

THE ADIRONDACK COMMUNITARIAN



A Monthly Newsletter of the Adirondack Unitarian Universalist Community

VOLUME 63

January 2008

A note from the President

I hope you all had a wonderful Holiday season. If you like the snow....there was plenty to play in this year.

I always try to take some time over the Holiday to reflect on the past year. I catch up on family scrapbooks and photo albums and look ahead to prospects for the New Year.

The AUUC also had a busy and event filled year. We accomplished a lot with the move to the new space highlighting our changes and growth. We have been adapting to our new space and getting into a nice groove as far as our services are concerned. Gail Brill and the Programming Committee have done a great job keeping the services educational and inspirational.

This is a good time of year for all of us to consider what AUUC means to us and what we would like to see it become. I ask you to take a little time to reflect on how AUUC impacted your life this last year. Is it all that you want it to be? What changes would you like to see happen?

Starting in March I will be organizing at least two meetings to be held after services during which time you can share those thoughts and discuss the present and future AUUC. The meetings will be a prelude to our spring Stewardship Campaign which will culminate in a "Pledge Sunday" on April 27.

So as you begin to think about your plans and hopes for the New Year, give a little thought as to how the AUUC fits into those aspirations.

OK. All for now. Have fun in the snow.

Randall Swanson



Event Calendar

Sunday, January 13

Sunday Service, 10 am

“Inherent Worth and Other Assumptions” — Wade Wheelock and Anne Marsh Much of what we hold true about life cannot be proved, but a core set of beliefs are crucial for how we shall live. We'll start off the new year with Wade sharing his conviction in the UU principle of the inherent worth of every person, and other fundamental assumptions about the universe.

After service discussion on Hinduism — Stay after the service and Wade will discuss the Hindu caste system (covered in chapter 4 of his book, *Considering the Asian Religions*, though no prior reading or experience required!). This will be part of an occasional series on “Asian Spiritual Snacks,” a parallel to Anne’s “Brown Bag Bible.” Bring some lunch and we’ll go about an hour. On February 10th, we’ll aim for a morsel of Buddhism.

Sunday, January 27

Sunday Service, 10 am

Details about the service will be forth-coming!

Looking Ahead!

January 26

Talent Show
Harrietstown Town Hall

February 5, 7-9 pm

Hollywood Canteen
Will Rogers

April 26, 7:30

Roy Hurd Benefit Concert
Pendragon

Coffee Hour

Coffee hour hosts for the month of January:

Jan 13 The McCurdys

Jan 27 Amy Kohanski



FUND-RAISING NOTES

It's time to think about the Talent Show on January 26! Barb Rexilius and her family, Reiko, Kevin and children will again “man” the refreshment booth at the Harrietstown Hall! The committee has decided to offer drinks, sandwiches, cookies, brownies, Henri’s bolts and candybars. Please sign up to bring same at our next AUUC meeting.

Next on the agenda is our Hollywood Canteen complete with the Andrews Sisters plus One and Dick Freeberg to help us with '40's style dancing. Debbie Kanze at Will Rogers is helping make sure that the evening is festive and colorful. That event is held on Feb. 5, '08 from 7-9 pm so mark your calendars!

Finally, for now, is the Roy Hurd Concert on April 26 at 7:30 pm at the Pendragon. This is a fundraiser just for us so we hope that everyone will come and sell tickets for us!

Happy New Year!

--Elaine Holmlund

Poinsettia Power!



Pictured here are Mary Beth Kikel and Sarah Wardner, RN, Patient Care Coordinator for High Peaks Hospice with poinsettias from AUUC for hospice patients.

Sandy Bandru, Development Coordinator, sent a note of thanks and appreciation for all that we do through Flower Power for their patients.

