

Issue

**JANUARY 2025**

# The Foreword



**UU AMHERST**

*Fostering Justice  
and Compassion*

The Newsletter of the  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst  
6320 Main Street, Williamsville, NY 14221  
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Office Hours Tues.—Fri. 9am to 2pm [www.uuamherst.org](http://www.uuamherst.org)

## Our Staff:

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### Minister Emerita

Rev. Maureen Q. Thitchener

## Pluralism and You and UU, oh my!

Being a Unitarian Universalist, a faith that is intentionally expansive, can be a little bit complicated: How do we explain a pluralism that welcomes spiritual traditions and practices whose center is Love? At a time when the nation seems more polarized than at any other time in our lifetimes, how do we make space for and honor traditions that may not mirror our own?



Do those words seem familiar? They are how I began last month's newsletter reflection. Perhaps those questions will be the ones we engage in the months to come. We live in anxious times, and it seems like taking a step back to consider how the various aspects of pluralism might show up as Love, Finding Our Center, Change, Creativity, and Delight. What openness of heart will be required of us? Just how far does pluralism extend? What is our history and relationship with the notion that *wide* is just as important as *deep* (and where might we have lost our way)?

This month is a time of beginnings - a new year. A time for resolutions and inaugurations. Perhaps it will be useful to recall that January is named for Janus, the Roman god of beginnings & ending, exits & entrances, transitions & thresholds. He is depicted with two heads, one facing forward and one facing backward. May we have the wisdom to be both farseeing and reflective.

Warmly,  
Rev. Michelle

## Our Covenant

*Together we promise:  
To gather in compassionate  
community,  
To celebrate diversity of thought and  
unity of spirit;  
And to seek wholeness for ourselves,  
our children, and our world.*

## JANUARY SUNDAY SERVICES AT 10:30 AM

**1/5** Hibernating john Snodgrass

You don't need to sleep all winter to awaken in the spring.

john (lower case intentional) Snodgrass is a frequent and popular speaker at UU Amherst. An instructor in Religion at Canisius University, john is also a playwright and author of many books, the most recent being *Shakespeare's Goddess*.

**1/12** Pluralism in These Times? Rev. Michelle

Are we experiencing a great 'pendulum swing' as religious conservatives seem to be doubling down? Is this a reaction to the speed of social change? Is it possible for Unitarian Universalists to be a tempering influence? Is that desirable?

**1/19** The Sociology of Religion: New Identities, New Meanings, New Values  
Dr. Ken Culton, guest speaker

Dr. Ken Culton, Chair of the Department of Sociology at Niagara University, will discuss how sociologists have understood religion in the past and how that understanding has changed over time. He will present research on religion and the value of seeing religion from a sociological perspective. Findings from his 2022 paper, "Shifting Identifications Among Religious and Non-Religious Emerging Adults at a Northeastern U.S. Mainstream Denominational College" will be presented. Dr. Culton will also discuss some recent trends in religious identification in the US and some thoughts about his present research that is based on interviews with UU members.

**1/26** Life After Doom Rev. Michelle

This book by Brian McLaren bears the subtitle, "Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart." In the introduction, McLaren writes: *When you dance with doom, doom changes you...It can scare you and exhaust you and leave you paralyzed in despondency, cynicism, and bitterness. Doom can win and life can lose. But the dance can also change you for the better, leaving you more humble and honest, more thoughtful and creative, more compassionate and courageous...more human and alive.* I'm ready for this kind of dance; how about you?

### HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

This is a reminder that if you are experiencing financial hardship, you can reach out to Rev. Michelle, [minister@uuamherst.org](mailto:minister@uuamherst.org), for assistance from the Minister's Discretionary Fund. This Fund is made possible by the generosity of fellow congregants, and just one more way we demonstrate that no one is alone. We care for one another.

**Please note:** If you are approached at church by someone asking for money, please direct them to Rev. Michelle for assistance from the Minister's Discretionary Fund. Contributing to the fund is our shared ministry to help those in need.

