



CommUUunity Matters

The Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Southwest Michigan

November 2023

DECEMBER SUNDAY SERVICES

Sundays at 10:00 AM. Onsite, [Facebook](#), or Zoom.

December 3: *What Lies at the Core?* with Rev. Gy

Christmas, that inescapable season of festivity, is loaded with Christian imagery and ideology. Join Rev. Gy for an exploration of what the bible actually has to say about Christmas (and what doesn't) and to think about how UUs can discern what biblical truths to embrace and how.

Zoom Meeting ID: 932 4236 6569 Click [HERE](#) to register.

December 10 *A Love Extravaganza* with Rev. Gy

We will make time for joy this Sunday by celebrating the LOVE at the center of our Unitarian Universalist faith with stories, songs, and readings.

Zoom Meeting ID 921 3249 2918 Click [HERE](#) to register.

December 17: *A Winter Solstice Ritual* with UUC Members and Friends

We will pause for a moment of peace and reflection during the hectic holiday season and celebrate the Darkness and the Light with stories, meditations, and songs. The choir will sing.

Zoom Meeting ID 978 4099 0674 Click [HERE](#) to register.

December 24: *NO 10 AM Service Today*

Join us for carols, readings, and candlelight at 5 PM. See page 2 for more details

December 31: *The Burning Bowl* with Rev. Gy

To welcome the New Year, it is our tradition to release all the emotional ties and bonds that no longer serve us by feeding them to the flames of the Burning Bowl. Join us to hit the spiritual reset button and reflect on making a fresh start.

Zoom Meeting ID:963 8368 5451 Click [HERE](#) to register.



Spiritual Theme for November PRESERVING OUR HEARTWOOD

Heartwood is the central, innermost portion of a tree's trunk. It is strong, resistant to decay, and provides the tree with support and strength. The heartwood provides the essential structure on which the growing, changing outer rings of the tree depend.

In the metaphorical *Tree of Life*, the theme for this year's spiritual exploration, the heartwood represents our core values and our guiding principles.

As you participate in our Sunday Services and programs this month, take the time to name and bring your core values into awareness. If you are not sure where to start, Brené Brown has [a list](#) that might help you clarify the values you hold important.

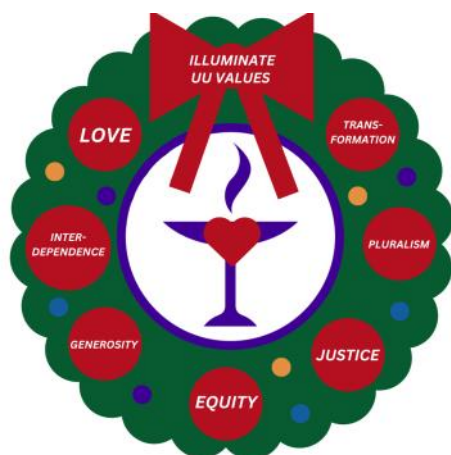
How do your intentions, words, thoughts, and behaviors align with your core values?

Is there a value you would like to live into more fully?

Which of your core values are most directly and deeply related to your UU faith?

How have your values changed over time?

ILLUMINATE



Illuminate Your Values

During the first week of December, it has been our recent tradition to spend time reflecting on the 8 UU Principles as a way to ground ourselves in our Unitarian Universalist values as we head into the holiday season and the New Year.

This year we will transition the celebration of our principles into an exploration of our shared UU values as articulated in the “Final” Proposed Revision of our Principles and Purposes that will be voted on at General Assembly in June of 2024. (Final is in quotation marks because amendments can still be made to the language and it is possible that the wording we have today is not actually final.)

During the first full week of December, consider setting aside time each day to light a chalice and **ILLUMINATE** (shed a light on, clarify, make understandable) one of the proposed values:

December 3: LOVE—Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values. We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love. *How can Love be a spiritual discipline for you?*

December 4: INTERDEPENDENCE—We honor the interdependent web of all existence. With reverence for the great web of life and with humility, we acknowledge our place in it. We covenant to protect Earth and all beings from exploitation. We will create and nurture sustainable relationships of care and respect, mutuality and justice. We will work to repair harm and damaged relationships. *What steps can you take to protect the earth and all beings from exploitation?*

December 5: GENEROSITY—We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope. We covenant to freely and compassionately share our faith, presence, and resources. Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality. *What practices help you cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope?*

December 6: EQUITY—We declare that every person has the right to flourish with inherent dignity and worthiness. We covenant to use our time, wisdom, attention, and money to build and sustain fully accessible and inclusive communities. *How can you help UUCC be more welcoming and accessible?*

December 7: JUSTICE—We work to be diverse multicultural Beloved Communities where all thrive. We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression. We support the use of inclusive democratic processes to make decisions within our congregations, our Association, and society at large. *What will the Beloved Community where all can thrive look like to you?*

December 8: PLURALISM—We celebrate that we are all sacred beings, diverse in culture, experience, and theology. We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with Love, curiosity, and respect. *How are you embracing and learning from those who think differently than you do?*

December 9: TRANSFORMATION—We adapt to the changing world. We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically. Openness to change is fundamental to our Unitarian and Universalist heritages, never complete and never perfect. *How do you know you are growing spiritually and ethically? What does that look and feel like?*

'TIS THE SEASON

Winter Solstice

The Winter Solstice is the shortest day and the longest night of the year. Traditionally, it is a time of both foreboding and expectancy, as the longest night leads to the return of the sun.