Ministerial Message



In Partnership

The other morning, I woke, as perhaps you do sometimes, to feelings of deep sorrow for the violence in our world and for the deaths and losses in our lives. Then I looked out the kitchen window and watched the early-morning sunlight sparkle on the icy tree branches in our backyard. Magical. And I said, “Okay, universe. Which is it? Is life about pain or is life about beauty?” It was not a rhetorical question. And the answer, of course, is “yes.” Life is about pain and beauty, love and loss, grief and gratitude. One of the things I’m most grateful for in difficult times is the poetry of Mary Oliver. Here’s one about winter — both the winter on the calendar and the chill that is sometimes in our hearts, whatever the temperature outside.

The snow
began slowly,
a soft and easy sprinkling
of flakes, then clouds of flakes
in the baskets of the wind
and the branches of the trees —
oh, so pretty.

We walked
through the growing stillness,
as the flakes prickled the path,
then covered it,
then deepened
as in curds and drifts,
as the wind grew stronger,
shaping its work less delicately,
taking greater steps over the hills
and through the trees
until, finally,
we were cold,
and far from home.

We turned
and followed our long shadows back
to the house,
stamped our feet,
went inside, and shut the door.

Through the window
we could see
how far away it was to the gates of April.

Let the fire now
put on its red hat
and sing to us.

In times of grief and loss, how far it feels to “the gates of April.” But let us remember the beauty that is as real as the pain. Let us open our hearts and light fires of warmth and comfort for each other.

— Anne

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Domestic Violence Intervention Program. Comlinks has been in the news and the news is not favorable. Since day one when we started to volunteer we knew that there were serious communication problems. We saw employees leave. We saw how ineffective managing a shelter in Saranac Lake from Malone was. We saw a lovely facility on Church Street changed and reduced to minimal staff. No victim of domestic violence should have to make a phone call of desperation and reach an answering machine or be put on “hold” or be told that someone will get back to them. The local advocates here are great, dedicated and overworked. I know that the many tasks that we did for the safe house in Saranac Lake helped them and the residents there. It has been an amazing year. The problems lie at the top and as Shakespeare noted in Hamlet, “Something is rotten in Denmark”. We will still be helping here when asked, because the employees here and the shelter inhabitants are victims of mismanagement and political turmoil, so we will not turn our backs on them. Stay tuned.

Food Pantry. There have been items in the press about the shortages of food in the Food Pantries around upper New York State. The Governor even addressed this issue. Peanut butter is rationed and not handed out by request. At our Interfaith Food Pantry here in Saranac Lake, it was only given to a family with four children at one time. We can help. Sunday February 17 will be “Peanut Butter Sunday”. When you come to church, please bring a jar of peanut butter. Thank you.

--Joyce

Green Circle - January Notes



At the December meeting of the Green Circle, we decided to have a goal of the month. Lasting change happens in small increments. The goal for December was to deplete our junk mail. You can make this one of your goals for the month of January. Here are some ways to take action on that:

<https://www.catalogchoice.org/signup>

<http://www.ecocycle.org/junkmail/index.cfm>

If you don't have a computer, grab that 7th copy of the L.L.Bean catalog you received this holiday season (or any and all catalogs you want to stop) and call them. Give them your customer number, (usually located on the back of the catalog near your address). They will take you off the mailing list and eventually you will stop the hemorrhaging!

It seems that there has been a shift in consciousness. Everywhere I go people are talking about making changes and tuning into a greener way. I was at a dinner party this past month and a group of us were lamenting our inability to make the changes we want to. I was talking about my holiday lights. I wanted to replace the power sucking strings with the environmentally friendlier LED lights. My dilemma was: do I add to the landfill problems by throwing out my old lights even though they still work? How do I dispose of them in a green way? Should I make art out of them? It seemed crazy to throw them out when they were still functioning and I didn't want to give them away because no one should be using them...my holiday dilemma was described as "green guilt". How well I know it, as do many of my friends.

A little guilt can spur you on to make those changes you need to make, but it can also be debilitating. So I say, do what you can to make changes, but don't

paralyze yourself with guilt about not doing everything you can.