## BOARD REPORT

As we move into the New Year, I look forward to continuing the progress we have made in building our congregational community with more families with children and more new members than we have had in some time. We now have a Faith Development Director and a choir contributing to our community. The Adopt-an-Angel program for the children at Gateway, our neighbor to the east, was a success (see page 11 of this newsletter). Many thanks to Marie Evans, Dian Tucker, Ruth Bowen, and Linda Joy Groat, and all those who contributed gifts.



The room that will contain our new boiler for heating the chapel has been completed and we await the arrival of one of the pumps needed for that system before it will be installed. We expect that the boiler installation construction will begin in January and I hope it will be completed before our Annual Meeting on Sunday, February 23rd. We are still accepting donations to defray the cost of the new boiler system.

Speaking of heating systems, the furnace that heats the first floor of our new Admin Wing which contains our offices needed work. This has led to it being made more efficient. We will no longer have to run the furnace fan continuously to provide heat thus saving energy and reducing our costs.

We have received the Wendel Architectural and Engineering Report, and we will begin sharing it with the congregation and discussing the options it presents.

2025 promises to be another eventful year for us all with more progress made.

I wish everyone a happy and safe New Year.

Randy Kent, Board Chair

### Rooms, Lights, Doors, & Heat

**If you have a meeting or event at church, please remember:**

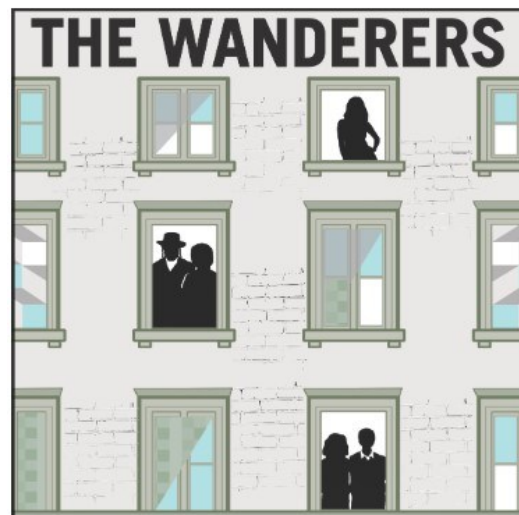
- Restore the room to its original state (or better)
- If you've turned up the heat, turn it down
- If you've turned on lights, turn them off
- The exception to lights are the vestibule/entry lights to the main lobby - please keep them on (or turn them on) so that those of us who might come to the building in darkness can see the entry
- If your group has generated food garbage, take to the kitchen receptacles or to the dumpster - no smells or critters!
- Make sure the exterior doors close and lock behind you

When in doubt, be ridiculously thoughtful. Thank you!

## THEATER LOVERS

Next up at Jewish Repertory Theatre is *The Wanderers* by Anna Ziegler, directed by JRT Artistic Director Saul Elkin, running February 6 - March 2, 2025. Showtimes are Thursdays: 7:30 pm; Saturdays: 3:30 pm and 7:30 pm; Sundays: 2:00 pm.

In this Off-Broadway hit, two marriages have seemingly little in common: Esther and Schmulik are Orthodox Jews navigating strictly defined rules and roles, while Sophie and Abe are secular and free to make their own choices. But both couples are growing apart as they strive to balance their individual identities with the families they've created. As Esther tests the boundaries of her personal freedom, Abe falls into a correspondence with a movie star that will shake the foundations of his marriage and career. From the playwright of JRT's hit production, *Photograph 51*, comes this funny, moving, and thoughtful play that asks if following one's truth is worth it, no matter the cost. Featuring an all-star cast including Arin Lee Dandes, Jordan Levin, Aleks Malejs, Alex Watts and Adam Yellen.



We are able to reserve discount tickets (\$30 per person) for the Thursday or Sunday performances. Look for the forms in the lobby at UU Amherst in a folder at the bottom of the Church Life bulletin board. Save the date Sunday, February 23, for our group outing. Place your order for the 2:00 pm show tickets ASAP because matinees sell out. Notify me by noon on Friday, February 21, to be included in the 4:00 pm dinner reservation at Lebro's Italian Restaurant (pay your own way).