The Winter Solstice has become important to Unitarian Universalists as a time during the holiday season when people on different spiritual paths can share a common celebration.

We hope you will join us either onsite or online on Sunday, **December 17 at 10:00 AM** to celebrate the darkness and the light with our annual Winter Solstice Ritual presented by our members, friends, and the UUCS Singers under the direction of our Music Director, Chris Petersmark.



The service will feature a different selection of songs and readings from years past. And, in honor of our 2023-2024 spiritual theme - *Growing the Tree of Life* - we will share a

sacred story from the British Isles about the *Oak Child and Holly King*.

As always you can enjoy this service onsite, on Facebook, or via Zoom.

To register for the Zoom link visit:
tinyurl.com/uuccSolstice2023

If you can't join us on December 17 but would like to see the service, register for the Zoom link and we will send you a recording to enjoy just in time for the actual Winter Solstice on December 21.



A Candlelight Christmas Eve

Please join us onsite, on Facebook, or on Zoom for a special Christmas Eve service on Sunday, **December 24 at 5 PM.**

Together, we'll celebrate the spirit of Christmas with **readings, carols, and the warm glow of candlelight.**

Feel free to bring your family and friends. This will be a wonderful opportunity for people of different beliefs and backgrounds to come together in the spirit of peace and goodwill. Following the service, there will be a time for fellowship and light refreshments. We invite you to linger, connect with others, and share in the joy of the holiday season.



Volunteers are needed to help with the Christmas Eve service including greeters, readers, sound and tech folks, and refreshment hosts. There is a sign-up sheet at the back of the sanctuary if you are willing and able to help.

To register for the Zoom link visit:
tinyurl.com/uuccXmasEve2023

As always, if you can not attend the service but would like to watch it later, register for the Zoom link and we will be sure to send a recording.

HOLIDAY OPPORTUNITIES



The Giving Tree

This year, over 150 refugee children from several countries in the world arrived in Kalamazoo with little more than the shirts on their backs.

They have been uprooted from their homes after experiencing traumatic events and, with their family, moved thousands of miles away to a new country with a different culture and language. Many of the children are scared and unsure of what might come next. Many of them have no toys and their families do not have the means to provide them with any.

A new toy could be a big comfort as they adjust to a new life, while still a child, and help bring a smile to their faces. To help bring toys to these kids, our friends at Samaritas are holding a **TOY DRIVE for REFUGEE CHILDREN** drive this holiday season to provide toys to kids in Kalamazoo.

We will be setting up a Giving Tree at the back of the sanctuary on November 19 covered with tags that have a toy idea for a child 5-15 years old.

If you would like to purchase a toy, grab a tag, go shopping, purchase the item, and return the toy and the tag to the Giving Tree.

Please be sensitive to English comprehension and cultural differences when choosing gifts. Games should not require a lot of reading. No military, war-themed, or culturally insensitive toys. Dolls and Barbies should be dressed modestly.

Wrapping the gift is optional (but appreciated). If you do choose to wrap, please use a plain gift bag or wrapping paper (no Christmas, Santa, or holiday-specific themes). Please attach the tag labeling what's inside.

Toys must be returned to church by Sunday, December 10. Thanks for your support!

Virtual Holiday Card

If you would like to be included in our virtual greeting card this year, please be sure to send a holiday photo of yourself (with or without your extended family) to the office by **Wednesday, December 20 at 5:00 PM.**

The virtual card will feature pictures and music and will be shared during our Christmas Eve gathering and via email to all your UUCC friends on Christmas morning.



Click [HERE](#) to see last year's card.

If you need technical help taking a photo or sending one you already have to the office, there are volunteers available to give you a hand. We would like to have as many beautiful UUCC smiles included in the holiday card as possible.

If you have any questions or need any help, please contact the office:

uucommunity@gmail.com



Come and Sing with Us!

The **UUCC Singers** will provide special music during the **Winter Solstice Sunday** service on **December 17.**

If you like to sing and would like to join the fun, come to **Choir Practice** on **December 3, 10, and 17 at 9:00 AM.**

More practices may be set up if people's schedules allow. Contact our Music Director, Chris, for more info—christopherpetersmark@gmail.com.

