossroads. And this faith also allows and encourages us to learn, reimagine, and change our minds as we continually search for truth and meaning in new territory.

I hope that whatever the Board decides that our UUCB community will have faith in one another and in our covenant to guide and hold us together in love.

Board of Trustees November Meeting Summary

- The search for a new full-time Religious Education Director is getting underway
 - Treasurer Lenore Ralston reviewed the church's financial reporting
 - The Board further crafted a vision for UUCB's Widening the Circle work and further refined the purpose and composition of the Widening the Circle Committee – both for adoption on December 1
 - The Opening Task Force checked in with the Board on the scope of elements to consider as they draft two to three policy options for in-person worship services and other large congregational gatherings, for presentation to the Board for its decision on December 1
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Social Justice Council

Co-Chair's Message

Sometimes, when we turn on the news, or listen to current events, it seems like the world is coming apart at the seams, and that there is just too much to fix! When we work alone, fighting for justice, it is an uphill battle. But, when we form communities and coalitions, the struggle becomes more manageable. With cooperation and connection, sustainable social change is possible. The Social Justice Council meeting in November was a welcome reminder of this fact. We discussed working with immigrant communities and our accompaniment team; we planned a community-wide food drive and clothing drive for December; we learned more about our connection with our partner church in Transylvania; and we debated our Good Neighbor Program practices and organizations.

We are looking to add a Social Justice Forum for future dates and hope to bring reproductive rights and environmental justice topics to the forefront. It wasn't a long meeting, but it was very fruitful and hopeful. Working together, our congregation can

change lives and make a difference. The Social Justice Council is leading the way. If you would like to be a change maker, please join our monthly meetings. We meet every 2nd Wednesday of the month, and we would love to see you there!
(nataliehcampbell@yahoo.com)

Good Neighbor Recipients for 2022

The time has come for UUCB's congregation to select our 2022 Good Neighbor recipients! We have sixteen organizations that have been selected. We need to choose twelve. Speakers from each of the local non-profits will attend our December Social Justice Council meeting to share a little about what they do. The zoom meeting will take place on Wednesday, December 8 from 7-9 pm. (More details to come, as we get closer to the meeting.)

To read more about each of the organizations and look at their websites, please follow this [link](#).

To see which organizations our Good Neighbor Program has supported in the past five years, please follow this [link](#)

After the meeting, the Social Justice Council will send out a form to let congregants vote on which organizations they would like to support. If you have any questions, please contact Natalie Campbell at nataliehcampbell@yahoo.com.

Winter Warmth for GRIP Residents

As in the past, UUCB will have our annual Winter Warmth for GRIP clothing drive in December. Please help clothe the GRIP (Greater Richmond Interfaith Program) residents for the cold and wet winter months. Except for underwear and socks, used clothing is acceptable, as well as clean sheets, blankets, and towels. Large cardboard boxes to collect your items will be in the atrium on December 1. If you have any questions about this, or if you would like to help, please contact Ray Westergard at raywest2@sbcglobal.net.

Literature, Film, Drama & Music Contingent

Hooray for HIP: Congratulations to the Honoring Indigenous Peoples Group (HIP) for sharing National Native American Heritage Month in such grand style, with very moving films and stories focused on the Bay Area!

Native American Heritage Month celebrates the richness of indigenous cultural traditions and is a time to educate ourselves about indigenous history and

contemporary issues. It was established in 1990 by congressional proclamation and presidential resolution. Every year many governors and presidents send out their own proclamations, and local communities engage in celebrations and acknowledgments throughout the month. Want to know more? Visit HIP's blog, and contact HIP at: honoringindigenous@uucb.org.

Back to Books: All are invited to join us on December 5 at 12:30 pm, when we go from “Marmee” to “Mammy!” We will discuss *So Many Beginnings [A Little Women Remix]*, by Bethany C. Morrow. PSST! Don't let the “remix” fool you! These are the only similarities in Alcott's *Little Women*, published originally in 1868, and Morrow's novel: They are both coming-of-age tales that take place during the same century and war; the fathers are away, and the girls have the same nicknames. Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84257017624>

Preparing for Kwanzaa: We will have a brief celebration on December 26, the last Sunday service for 2021, and the first day of Kwanzaa. You can prepare by watching the wonderful documentary, *The Black Candle*, either on Amazon Prime Video, or free, with commercials at: <https://mkasante.com/films/the-black-candle/>.

Each of the seven days of Kwanzaa is dedicated to one of the principles:

Umoja (Unity): To strive for and to maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.

Kujichagulia (Self-Determination): To define and name ourselves, as well as to create and speak for ourselves.

Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility): To build and maintain our community together and make our brothers' and sisters' problems our problems and to solve them together.

Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics): To build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together.

Nia (Purpose): To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community, to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

Kuumba (Creativity): To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

Imani (Faith): To believe with all our hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

For more information, contact Camille Parker, camilleparker@comcast.net

From the Executive Director

Tess Snook O'Riva, Executive Director



In December we are Opening to Joy. Heck, we're all just working on Reopening. If we can do it with joy, great! Ok, bad joke. I just wanted to remind everyone to find the laughter, that we are all in this struggle together, and that this wobbly ground we're walking on is not helping.