My hopes for the New Year are that those in power make strides towards a more sustainable future for America and the world.

In Fellowship,
Gail Brill

P.S. For those of you that are interested in jumping in, the Green Circle (now consisting of about 19 people; most non-AUUCers) will be meeting on February 3rd, Sunday morning at 10am. Call me to find out where. 891-7230.

Solstice Service Reprise

*These words were read by Nancy Murphy at the
Community Solstice Service*

Introduction – adapted from Shannon Klasell

In a few hours the Winter Solstice will arrive.

The year circles – again.

Darkness and light approach each other across
today, tiptoe near each other in this night.

I say let's sing.

Let's sing about the darkness, the waiting, the
circling.

Let's sing for the joy of singing.

As the new light hovers just over the horizon, we
celebrate joy, love, and laughter.

We wish for peace to grow in our hearts like the light
we sing about now.

Winter Solstice 2005 – by Shannon Klasell

Time shudders -

We pause in the brilliant darkness,
in a delicious, icy and empty world.

Shrouded in hot breath,
we wait to be remade.

Time sighs -

We wake from this little death,
shake ourselves and wander on -
breathing life into a world
where mountains glow in moonlight.

Celebrating the Solstice

This sermon was presented by Annette Scheuer at the Community Solstice Service

From the dimmest dawning of history, the days around the winter solstice were regarded as a time of special significance. Winter festivals were observed by many tribes of people who were lacking in civilization, but had learned to become close observers of the world around them. It isn't difficult to imagine their feelings as summer gave way to harvest, as the leaves began to fall from the trees, as the first snows of winter began to sprinkle the earth. The people would be troubled as the life-giving sun sank lower in the sky each noon. They feared that it would eventually disappear and leave them in permanent darkness and extreme cold. They (more or less) knew that the winter would eventually yield to spring. At least, it always had in the past. But in the absence of exact knowledge as to why the seasons changed as they did, there was always room for doubt. Maybe it wouldn't happen this time. Perhaps the days would go on getting shorter and shorter, colder and colder, until the world was swallowed up in a perpetual night.

Many, many cultures the world over perform solstice ceremonies. At their root is an ancient fear that the failing light would never return unless humans intervened with anxious vigil or antic celebration.

So the approach of the winter solstice was marked with growing apprehension. Elaborate ceremonies took place. As the critical time approached, huge fires were kindled on the hilltops to imitate the light and warmth of the retreating sun, and to lure it back by sympathetic magic. When it became apparent that the magic was working, that the days were lengthening instead of shortening, and that the sun was returning, the feelings of relief and joy were expressed in the greatest celebration of the year. All normal activities came to a halt, to be replaced by singing, dancing, and feasting.

If the primeval fear of never-ending darkness was one major concern, the other was the ancient myth of the divine birth, or rebirth, which symbolizes the growing sunlight and lengthening days that each year follow the winter solstice. Our ancestors celebrated the return of the sun and the promise of new and continuing life.

In most parts of Europe, houses were decorated with greenery during this season. Just as the fires were supposed to attract the sun back, the display of evergreens was thought to encourage the rebirth of the hero-god, symbols of the earth's vegetation. In the autumn the god sickened and died or was slain, and went to dwell in the underworld. In the spring he returned, and the earth became green again. He was known by many names: Osiris, Apollo, Adonis, Dionysus, and Mithra, among others. In ancient Egypt the god-man/savior Osiris died and was entombed on DEC-21. "At midnight, the priests emerged from an inner shrine crying 'The Virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing' and showing the image of a baby to the worshipers. Early Christian representations of Mary and Jesus, the Madonna and Child, were imitations of the Egyptian god Horus and his mother Isis.