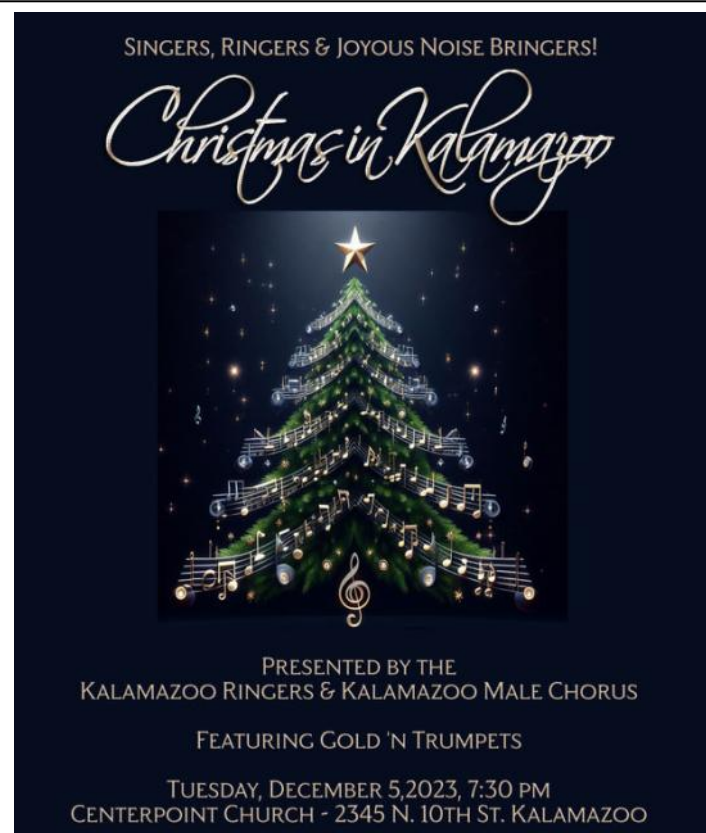
MORE HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS



UUCC members **Frey Lake** and **Nancy Crowell** are long-time supporters of the Kalamazoo Community Chorale!



Our friends at the **Jewish Federation of Kalamazoo** invite you to join them for a night with [Nefesh Mountain](#). The acclaimed Bluegrass/Americana group has added Kalamazoo to their current "Love and Light" tour and will be performing "messages of inclusivity, unity and love in response to the current and devastating war in Israel and Gaza" at the Congregation of Moses (2501 Stadium Dr) on **December 5 at 7 PM**. Click [HERE](#) for tickets.



UUCC member **David Senecal** sings with the Kalamazoo Male Chorus!



UUCC member **Nancy Calme** will be playing with the Southshore Concert Band on these dates:

Sunday, December 10 at 2 PM
CHRISTMAS ON THE MAINSTAGE
 Mendel Center at Lake Michigan College
 Benton Harbor, MI
 Free concert!

Thursday, December 14 at 7:30 PM
A SOUTH HAVEN CHRISTMAS
 Listiak Auditorium, South Haven High School
 South Haven, MI
 Tickets: \$15

FROM THE MINISTER



From the Minister

[Rev. Gy Ludvig-McCartney](#)

The other day Miriam and I attended a school board meeting in Vicksburg. The Board decided to allow transgender children to use the bathroom according to their gender identity and they encountered serious pushback from the community. Miriam and I attended the meeting to express our support for the Board's decision and to encourage them to stand strong.

The ones who spoke in opposition were all subscribed to a Christian belief system that endorses marriage between one man and one woman and acknowledges gender assigned at birth and birth only.

A week or so has passed and I can no longer quote verbatim, but I still have the "taste" their words left. They spoke of the will of God with such certainty. They seemed to have known the "mind" of God without a shadow of a doubt. To them the Board clearly was in the wrong, the danger of trans kids using bathrooms true to their gender identity was clear and present.

They claimed that they were empowered by their God, thus their words carried the authority of their God, who is the only God, the one Lord who created this world. To me it all sounded like Power void of Love, Compassion, and Kindness.

I was grateful and relieved that none of the implicated children were present. The saying goes that "Sticks and stones can hurt your bones, but words can never hurt me" – not true! Words can be so wicked. Where healed broken bones are forgotten with time, hurtful words can burn and hurt for a lifetime and then some.

Power without Love is dangerous. It is a stern, unyielding energy that asserts dominance over compassion, rendering relationships strained and communities divided. All presented as unquestionable, in the name of God. The imposition of rules without considering individual stories and unique journeys creates an environment where inclusivity is sacrificed at the altar of control.

Fortunately, there is an antidote to this, called Unitarian Universalists who are willing and ready to question ANYTHING!! I mean, anything!! But most importantly, we are committed to marrying Power with Love and see what it would have us do and say.

When I first started writing this article, I was ready to claim that "Love without Power" does not exist. But since I've changed my mind. I think it shows up as passive existence, where compassion is expressed in sentiment but lacks the strength to effect meaningful change.

Unitarian Universalists have long empowered Love with dedicated, compassionate action in ways small and large. We are called to embody a love that actively engages with power, recognizing its potential to create positive change. This involves challenging oppressive systems, advocating for justice, and embracing a spirituality that compels us to act in the service of love.

(Continued on page 5)

GENEROSITY SUNDAY

(continued from page 4) Miriam and I did a bit of that. We added a different narrative, we gave Love a kinder, more compassionate, and inclusive voice. I hope this is the voice that shall be carried into the future while the other one will fade into the past as the echo of a long-gone world where power was once exercised without love, where some believed in a God who would willingly ostracize innocent children finding their way to their true, authentic self.

And so it is.



One of the earliest decisions the founders of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church made was to establish a fund that supports individuals in our community who are in crisis.

The Chuck and Ellen Howard Emergency Fund, named after the members who provided the first donation, has provided financial support to countless individuals since it was established in 1997.

The fund has provided rent assistance, desperately needed car repairs, and even financial support to domestic abuse survivors escaping dangerous situations.

The Howard Fund does more than just meet immediate needs; **it plants the seed of hope.**

We are excited to announce that our **Generosity Sunday recipient for the month of December** will be the Howard Fund.