Many outcomes of this pandemic are becoming readily apparent. Things have fallen through the cracks. People are beyond burned out. Emotional resources are low. Brain fog is real, can be severe, and may be long term. The kids are way behind in their studies. And the world is talking about it as if it's over, right as we head into the next flu season.

But what hits me most is that there is so much we still don't know. We all want it to be over, feel safe, and work our way back to what we had before, but we don't know if we've done enough, or even the right things, to be as safe as possible. I feel like that scene in the Peter Pan play where if we just clap hard enough (or do enough, or pray enough, etc.), we can bring Tinkerbell back from the brink and we can all go back to normal. Yet for the second year, we have to discuss the risks of being with family instead of just enjoying them. We have tough conversations that will devolve into politics because some people choose not to get vaccinated. It's like we just figure out one problem and another one crops up.

So, yeah. Some days I feel like I need to open just to the possibility of joy. I know not all days are happy, or easy, or even worth getting out of bed for. And you know what? That's perfectly fine. I can be not okay for a while. I deserve it. So does everyone else. But each day leads to the next – the next adventure, the next belly laugh, the next step forward into the unknown. I can be a “hot mess” (as my niece would say) and know that this too shall pass. So if you're not okay, please know that you're not alone, and nothing is inherently wrong with you. Do what you need to get through this time, and together we'll pull through until once again the daylight is stronger than the darkness.

From the Treasurer

Lenore Ralston

UUCB is an extraordinary community. We are resource rich – in spirit, generosity, talent, resilience, and resources. In the midst of a major (and ongoing) pandemic, we have done so well. Kindness and generosity have prevailed.

For those who experienced some of the angst we had several years ago regarding cash flow and decreasing membership, we believe we have turned a big corner! Our Temporarily Restricted Funds (TRNAs) are healthy. Thanks to Patrick, Michael & the whole Stewardship Team, we exceeded our pledge goal. We have \$1,700,000 in our ten Endowment Funds (which earned 19.8% composite interest last Fiscal Year), and Lonnie has told me we have nine (potentially 11) new members! Between increased pledges and more short-term and long-term rentals, now at market rate, we continue to stabilize our income/expense balance.

Facing grave concern, UUCB also made serious campus improvements and repairs. Thanks to many special gifts, including those from the Board-designated endowment, the Chancel has disability access, our audio/visual systems are improved, and our roof, purlin tails, landscaping, Safir Room, bathrooms, ventilation, cottage, and other spaces are refurbished. We are in good stead for future gatherings with those near and far.

An additional step to strengthen our financial reporting is now underway – an independent audit by the firm Healy and Associates, shepherded by the Audit Committee led by Randall Hudson. Our Executive Director is shopping for a fully integrated financial system while your Treasurer and Endowment Committee, led by the Finance Committee, have already fully engaged with troubleshooting long-standing anomalies – some more than ten years old!

All of this is a reminder: It takes a village of all of us – past, present, and future!

One caution: we need to be mindful that for the past four years we have had extraordinary windfalls: \$133,000 from UUCEF's Wake Now our Vision that initially funded our Executive Director, and some other critical UUCB expenses, and another ~ \$210,000 given to us through Federally underwritten COVID monies for non-profit organizations procured through the initiative of our Executive Director. This additional infusion of approximately \$100,000 per annum over the past three years will not continue. Not in these big chunks. However, our rental agreements along with picking up more short-term rentals will give us a more robust stream of additional income to assist with filling this anticipated gap. Further, the extraordinary generosity displayed in last year's pledge is extremely consequential (thank you congregation!) And in anticipation of boosting our membership through our highly successful program diversification, campus improvements, palpable enthusiasm, and emphasis on inclusivity? We are feeling optimistic!

Partner Church Committee

Stephanie Ann Blythe

Here is the latest communication received by Anne Greenwood from our friends and Partner Church in Homoródújfalú:



Dear Anne!

It's a while since we spoke last time in Zoom. Since then a lot of things happened here in Újfalú. Among them there were nice things but there were sad things too.

The saddest thing was that the former caretaker (I'm not sure that this is the English translation of that laic person who takes care of the church) of the church, Egyed János passed away (he was the sixth person who passed away this year from our congregation).

The happiest event is the commemoration of the 340th birthday of our church and the 220th birthday of our church.

Because of the pandemic and because here in Romania the vaccination rate is low and the death rate is very high, the state put us in partial lockdown. All sort of events are forbidden; the schools are closed since Monday, and when we try to enter in a store, cinema, mall or museum we must show our Green Card.

I hope that you are O.K., you are safe from the pandemic, and I hope that in the U.S. the situation is better.

Until we meet again I wish you all the best.

Your friend,

Attila

We send our deepest condolences to the village for the loss of their church sexton. Regrettably, it appears that some bishops of the Romanian Orthodox Church are the biggest spreaders of misinformation (lies) about COVID vaccines in Romania, and are using their pulpits for that purpose. This is one of the reasons that our partnership with Homoródújfalú is so important. You can contact Stephanie Ann Blythe at steph62850@yahoo.com or Anne Greenwood at annegt1@sbcglobal.net to learn how we can help fight those lies, and bring hope to the village.



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