In Rome, the Saturnalia, a feast held in honor of Saturn, the god of the harvest, was celebrated on December 17. The festivities lasted a full week, until the winter solstice on December 25, known as Brumalia. It was a time for visiting friends and feasting, and the Romans exchanged gifts of copper, silver and gold coins, candles and sweets. Among the laws of Saturnalia passed by the Roman Senate were the following: "All business, be it public or private, is forbidden during the feast days, such as tends to sport and solace and delight. Let none follow their vocations, save cooks and bakers. All men shall be equal, slave and free, rich and poor, one with another. Anger, resentments, threats, are contrary to law. No discourse shall be either composed or delivered, except it be witty and lusty, conducing to mirth and jollity."

Clearly the Pagan spirit of the Saturnalia has never died. It remains alive and well beneath the traditional Christmas and New Year's celebration.

A few days after the end of Saturnalia, on January 1, the Romans celebrated the festival of Calends, or New Year. Our word "calendar" is derived from this name. Here is a description of the Calends, which could easily apply to the modern holiday season: "Everywhere may be seen carousels and well-laden tables; luxurious abundance is found in the houses of the rich, but also in the houses of the poor where better food than usual is put on the table. The impulse to spend seizes everyone. One who the whole year through has taken pleasure in saving and piling up his money becomes suddenly extravagant. People are not only generous toward themselves, but toward their fellows. A stream of presents pours itself out on all sides. It may be justly said that this is the fairest time of the year. The Calends festival banishes all that is connected with toil, and allows people to give themselves to undisturbed enjoyment. From the minds of the young people it removes the dread of the schoolmaster."

In the year 273 C.E., the Roman Emperor Aurelian, who had become an ardent worshiper of the Syrian sun god Baal, decreed that the day of the winter solstice, December 25, should be observed as Natalis Solis Invicti, the birthday of the unconquerable sun. This was to the distinct advantage of Mithraism, a religion which for two centuries had been the chief rival to Christianity in the Roman world. Originally a Persian deity, Mithra had become closely associated with the worship of the sun. He was said to have descended to earth, been born of a Virgin, and shown human beings the way to salvation and eternal life. He then ascended into heaven again, where he rode across the sky each day in his solar chariot. He was often described as "the good shepherd" and the "sun (s-u-n) of righteousness." His followers met regularly on the first day of the week, Sun-day, to share a sacred meal of bread and wine.

The cult of Mithra was especially popular amongst the Roman legions. It provided Christianity with serious competition, and for a time appeared likely to become the official religion of the empire. But early in the fourth century the Emperor Constantine, who had been a sun worshiper most of his life, converted to Christianity, and proceeded to make *it* the state religion instead.

Rather than participating in the holiday merrymaking, the early leaders of the Christian church denounced it. St. Augustine wrote: "They both give and receive diabolical

presents, some people, moreover, lay tables with plenty of things necessary for eating, thinking that thus the Calends of January will be a guarantee that all through the year their feasting will be in like measure abundant. Our holy fathers of old, considering that the majority of men on those days became slaves to gluttony and riotous living and raved in drunkenness and impious dancing, determined that throughout the church a public fast should be proclaimed. For he who on the Calends shows any civility to foolish men who are wantonly sporting, is undoubtedly a partaker of their sin." It seems that New Year's celebrations haven't changed much in the last two thousand years!!

The leaders of the church tried repeatedly to suppress celebrations of the winter solstice and the New Year. Mostly their efforts were ignored. Constantine refused to pass edicts against the festivals because he feared the non-Christian population of Rome would turn against him if he did. And large numbers of Christians, who were recently baptized Pagans themselves, kept right on celebrating the holidays.

Eventually the church adopted the policy, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." During its first three centuries of existence, Christianity had not bothered to observe the birthday of its founder. No one even knew the *year* in which Jesus had been born, much less the exact *day*. But in the fourth century, Pope Julius I announced that the "true" date had been determined. It was, of course, December 25.