We do hope you will join us on this remarkable journey of generosity. Your donation to the Howard Fund will allow us to help more people in need, help create a brighter future, and promote positive change.

Please make a donation today!



To donate visit: [Howard Fund](#) Or, send a check, made out to UUCC (write Howard Fund in the memo line) to 10441 Shaver Road, Portage, MI 49024

100% of your donation will be given directly to someone in need.

Even small donations make a difference. We invite you to consider a recurring monthly donation of \$5 or \$10. Please set up your monthly donation here: [Howard Fund](#)

Whatever amount you choose to give, we are grateful for your support.

CARING COMMUNITY



DECEMBER CARING COMMUNITY NEWS

Winter, a lingering season, is a time to gather golden moments, embark upon a sentimental journey, and enjoy every idle hour.

- John Boswell

Joys, Concerns, and Member News:

Mary Roscoe has had a very painful month, with the passing of her brother Charles and her aunt, Joyce. Please hold Mary in your heart.

Those of us who share our homes with pets know how big a place they inhabit in the family. Recently, **Miriam** lost her cat, Findle, and **Rev. Gy** was shocked by a medical emergency that took her dog, Mina. Pets teach us both intense joy and loss.

Wish healthy healing to **Bruce Fetzer**, **Nancy Stob**, and **Bev Folz** as they all recover from recent surgeries. Health issues have also been plaguing **Stace Danielson**, **Sherrie Vandeputte**, and many others. Let us hope that the quiet stillness of winter days gives everyone the space to heal and gain the strength they need.

Our snowbirds, **Kathy Hays** and **Marsha Laya** are safely settled in Florida for the winter. Our friend **Marcia Adams** who relocated to Massachusetts a few years ago has now settled down year-round in St. Petersburg. While we shovel and salt here in Michigan, we can see our friends on Zoom and dream of the sunny warm days they are feeling on a daily basis. (Not jealous at all!)

Mike Graham reframed and painted our rainbow sign. What a handyman he is, and a gift to the congregation.

Sofi Husdon, **Sherrie Vandeputte**, **Justin Wocjiak**, and **Kaitlin Wocjiak** attended our recent Newcomers Book Group. All four of them are welcome and wonderful additions to our community. Ask them if they feel the discussions were helpful.

Birthdays:

So many December birthdays! Wish a happy day to these special people:

3 – **Ken VanEseltine**, 5 – **Harold Beu**, 9 – **Matthew Nelson**, 14 – **David Bott**,
14, – **Tami Brozovich**, 18 – **Rev. Gy**, 19 – **Nancy Calme**, 25 – **Mary Roscoe**, 28 – **Steve Tasko**,
28 – **Jeannine Willacker**, 30 – **Michael Graham**, 31 – **Marcus Ragains**

Remembering Friends Who Have Passed On:

In December of 2001, we lost a founding member, **Herb Tompkins**.

Welcome New Visitors:

We were delighted to host new visitors last month including **Holly** and **Cullen MacEwan**, **Zach Baker**, **Eric Miller**, and **Terez Lowry**. It was also a joy to have founding members **Mike** and **Connie Leatherman** stop in for a visit.

Everyone in the church is part of our Caring Community, and caring for one another is a key feature of the congregation. If you have a need that we can help with or some news that you would like to share with us all, pass it on to the coordinators through the UUCC office: 269-324-7262 or uucommunity@gmail.com.

LEADERSHIP

The Board of Trustees met on November 1. Here are some of the things they worked on:

- Made plans to survey the congregation about a name change.
- Discussed collecting congregational input about security concerns and possible actions.
- Discussed renting the building on Saturdays to a Church of God congregation.



Click [HERE](#) to access the minutes from the meeting. The next board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, **December 6** at **6:30 PM** via Zoom. Board meetings are open to anyone who would like to attend. A link to the Zoom meeting can be found on our [online calendar](#). Questions about the Board of Trustees can be directed to Board President, Steve Tasko.



Putting Our 8th UU Principle into Action

Our 8th UU Principle calls on us to engage in individual and communal action to accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in our congregation and society at large. We regularly share insights and resources in the space to help us do this work.

A lot of us will spend time this month shopping for gifts for family and friends. Intentionally spending our dollars at BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) owned businesses is one way we can lean into our UU values.

BIPOC-owned businesses have often faced greater challenges in establishing and growing their businesses than white-owned ones. [Research by the Federal Reserve](#) has found that business owners of color — as well as women and other overlooked entrepreneurial communities — are not able to access the same financial resources that white, male business owners obtain regularly.

When we support BIPOC business owners, hear their stories, buy their products and services, and share them with others, we help empower and uplift our entire community.

Not sure where to shop? Visit these organizations for some ideas:

- **Black Wall Street Kalamazoo** has compiled a [Directory of Black-owned Businesses](#)
- **El Concilio** has a directory of local [Latinx-owned Businesses](#) on their website.
- **Pokagon Band of Potawatomi** created a [Tribal Owned Business & Vendor Directory](#)

Aside from donating to social justice organizations, calling out racism when you see it, and educating yourself with [anti-racism resources](#), consider using your buying power (if it is yours to do) to help dismantle racism and other oppressions this holiday season.



PROGRAM COUNCIL



Program Council—Where TOGETHER—We Get Stuff Done!