Contact Marie Evans

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## UU AMHERST BOOK GROUP

UU Amherst's Book Club meets in the church Library/Living Room at noon on the last Sunday of the month (September through May). We alternate between picking a general TOPIC for the month (for which participants can choose any relevant book they'd like to read), and choosing one "common read" BOOK. All are welcome to attend our meetings, whether or not you've "done the reading."

### UPCOMING:

January 26 - BOOK: *The Office of Historical Corrections*

February 23 - TOPIC: celebrity memoir

March 30 - BOOK: *The Thursday Murder Club* by Richard Osman

Questions? Reach out to Marie Evans





## Ministry Train Notes

From the December 7th meeting:

Leaders from many of the ministry teams (plus interested congregants and a couple of Board members) gathered to share ideas that would promote community and offer programs and experiences that could also be open to the public. The “Firewall” justice awareness and action group is a combination of UUs and others who are concerned about the coming changes in our country. See Dian Tucker for more information.

The group also decided to move forward with a Somatic Yoga Event in the spring. Watch for more information in various UU Amherst publications.

Finally, the group decided to create a planning sub-group who would meet quarterly to pace and publicize events. The group consists of Rev. Michelle, Dian Tucker, Marie Evans, Linda Joy Groat, Ruth Bowen, Karen Thompson, Jill Fondiller, Wendy Scott, Sally Hamlin, and Katie Cosgrove.

Rev. Michelle borrowed another UU congregation’s helpful guide for determining projects and programs. The quarterly planning group will take these guidelines under consideration.

**Articulate Purpose & Goals:** It’s helpful to clarify the purpose or goal of your opportunity. Doing so will help focus your efforts, strengthen communication with potential participants about what you are offering, and help us understand what you are offering. Which purposes best fit your activity/class?

- a. **Learning & Sharing:** participants will learn new skills or gain knowledge
- b. **Connection:** participants will develop or strengthen relationships with each other
- c. **Belonging:** participants will feel a deeper sense of belonging to UU Amherst and/or Unitarian Universalism
- a. **Transformation:** participants may experience a new sense of agency, worldview, or self
- b. **Capacity Building:** participants will become newly equipped to care for our congregation

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## CONNECTIONS TEAM

The Name Tag Board has been reorganized to be current and alphabetized to make room for all our newcomers. If you can’t find yours, please see someone at the Welcome Desk.

The Connection Team provides outreach to newcomers to help them make quick connections to meaningful activities and relationships. Our goal for the new year is to increase membership and participation of members in general.

Anyone interested in learning about and/or joining our Connections Team, please email me.

Linda Joy Groat, [uuamherstconnections@gmail.com](mailto:uuamherstconnections@gmail.com)



## JANUARY 2025 CALENDAR

**PLEASE NOTE:** Some meetings are virtual-only; others are dual platform (Zoom and in-person); and some in-person only. See the notation after the meeting. Zoom links for general groups are published in the *Weekly Update* unless they are hosted on a private account. Zoom events taking place in the Zadmin or Zrev rooms are identified with the abbreviation.

**Room abbreviations:** EM (Emerson Room); LR Living Room); Bul (Bulfinch-FD Wing); EC (Ecology Center); Murray Meeting Room (MMR)