By deliberately superimposing the celebration of Christ's birthday on the Roman Saturnalia and the Natalis Solis Invicti, the church hoped to replace those festivals with a regimen of worship. Eventually the entire period from December 17 to January 6 was declared a time of fasting. But everyone kept right on celebrating, just as their Pagan ancestors had. The Christ Mass was never successful in suppressing the old festivities. On the contrary, it tended to spread them. As Christianity moved into France, England, and Germany, so did the Roman custom of riotously celebrating the end of the old year and the beginning of a new one.

The custom of having a *tree* as a central focal piece in winter holiday celebrations can also be traced back hundreds of centuries. The ancient Egyptians had a custom of bringing branches from palm trees into their homes on the shortest day of the year each December. The Chinese and Hebrews from ancient history had similar traditions, too. The Scandinavians are attributed with beginning such customs as the Advent Wreath and the Yule Log, and were known to decorate their houses and barns with evergreens during winter celebrations. The Vikings of Northern Europe believed the evergreen to represent the promise of the return to spring once winter had passed. In Italy, Romans decorated trees with candles and trinkets during Saturnalia. The Druids, in France and England, dressed oak trees with fruit in honor of the gods of harvest. Because oaks were considered sacred, elaborate ceremonies were attached to the bringing in of the log, and on the eve of Dec. 25 it was rekindled with the remainder of the previous year's log. An old poem says:

*Kindle the Christmas brand, and then Till sunneset let it
burne;
Which quencht, then lay it up agen, Till Christmas next
returne.
Part must be kept, wherewith to tend, The Christmas log
next yeare;
And where 'tis safely kept, the fiend can do no mischief
there.*

The origin of the word Yuletide, often used to refer to the holiday season, is uncertain. It may have been derived from the old gothic "gul" or "huil", which meant "wheel". In reference to the winter solstice, it would have signified the great wheel of the year, the turning of the seasons.

So what does it mean in our day and age to celebrate the Winter Solstice? Perhaps it simply means luring back the sun and the longer hours of light and warmth it brings; or maybe honoring the growth, energy and life force of things we can not see in darkness, recognizing that they are manifesting even when hidden; We might honor our faith in the silence, darkness and mystery of life, from which new creation emerges, reflecting on the safe incubation of the earth, the sea, the human heart, the human mind, the womb... where life, solutions and inspiration find nourishment in fertile space. We reclaim hope in the face of troubles, knowing that the seeds of change are always present.

Celebrating the Winter Solstice is as appropriate now as it has ever been, or maybe more so, regardless of whether or not you follow a more traditional religious observance at this time of the year.

As Unitarian Universalists, we believe that the Sacred is found *all* around us and *within* each of us; that every person has inherent worth and dignity, that all life forms are worthy of reverence, and above all, that all life is connected in an interdependent web of existence, held together by the mysterious life forces of the universe. We accompany each other in the search for truth and meaning, and we embrace inspiring new knowledge as the mysteries of our wondrous universe continue to reveal themselves to us.

We all share in the common human experience. People have many different ways of practicing their own spirituality, but we are all family on this planet. We all experience joy, sorrow, health, illness, fear, cold, heat, birth, and death. And we all share in the turning of the seasons, whether we like the seasons or not!

So yes, it makes perfect sense that as different as we are culturally, ethnically, physically, and religiously, we celebrate the Solstice, because it reminds us of our common ground. In these colder days, and longer, darker, nights of winter, why not delight in celebrating in the same way our ancestors celebrated — with gusto, with reverence, with imagination, with joy, with humility, with hearts full of overflowing with a deep appreciation for all the songs, symbols, and customs with which we have been gifted.

Christmas Memories Service



The Children's choir, performing at the Christmas Memories service.

Photos courtesy of Nancy Murphy

Community Solstice Celebration



Symbols of the Winter Solstice, at the AUUC Community Solstice Celebration.