Everyone - members, friends, visitors—is invited to help create programming at UU Community Church on the **second Sunday of each month** at around **11:20 AM**. You can participate in Program Council in person or via Zoom.

We had lots to **CELEBRATE** at our November meeting:

We enjoyed great Sunday Services from **Rev. Gy, Barrett Lee**, and **Brent Harris** and amazing Thoughtful Thursday conversations with **Donald Rothberg** and **Tam Morgan**. We held more than 15 other group meetings and activities too. We had an outstanding **Goods and Services Auction** that raised over \$8000 for our programs and ministries. Twelve 12 UUC folk participated in the **United Way 21-Day LGBTQIA+ Equity Challenge** and/or the follow-up debrief session to help us meet our Welcoming Congregation Renewal commitments. We sent 100 letters to young voters as part of our youth-led **Climate Change/GOTV** letter-writing project. Thanks to our **amazing Building and Grounds Team** we were able to get some cracks patched in the parking lot, new gutters on the south side of the building, and a new frame for our rainbow sign. Together we can do great things!

We learned about many upcoming **OPPORTUNITIES** including:

- **Volunteering with Samaritas** to help resettle refugee families. (Contact Afifa at athaj@samaritas.org to learn more.)
- **Donating toys** to refugee children (See page 4 for more info.)
- Participating in [Guest at Your Table](#) to support the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
- Accepting a **matching grant challenge** from the [Michigan UU Social Justice Network](#). Learn more about the network and how to donate on page 16.
- Attending a **Candlelight Christmas Eve service** at UUC. (See page 3 for the details)
- Helping form a new **Partner Outreach Team** at UUC. (See page 12 to learn more.)
- Spreading the good news about UUC with **bumper stickers and pamphlets** (available to all at the Welcome Table) and a great new **elevator speech: Unitarian Universalist Community Church is an inclusive compassionate community of many beliefs united by Love working for a just and sustainable world.**
- Keeping in touch with UUC members and friends with an **updated photo directory** (check your email for the link or pick up a paper copy by the Welcome Table)
- **Exploring Anti-Racism** with Eric and Rev. Gy beginning in January.

Our next Program Council meeting is on Sunday, **December 10** at around **11:20 AM**, onsite or via Zoom. On the **AGENDA** for our next meeting:

- Name Change Survey
- Discussion about Building Security
- Announcement about new renters
- MUUSJN Membership for 2023

Please plan to attend and help keep UUC's programs going strong. As usual, the Youth Program will serve a soup lunch before the meeting (vegetarian and vegan options available). Your donations help support the youth program's social justice activities. Thanks for your support!

RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION



R.E.flections [Miriam Epskamp](#), Director of Religious Education

I remember many years ago, giving a tour of the Religious Exploration area to a young couple new to Unitarian Universalism. I was giving them an overview of our faith, of UUCC's strong humanist leanings, and explaining the kinds of things the kids learn about downstairs, when the young woman turned to me and rather nervously asked, "What do you do about Christmas?" like she feared that it might not be incompatible with this new religion she had found. I smiled and said, "Well, pretty much anything we want."

This was a rather flippant answer to her question but in all seriousness, I believe there are many reasons why Unitarian Universalists should embrace Christmas. It is actually a very UU holiday. Ours is a faith that recognizes that wisdom and meaning can be found in many different places. What is Christmas but an amalgamation of a variety of traditions? From the December 25 date possibly borrowed from the Persian Mithraic tradition, to a nativity narrative influenced by Jewish salvation history and Greek myth, to the traditions of trees, mistletoe, holly, and wreaths picked up from Northern European solstice celebrations, Christmas is a multi-cultural, multi-faith wonder.

Christmas's very strong social justice roots appeal to our UU sensibilities as well. Some may have been borrowed from the Roman observances of Saturnalia in which the lowest echelons of Roman society were given the day off work and honored with a lavish feast. Jesus' teachings of love and forgiveness certainly helped define Christmas too. However, it was a British Unitarian named Charles Dickens who established an almost moral imperative connected with Christmas charity that remains with us today when he published *A Christmas Carol* in 1843. Non-profits raise nearly a quarter of their yearly revenue in December as so many of us embrace the Christmas spirit of giving.

And yet, many of us struggle with Christmas. We struggle to reconcile the fond childhood memories of traditions that belong to a belief system we no longer embrace. We struggle to reconcile the joyous gathering around a table laden with foods we find we can no longer ethically consume. We struggle with the fact that the holiday has become inextricably tangled up with spending huge amounts of money for stuff that perhaps no one really needs. It is easy to see how some of us might say "Bah Humbug" and forget the whole thing.

But I think that we would be missing out on something if we gave up on Christmas. In their book *Unplug the Christmas Machine*, Jo Robinson and Jean Staehli point out that the key to finding satisfaction with Christmas is by making sure that our observances of the season reflect *our core*

RE SCHEDULE FOR DECEMBER		
DATE	TOPIC	VOLUNTEERS
Dec 3	Build a Fair and Peaceful World	Regena and Eric Nelson
Dec 10	The Christmas Truce	Isaac Epskamp-Hunt
Dec 17	Multigenerational Service	N/A
Dec 24	NO 10:00 AM Service	N/A
Dec 31	The Burning Bowl	Mary Roscoe

values. The challenge for each of us at Christmas is to figure out how we can get past stumbling blocks and separations to make our celebrations reflect what is truly important to us. However you choose to celebrate (or not) I wish you a holiday season that is just what you need it to be. May it be so.