**Wednesday, January 1st**  
New Year's Day—Office Closed

**Saturday, January 4th**  
10:00 am: Lace Guild (rental) MMR

**Sunday, January 5th**  
12:00 pm: Amherst Little Free Pantry Meeting LR

**Tuesday, January 7th**  
10:30 am: LD&NC Meeting EM

**Wednesday, January 8th**  
5:30 pm: Finance Committee Meeting MMR

**Saturday, January 11th**  
10:30 am: Fun & Games EM

**Sunday, January 12th**  
12:00 pm: Poetry as Practice LR

**Wednesday, January 15th**  
1:00 pm: Ministry Train Planning MMR  
7:00 pm: Board Meeting MMR

**Sunday, January 19th**  
1:00 pm: Justice Advocacy Group EM

**Tuesday, January 21st**  
6:30 pm: Lace Guild (rental) MMR

**Saturday, January 25th**  
9:30 am: Ministry Train Meeting EM

**Sunday, January 26th**  
12:00 pm: UU Amherst Book Group

**Wednesday, January 29th**  
6:00 pm: Endowment Trust Meeting EM

**Friday, January 31st**  
3:00 pm: Grounds & Gardens Planning MMR

## RECURRING:

**UU Universe-ity Sunrise Sessions continues M-F 8:30 am.**

All "tree" names are for Village groups

**Saturdays, January 4th-25th**  
7:00 pm: Birch Bunch Zadmin

**Sundays, January 5th-26th**  
10:30 am: Sunday service—in-person and livestream; coffee hour following  
1/19 (3rd Sun)  
12:00 pm: Faith Development MMR

**Mondays, January 6th-27th**  
7:00 pm: Tulip Crabapples Zadmin (weekly)  
L. Marcus

**Tuesdays, January 7th-28th**  
12:30 pm: Women's Group (weekly) Zoom  
1/14 (2nd Tue)  
7:00 pm: Marlana's Covenant Group LR

**Wednesdays, January 1st-29th**  
1/9 (2nd Wed)  
1:30 pm: Caring Team Zoom  
1/16 (3rd Wed)  
1:30 pm: 3rd Wednesday Covenant Group  
7:00 pm: Northtowns Village

**Thursdays, January 2nd-30th**  
Weekly 1/2nd-30th  
10:00 am: Current Events (weekly) Zoom  
1/2 (1st Thr)  
12:00 pm: Men's Lunch (aka ROMEOS)  
(Buffalo Brew Pub)

**Reminder:** Groups, please restore rooms before leaving. Return chairs to their places and take any papers (etc) with you or dispose of them properly.

**Kitchen Storage:** All opened packages must be enclosed in plastic containers or Ziplock bags before placing in cupboards.



## Ministry Train Update

All aboard the Ministry Train! Truly, all are welcome to attend the meetings that bring the various areas of ministry together for mutual support, encouragement, and generating new ideas to enhance our connections and live into our mission as a congregation. The next meeting is Saturday, January 25, 9:30 am-12 noon in the Emerson Room at church. (If the weather is unruly, watch for a Zoom link!)

## MINISTRY & MORE

### Music at UU Amherst

#### Choir Call-Out & Rehearsals

If you are a singer in search of a song, join the choir! Questions? Contact Linda Delorey .

#### Instrumentalists Wanted

Do you play an instrument? Would you like to be part of a pick-up ensemble or even a soloist? Great! Contact Rev. Michelle (minister@uuamherst.org).

## Gathering Interest for Another Brené Brown Zoom Group

Last fall, a group of us met for 8 weeks and worked through the Dare to Lead program. I would like to offer another opportunity, beginning in late January, on Zoom. Please contact me if you are interested in participating. Linda Joy Groat

## Tuesday Women's Group

This month our in-person meeting will be Tuesday, January 7th. We will meet in the Emerson Room at 12:30 p.m. Bring your lunch and a beverage. Other meeting dates via Zoom are: January 14th, 21st, and 28th. See the *Weekly Update* for Zoom link and pass code.

## Save Old Newspapers & Cardboard Boxes

The garden group will use them to put under the wood chips in the gardens.

Please leave them in the back of the coat room. Thanks! Linda Joy



## Current Events Zoom Schedule Change in January

The Current Events meeting will be going to a once monthly schedule on the third Thursdays each month. The first date will be January 16th at 10:00 am on Zoom. The Zoom link and log-in details remain the same (see the *Weekly Update* for link).



## Fun & Games

### January 11th 10:30 am-1:00 pm

Our next game day will be on January 11th from 10:00 am-1:00 pm in the Emerson Room! Get ready for fun activities, games and maybe a little outdoor play!

A private, gender-neutral restroom is available on the second level of the house portion of our building. If you're offering a tour to a newcomer, be sure to mention that we have this accommodation.

## FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Here's a little prayer taken from *A Child's Book of Blessings and Prayers*, collected by Eliza Blanchard:

There is a love holding me.  
There is a love holding you.  
There is a love holding all.  
I rest in this love. (I, you, we)  
- Rebecca Parker (UU)



### Save the Date: Valentines for GSAs

Following service on Sunday, February 9th, we'll be creating valentines for our local GSA (Gender Sexuality Alliance) clubs to show our support and care. We'll be gathering in the Emerson Room to do so, which means coffee hour will be located in the lobby. Don't worry - you can still be in the Emerson Room if you're not making valentines but we encourage you to do so!

### Call for GSA Officers

The time has come to create a safe space for LGBTQIA+ youth by starting a UU Amherst GSA club. Currently, we're looking for officers. The only criteria is that the youth are in 10th-12th grade or a recent high school graduate. If you or someone you know is interested, please contact Katie Cosgrove at: [dfd@uuamherst.org](mailto:dfd@uuamherst.org).

### Chalice Chests

As we step into the new year, we're excited to offer a new way for our families to celebrate and explore the rhythms of the seasons together. On December 22nd, during our winter solstice (Yule) gathering, we distributed Chalice Chests—decorated shoeboxes that will be filled with small treasures and symbols that honor each of the Wheel of the Year holidays. These chests are designed to spark curiosity, deepen understanding, and bring the spirit of each seasonal celebration into your home.

In community,  
Katie Cosgrove she/her  
Director of Faith Development

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## AMHERST LITTLE FREE PANTRY

If you're making in-kind (grocery) donations, please keep in mind that the pantry is outdoors and we'd prefer dry goods as much as possible - breakfast cereal, pasta, side dish mixes, baking mixes, oatmeal packets, coffee, and hot chocolate mix packets. As we head into freezing temperatures, we put out only tuna in oil.

Keep sending in canned fruit, shelf-stable milk, Chef Boyardee products, soups, and pasta sauce – whatever we stock is taken quickly each day. Peanut butter is another constant need. Baked or refried beans have low water content and are slower to freeze than other canned beans. The pantry will not be stocking toothpaste or tuna in water until spring, but we have indoor storage for any that are donated in the meantime.



Thank you to all our donors and volunteers. Our ministry is much appreciated by our users!

Questions? Contact Marie Evans, Chair



## **NOMINATING & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

We want to give a sincere thank you to the presenters at our December Leadership Sunday Service. They each did a superb job telling our church family about our many teams and events. We hope this has encouraged other members of the congregation to step-up and join an area of interest.

We plan to start off the New Year discussing a few surveys we have in mind. Wishing Everyone A Healthy and Happy New Year!

Suzanne Christ, on behalf of Committee members: Jacquelyn Senders, Chairperson; Marlana Rice; Jacqueline Babka; and Linda Gardner, Liaison from the Board of Trustees.

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## **CLOTHING MINISTRY**

Happy 2025!

2024 was a good year for our ministry. We estimate we supplied at least 2,600 items of clothing and at least that many accessories to our neighbors in WNY in 2024. At this time of year we are in need of gloves, boots, and coats. Any warm clothing is welcome.

Do you want to be more involved with the clothing ministry? We are looking for helpers who are willing to commit to a regular schedule, who can climb stairs and carry armloads of clothing and accessories from the clothing room to the pantry rack. Contact Dian Tucker, Pam Kent or Barbara Kent Gauger to become more involved. We also process bags and boxes of clothing. It is a very satisfying ministry to be involved with and we welcome your involvement.

Clothing Ministry Team, Dian and Don Tucker, Pam and Jerry Kent, Barry Kent and Barbara Kent Gauger

### **Coordination of Caretaker Duties—January**

Sunday, December 29 - Saturday, January 4 - Bruce Becker

Sunday, January 5 - Saturday, January 11 - Dian & Don Tucker

Sunday, January 12 - Saturday, January 18 - Bob Johnson

Sunday, January 19 - Saturday, January 25 - Barry Kent

Sunday, January 26 - Saturday, February 1 - Randy Kent



## ENDOWMENT TRUST

2025 begins with so much uncertainty and anxiety. UU Amherst must continue its active presence as the alternative/refuge, promoting its values of democracy, justice, transformation, interdependence, generosity, plurality and equity. It can only persist with your generosity. As is often said during Sunday Service:  
We pick fruit from trees we did not plant;  
We drink water from wells we did not dig;  
This is as it should be, as long as we dig and plant for those who come after us.