Photo provided by Marcy Woodland

My Opinion: Our Beloved Adirondack Unitarian Universalist Community

We are called to gather in worship as a beloved community. We are called to set aside distractions and anxieties, that we might touch deeper springs and be renewed. We are called to seek and to share comfort for the hurts that afflict. We are called to desire more love, more justice, and life more abundant. We are called to truth, to mercy, to humility, and to courage. Let us answer the call with the yes of our lives.

--Kirk D. Loadman-Copeland

I wanted to share with my beloved AUU Community how deeply grateful I am for all of you. After the richness of the Solstice Service and the Sunday morning Christmas Service, I felt so connected and loved and

spiritually uplifted by our being together. We have come far as a small congregation. We have grown into a valuable, sacred, welcoming group of kindred spirits. In an email I sent to Peggy Roche, I said: *I really feel that AUUC is a beloved community of people that care deeply about each other and our world. We are all so blessed to be together in this sacred community. We can watch the children grow, help our elders as they age and hold hands as we make our way through an often scary and difficult but always wonder filled life.*

How lucky are we! I look forward to the year ahead with all of you.

Love, Gail

Contact Numbers

www.adkuu.org

Ministers:	Revs. Anne Marsh and Wade Wheelock 315-386-2809; yajur@verizon.net	
President:	Randall Swanson	891-3512
Secretary:	Nan Palmateer	891-9687
Treasurer:	Chris McGrew	523-9462
Trustees:	Richard Kelly	523-1133
	Emily Warner	327-3605
	Paul Van Cott	891-2628
	Stanley Ingison	946-7465
Adult Programming:	Gail Brill	891-7230
	Emily Warner	327-3605
	Laura Jean Swanson	891 3512
	Joyce Henklein	891-7761
	Annette Scheuer	891-9498
Children's Programming:	Jenni McGrew	523-9462
Communitarian:	Marcy Woodland	891-5997
	(mblackman@trudeauinstitute.org)	
Community Outreach:	Joyce Henklein	891-7761
Congregant Care:	Henrietta Trapp	523-8185
	Thirza Ecker	891-9710
Flower Power Program:	Mary Beth Kikel	891-3930
	Nancy Murphy	891-6602
Hospitality Coordinator:	Nancy Read	891-9420
Place:	Randall Swanson	891-3512
	Stanley Ingeson	946-7465
Fund-raising:	Elaine Holmlund	891-6717
Publicity and Advertising:	Gail Brill	891-7230
Web Master:	Katherine White	
	(white@paulsmiths.edu)	



**We the member congregations of the Unitarian
Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and
promote**

-The inherent worth and dignity of every person.

-Justice, equity and compassion in human relations.

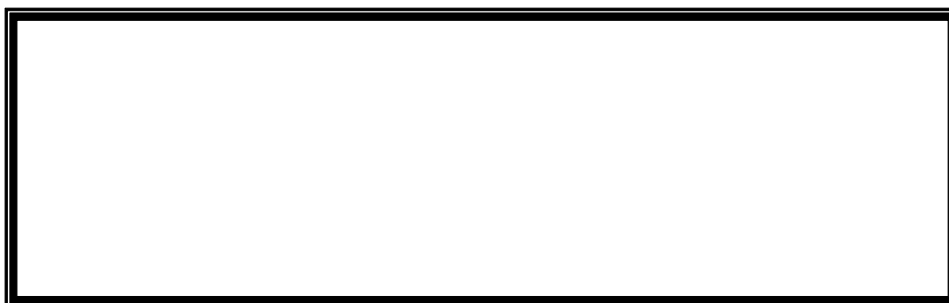
*-Acceptance of one another and encouragement to
spiritual growth in our congregations.*

-A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

*-The right of conscience and the use of democratic
process within our congregations and in society at
large.*

*-The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and
justice for all.*

*-Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of
which we are a part.*



From the "Church of the open mind, loving heart and helping hand" to

**Adirondack Unitarian Universalist Community
89 Church Street
Saranac Lake, NY 12983**