LEARNING AND GROWTH

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST COMMUNITY CHURCH

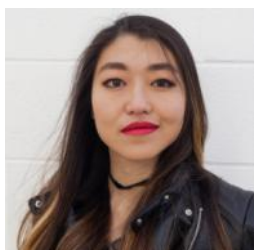
THOUGHTFUL THURSDAYS

We have an exciting lineup of guests for our once-a-month **Thoughtful Thursday Speakers Series**. Each of these events will give you an opportunity to listen to and dialog with people navigating spiritual, mental, or physical growth and change in their work and their lives. Please plan to join us on Zoom at 7 PM for these unique opportunities to learn and grow. And, if you cannot attend any of these Thoughtful Thursdays in real-time, you can **sign up to receive a recording** of the event by filling out the Zoom registration form.



December 7: Discovering Hope at a Time of Climate Upheaval

Join us for a conversation with **Ben Brown**, a Kalamazoo-based mini-farmer, musician, writer, and activist focused on agrarian life, equity, ecology, and sustainability. Mr. Brown will share a new vision of Eco-nomics grounded in planetary awareness, restoration, equity, and love for all living things as well as his personal journey towards hope at a time of ecological uncertainty. Click [HERE](#) to register.



January 18: A Conversation with Emilee Petersmark

Emilee Petersmark is a Grand Rapids-based artist and musician who favors dark, spiritual elements, creating unique and haunting imagery. Making a living as a touring musician with her band [The Crane Wives](#), Emilee takes inspiration from music and does much of her creating on the road. Emilee will join us to talk about the creative process and how she stays true to herself as she pursues her ambitions. Click [HERE](#) to register.



February: The Freedom to Choose Project with Bonnie Paul Ph.D.

The Freedom to Choose Project, based in California, transforms the lives of individuals impacted by incarceration through compassionate experiential education that has been proven to reduce prison violence and recidivism. We are excited to host its co-founder Bonnie Paul at our February Thoughtful Thursday to learn more about the project and how it is transforming lives.

Partner Outreach Team

Community partnerships are a powerful force for good when it comes to social change and impact. Building strong connections with community organizations can provide UCC with new ideas, resources, and ways of thinking that can help us spread our life-giving message to a larger audience and make the world a better place. If you are part of any organizations that might be good partners for UCC or if you are interested in helping us build connections in the community, consider joining our Partner Outreach Team. Contact Eric Nelson (ericvnelson1@gmail.com) to learn more.

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Building Beloved Community One Conversation at a Time

The UUCC Civil Conversations Group meets once a month via Zoom to help participants learn the skills that will help them engage in more meaningful conversations with family, friends, and others to authentically build a more Beloved Community.

The group's next meeting will be on **Thursday, December 14** at 7 PM. At this gathering, we will:



- Review what it takes to have a Civil Conversation
- Share Civil Conversations we had recently
- Engage in a 'practice' conversation on a controversial topic

Newcomers are always welcome to join in our Civil Conversations. Please feel free to invite friends to this gathering. We work to intentionally create a safe space by following our Civil Conversation's guidelines and intervening if necessary.

Click [HERE](#) to register for the December Civil Conversations Group meeting.

If you have any questions contact Civil Conversations Facilitators Darby Fetzer and Miriam Epskamp.

Finding Joy Through a Smaller Environmental Footprint!



On the third Monday of most months, the **UUCC Sustainability Group** meets to reflect on their personal sustainability journeys, to share their successes and failures, and to explore ideas for promoting sustainable living at UUCC and in the wider community.

At their November meeting the group made plans to for **the 2023 Holiday Edition of the 30-Day Sustainability Challenge**. If you didn't receive the Challenge via email recently, you can check it out [HERE](#). It is packed full of ideas to keep your holiday celebrations more earth-friendly. There are also printed versions of the Challenge by the Welcome Table if you prefer.

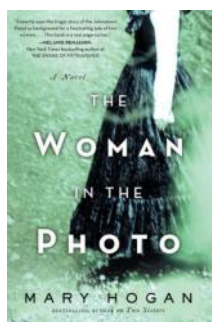
Another way to be more green this holiday season is to recycle! Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) Foam (aka **Styrofoam**) **Recycling** is available in Kalamazoo once every quarter. The next collection day is **Saturday, December 30**. Residents can drop off any amount of clean, dry foam labeled with a 6 symbol. Volunteers will be set up in the parking lot of **Mayors' Riverfront Park** from **10 AM to 1 PM** to collect the foam. Please note there will not be electronics recycling or paper shredding on December 30. Don't forget, you can also bring your foam recyclables to UUCC and leave them in the collection box by the Welcome Table and our Sustainability Group volunteers will make sure they get recycled.

Composting is another earth-friendly habit you should get into. The **UUCC Compost Bin** is still going strong. Thank you to everyone who has added their kitchen scraps to the bin! We removed our first batch of composted soil a few weeks ago. It is being stored in a bin next to the compost tumbler. Feel free to pick up some composted soil if you need some.