Become a member of the Legacy Society by letting the Endowment know that you have included a bequest to the UUCA Endowment Trust in your will. Make the Endowment Trust the beneficiary of one of your financial assets, like life insurance, IRA, brokerage accounts, or trust. Lower your tax burden by donating directly from an IRA in the form of a Qualified Charitable Deduction (QCD). You can also give through a Donor Advised Fund. If you have any questions about any of these ways of giving, please talk to our treasurer, Barry Kent.

As of November 30th, the total value of our funds with Level Wealth Management was \$1,181,263.78 with an additional \$5,000 in the Citizen Bank account. The next scheduled meeting for the Endowment has been changed to **Wednesday, January 29th at 6:00 pm** in person at UU Amherst. in the Emerson Room. If you are interested in attending our meeting, please let one of the trustees know.

Lauraine Marcus, on behalf of the Endowment Trustees John Thompson, Dian Tucker; Barry Kent, Tammy Kofke, Nominee to the Endowment: Eric Groat



## Adopt-an-Angel Update

Thank you to everyone who donated funds or gifts for the 2024 Gateway Longview Adopt an Angel program! Gateway was very appreciative of our participation and featured a photo of the delivery team at their sorting/storage facility: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/19nX7P1J4z/>

Marie Evans, Dian Tucker, Ruth Bowen, Linda Joy Groat

Shown dropping off Adopt-an-Angel gifts L to R: Marie Evans, Linda Joy Groat, Ruth Bowen and granddaughter, Maddie.

## CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER RECIPES Provided by Christine Boczarska and Faith Pham

Christine Boczarska and Faith Pham are sisters and dedicated members of our Caring For One Another group. They provide occasional meals to UU Amherst members on an as-needed basis. With the meal they generally include a “goodie bag” and a card on behalf of the Caring Group. Each month you’ll find one of their healthy recipes here in *The Foreword* often incorporating fresh vegetables and even gluten-free.

The following is perfect comfort food for the cold days of winter

### Skillet Chicken Potpie

- 1 1/2 cups low-sodium chicken broth divided
- 1 Tb all-purpose flour
- 1 Tb olive oil
- 8 oz cremini mushrooms, sliced
- 1 cup chopped onions
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 cups frozen carrots and peas
- 1 Tb chopped fresh sage
- 1 Tb fresh thyme leaves
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp ground pepper
- 1 lb shredded cooked chicken (about 3 cups)
- 1 (7-8 oz) prepared pie crust, thawed if frozen
- 1 egg white, lightly beaten



Preheat oven to 425°. Whisk 1 1/4 cups of broth and flour in a medium bowl; set aside.

Heat oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Add mushrooms; cook until browned, 6-8 minutes. Reduce heat to medium. Add onion and garlic; cook until tender about 4-6 minutes,

Stir in the remaining broth, scraping up any browned bits. Stir in the reserved broth-flour mixture, peas and carrots, sage, thyme, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Reduce heat and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are tender, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in chicken.

Lay pie crust over the chicken mixture, folding the edges over as needed. Cut 4-inch slits in the crust to allow steam to escape. Brush with egg white. Bake until the crust is golden and the filling is bubbly, 20-25 minutes. Let cool 10 minutes before serving.



### UU Tapestry Artist, Nancy Belfer

In December, we learned that renowned Buffalo fiber artist, Nancy Belfer, passed away at the age of 95.

UU Amherst is the home of one of her fiber arts. The large weaving can be found in the chapel/sanctuary, just as you enter. In a room that is dominated by windows, it must have been difficult to find a space to accommodate the large tapestry.

Next time you're at UU Amherst and entering the chapel, look up! And then look around. We are blessed with so much artistry throughout the building: weavings, paintings, photographs, carpentry. Open yourself to the abundance that has been so generously shared for your pleasure and upliftment.



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