The group also shared some books about sustainability/climate change that you might want to check out: *The Water Will Come* by Jeff Goodell and *The Day the World Stops Shopping* by J.M. MacKinnon

In lieu of a December Zoom meeting, the group plans to attend **Pints and Native Plants** hosted by [Kalamazoo Wild Ones](#) on **Thursday, December 14** at **7:00 PM** at **Brewery Outré** in Kalamazoo. If you have any questions about Sustainability Group please contact Miriam—uucommunity@gmail.com

CONNECTION



Women's Book Group

December 8

1:00 PM

The Woman in the Photo

by Mary Hogan

Discussion Leader: Nancy Calme

From Goodreads:

In this compulsively readable historical novel, comes the story of two young women—one in America's Gilded Age, one in scrappy modern-day California—whose lives are linked by a single tragic afternoon in history.

1888: Elizabeth Haberlin, of the Pittsburgh Haberlins, spends every summer with her family on a beautiful lake in an exclusive club. Nestled in the Allegheny Mountains above the working class community of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Elizabeth summers with Carnegies, Mellons, and Fricks, following the rigid etiquette of her class. But Elizabeth is blessed with a mind of her own and when she discovers that the club's poorly maintained dam is about to burst and send 20 million tons of water careening down the mountain, she risks all to warn the townspeople in the lake's deadly shadow.

Present day: On her 18th birthday, genetic information from Lee Parker's closed adoption is unlocked. She also sees an old photograph of a genetic relative—a 19th-century woman with hair and eyes like hers—standing in a pile of rubble from an ecological disaster next to none other than Clara Barton. Determined to identify the woman in the photo and unearth the mystery of that captured moment, Lee digs into history. Her journey takes her from California to Johnstown, Pennsylvania, from her present financial woes to her past of privilege, from the daily grind to an epic disaster.

If you have any questions about Women's Book Group, please contact Stephanie Grathwol.

Click [HERE](#) to join the Zoom Meeting.

Meeting ID: 996 0783 5644 Passcode: 360981

Qigong Group

You are invited to join our weekly Qigong sessions, every Tuesday and Saturday morning at 9:00 AM. Newcomers are always welcome!



Click [HERE](#) for the TUESDAY Zoom link.

Meeting ID: 697 338 090 Passcode: 138550

Click [HERE](#) for the SATURDAY Zoom link.

Meeting ID: 977 5286 6838 Passcode: 383810

If you have any questions about the group, contact Freya Lake (freyalake@sbcglobal.net)



Game Gathering

Come to the 1st Saturday Game Gathering on **December 2** from

1-4 PM for an opportunity to play tabletop games or cards with your UUCG friends.

People of all ages are welcome. Childcare is available on request.

We will be meeting downstairs in the RE area to accommodate renters on the 1st floor. Please enter the building through the set of doors on the right to go directly downstairs.

Bring your favorite game, a beverage of choice, snack to share, and join us for a relaxing afternoon of fun, fellowship, and games.

3rd Saturday Breakfast Group

The UUCG Breakfast Group will change things up a bit this month when they meet for breakfast on **Saturday, December 16 at 9:30 AM** (instead of the usual 9:00 AM) at the **Elder/Senior LGBTQIA+ Pancake Breakfast** being held at UUCG in partnership with **OutFront Kalamazoo**.



More info about the breakfast can be found on page 15. Please contact Ron for more info about Breakfast Group:

ronald.crowell@wmich.edu or (269)599-1242.

OPPORTUNITIES

Senior/Elder LGBTQIA+ Pancake Breakfast



December 16, 2023 | 9:30 am - 11 am

**Unitarian Universalist Community Church of SW Michigan
10441 Shaver Rd, Portage, MI 49024**



Unitarian Universalist Community Church is pleased to be partnering with OutFront Kalamazoo to present a **Pancake Breakfast for LGBTQIA+ Older Adults** (55 and up) on Saturday, December 16 from 9:30-11:00 AM.

We hope to see many smiling UUCC folks at this event! LGBTQIA+ allies and supporters are welcome to attend. Click [HERE](#) to let us know you are coming.

If you have any questions about this event, contact Rev. Gy (gyludvig@gmail.com)



Readers Needed

UU Community Church is home to **Open House Theatre Company** (OHTC), a group that strives to provide accessible, educational, and inclusive theatrical experiences to members of the community regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, or economic status.

The folks at OHTC are very excited to be preparing for a future production and could use YOUR help. They need seven (7) volunteers to participate in a **table read** of local playwright Daniel Smith's new play on **December 10 at 12:30 PM**. The read-through should take about an hour and a half and the only skill-set needed is the ability to read out loud.

Participating in the table read does not commit you to participating in the final production. Hearing the play read aloud brings life to the work for the playwright and the director and gives them an opportunity to clarify goals, sharpen dialogue, and highlight areas of concern in the script.

Please contact OHTC Artistic Director, Mary Roscoe at lizoflynn@gmail.com if you are interested in helping with the reading. Thanks!!

MUUSJN

MICHIGAN
UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
SOCIAL
JUSTICE
NETWORK

Michigan faith communities
connected and empowered
to create a more just
and caring world



2024 Membership Drive



Get Out the Vote



Environmental Justice



LGBTQ+ Rights



Challenging Racism



Women's Rights



Economic Justice

Each year Unitarian Universalist Community Church sets aside funds to pay for annual membership dues to **Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network (MUUSJN)**. Supporting MUUSJN with our time, talent, and treasure is one of the ways UUCC puts our faith in action!

Established in 2002, MUUSJN's statewide social justice network of over 3000 people includes allies, activists, and clergy from 26 Michigan Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregations. The network's Board of Directors represents all parts of Michigan and its Advisory Council is linked to every UU Congregation in the state.

The network promotes legislative change by working in coalitions; organizing action alerts, hosting conferences and webinars; and publishing e-newsletters, a lively Facebook page, and a dynamic website.

MUUSJN has a solid record of achievement. It mobilizes our UU faith values to impact public policy through **advocacy, education, and public witness** on a wide range of issues including racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, immigration reform, economic justice, environment, water rights, access to reproductive health, healthcare reform, gun violence prevention, voting rights, and prison reform. Click [HERE](#) to learn more about what MUUSJN worked on in 2023.

MUUSJN relies on financial support from congregations **and individuals like YOU** to sustain its justice movement. Please consider becoming a member today not only to support ongoing projects and initiatives that amplify our UU values in the world but to send a powerful message about your commitment to justice and equality in Michigan.

Visit tinyurl.com/DonateMUUSJN to use PayPal to join with a credit or debit card or send a check made out to MUUSJN with "Membership Dues" in the memo line to Randy Block, Director, MUUSJN, 4220 Arlington Drive, Royal Oak, MI 48073.

For all the latest UU social justice news, sign up to receive [MUUSJN's Action Alerts](#) or visit their Facebook Page— facebook.com/MUUSJN

Put your faith in action!



DECEMBER



DAY	DATE	EVENT	TIME
Saturday	December 2	Qigong 1st Saturday Game Gathering	9:00 AM 1:00 PM
Sunday	December 3	Choir Practice <i>What Lies at the Core?</i> with Rev. Gy; UU Exploration for Kids After Service Social Time	9:00 AM 10:00 AM 11:00 AM
Tuesday	December 5	Qigong	9:00 AM
Wednesday	December 6	Board of Trustees Meeting	6:30 PM
Thursday	December 7	Stewardship Committee Meeting Thoughtful Thursday with Ben Brown	1:00 PM 7:00 PM
Friday	December 8	Women's Book Group Growth Team Meeting	1:00 PM 10:00 AM
Saturday	December 9	Qigong	9:00 AM
Sunday	December 10	Choir Practice <i>A Love Extravaganza</i> with Rev. Gy; UU Exploration for Kids Souper Sunday/After Service Social Time Program Council	9:00 AM 10:00 AM 11:00 AM 11:20 PM
Tuesday	December 12	Qigong	9:00 AM
Wednesday	December 13	Sunday Services Committee Meeting	5:30 PM
Thursday	December 14	Civil Conversations Group Sustainability Group at Pints and Native Plants	7:00 PM 7:00 PM
Saturday	December 16	Qigong 3rd Saturday Breakfast Group OutFront 55+ Pancake Breakfast	9:00 AM 9:00 AM 9:30 AM
Sunday	December 17	Choir Practice <i>A Winter Solstice Ritual</i> with Miriam and Friends; NO UU Exploration for Kids After-Service Social Time	9:00 AM 10:00 AM 11:00 AM
Tuesday	December 19	Qigong	9:00 AM
Wednesday	December 20	NEWSLETTER DEADLINE	12:00 PM
Saturday	December 23	Qigong	9:00 AM
Sunday	December 24	NO 10:00 AM; NO UU Exploration for Kids <i>A Candlelight Christmas Eve</i> with Rev. Gy and Chris Petersmark	10:00 AM 5:00 PM
Tuesday	December 26	Qigong	7:00 PM
Saturday	December 30	Qigong	9:00 AM
Sunday	December 31	<i>The Burning Bowl</i> with Rev Gy; UU Exploration for Kids After Service Social Time	10:00 AM 11:00 AM



Weather Emergencies: For the safety of our members and friends, we occasionally make the decision to cancel onsite Sunday Services in the event of severe weather or similar emergencies. If Rev. Gy and the Board President decide to cancel, we will send out an email via Mailchimp to let everyone know we are not meeting at the building. We will also post closing information on our Facebook page, on our website, and on WWMT's Closing Alerts as well as local radio stations, if time permits. On Sundays when we have had a lot of snow or are under a Winter Storm Warning, be sure to double check we are in session before heading out to church.

UU Community Church is served by:

Rev. Gy Ludvig-McCartney M.Div., M.A.
Consulting Minister
By Appointment Only
gyludvig@gmail.com
Cell: 269-352-2412

Miriam Epskamp
Office Administrator and
Director of Religious Education
uucommunity@gmail.com
Church office: 269-324-7262
Cell phone: 269-993-8758

Chris Petersmark
Music Director
christopherpetersmark@gmail.com
Cell phone: 248-535-4197

2023-2024 Board of Trustees

Steve Tasko

Eric Nelson

Pat Timm

Michael Graham

Marsha Laya

**The next Newsletter Deadline is
Wednesday, December 20 at NOON**

Please send submissions to:

uuccnewsletter@gmail.com

CommUUnity Matters

Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Southwest Michigan

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Portage, MI 49024
269-324-7262



uucommunity@gmail.com
uucommunitychurch.org
facebook.com/uuccswmi
instagram.com/uuccswmi/

NOW ON

