

December 2021

Uniter



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF SILVER SPRING
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WORSHIP SERVICES

December 2021 Worship

Sunday morning worship--10:00 am, Prelude; 10:30 am, Service

UUCSS is proud to offer hybrid worship on Sunday mornings. Some of us gather together in person in the Sanctuary and others tune in online. Masks are required at all times on church property, except when eating and drinking. All services are offered both in-person in the Sanctuary and online unless otherwise noted. Online links sent out in weekly all-church email and on Sunday mornings.

December 5: Kindling the Lights, Dr. Laura Solomon

This week, those among us who are Jewish have been celebrating Hanukkah. What does the story of Hanukkah have to teach us who are Jewish, and how might the miracle of this holiday light our way through these days? Join Laura Solomon, Director of Spiritual Growth, for this service of miracles and hope.

December 12: People Who Need People, *Service leaders:* Catherine Buckler, MaryBeth Lerner, Jake Ryder, Carolyn Savadkin, and Kathryn Leete from the Racial Justice Task Force

How can exploring the 8th Principal help us get through the dual pandemics of Covid 19 and Racism? Join the Racial Justice Task force for this exploration of who we are in our UUCSS community, as people who need people, and how we can use the wisdom of the 8th principal to help us weather both pandemics of Covid 19 and Racism.

December 19: Joy in the Darkest Night, Rev. Kristin Grassel Schmidt

This week in worship we gather in song, spirit, experience, and ritual as we open to the joy in this season of dark, cold nights. This is a service for all ages and there is no Religious Education for children this week.

Friday, December 24: 7:00 pm, Christmas Eve for All Ages

This night may not be so silent, but it will certainly be holy when we gather together to recall the Christmas story and consider what it means for us here, today. Our one hybrid Christmas Eve service this year will include sacred scripture, special music by our fabulous choir, a Christmas homily, lots of carols, and singing Silent Night by candlelight.

December 26: Worship Online only; Church building closed today. Eric Byrd Trio

UUCSS welcomes the amazing Eric Byrd Trio for a pre-recorded service of reflection and music from *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. There is no Religious Education today.

INSPIRE

Minister's Column by Rev. Kristin Grassel Schmidt



For most of my adult life I've been a bit of a stickler for giving each holiday its due. I was one of those people who would roll my eyes when I heard Christmas music in the grocery store the day after Halloween, I banned Christmas movies and music until after Thanksgiving, I'd wait until right before Christmas to set up the tree, you know the type. Each season brings its own foods that are special because they are only at their best that time of year, and that's how I thought about the holidays. But last year, the pandemic changed all of that.

Our family's need for joy in the midst of the most difficult year we'd ever faced meant all of the old regulations went out the window. We did nearly everything I always said I'd never do, and the joy it brought was truly life-giving. And though the pandemic meant we missed out on some of our most cherished traditions, last year was perhaps the time in my life I've identified most with sacred stories of people longing for a reason to hope, yearning for victory over injustice, hoping for a miracle.

This year our worship theme for December is "Opening to Joy." I'm especially excited about the work of the new Afghan Resettlement Task Force, and the opportunity we have through their leadership to bring some joy to a family settling into our wider community. And whether you join us online or in-person, I look forward to seeing you in church on Sundays and Christmas Eve.

However and whatever you celebrate this winter season, may wonder and mystery, warmth and joy be yours.

In faith and affection,

Rev. Kristin

Message From Maggie Hayes, Board President



Our *Uniter* editors encourage us to build our messages around the monthly worship theme. For December it's "Opening to Joy." But as I'm writing this, my focus is on Thanksgiving, more than a week away. My family has a practice of going around the table to hear from everyone what they're particularly thankful for. This year I'll give thanks that my sister's family and mine are able to resume a decades-long tradition of celebrating the holiday together, by gathering in Seattle where my daughter, nephew, and their families live. I'm anticipating the joy I'll feel

next week.

Aha! Maybe that's the connection between giving thanks and "opening to joy." The expression, the practice, of gratitude opens us up to feelings of joy, whether in memories, in this moment, or in the future. Apparently I'm not the first person to make this connection. A 95-year-old Benedictine monk, David Steindl-Rast, has said, "The root of joy is gratefulness....It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful."

I have so many reasons to be grateful and to open a gateway to joy. Here I want to focus on several associated with our church.

- I appreciate the tireless efforts, creativity, professionalism, and compassion of Rev. Kristin and her excellent staff. A special shout-out to Phil Browne, who in his too-brief time with UUCSS has instituted improved ways of approaching administrative and technical functions. I am grateful that he will still be with us, however part-time, and wish him joy in his new career.
- I'm so thankful for all the volunteers who are making hybrid worship meaningful, whether in-person or online. I also give thanks to congregants who can abide the inevitable glitches with patience and grace. There's more joy ahead!
- Gratitude also goes to so many others who serve our community by leading efforts to improve our buildings and grounds, keep our programs up and running, and implement our visions of social justice and living into the 8th Principle. Another shout-out to the folks who are initiating a project for UUCSS to co-sponsor an Afghan refugee family resettling in our area. What joy that will bring!

With hopes that your observation of Thanksgiving has opened you to joy!

LEARN

Message From Laura Solomon, Director of Spiritual Growth



December always gets me thinking about ritual. Whether lighting the menorah, decorating a Christmas tree, welcoming back the sun, counting down the seconds to the new year, or just drinking our favorite hot cocoa with marshmallows, something about the cold, dark winter makes us hungry for the comfort ritual can bring.

I think there's a pressure many of us feel to make our holiday rituals somehow "big" or Pinterest perfect. Yes, those rituals of gingerbread houses, and amazing crafts, and gorgeous Christmas trees, and big holiday parties...they're great! And, sometimes, it's the little rituals that mean more.

For me? The Christmas season doesn't really start until I listen to Frank Sinatra sing "Mistletoe and Holly" ([Mistletoe and Holly - Frank Sinatra HQ Christmas - YouTube](#)), because that was the first song on the Christmas music CD my family had growing up. My mother certainly didn't intend for this to be the ritual that stuck, but my sisters and I--all of us now over the age of 25--still need to dig out this CD when we visit my parents for the holidays every year.

Growing up in an interreligious household, other than lighting the menorah and eating the traditional latkes (with applesauce, please!), I always watched our VHS copy of "Bubbe's Boarding House." I recently mentioned this video to my partner--to introduce her to this ritual - and found it on YouTube (times may change, but Bubbe's Boarding House stays the same!) [Bubbe's Chanukah](#)

When I was 11 years old, I read a book in which a character wrote herself a sort of "year in review" letter every year on New Year's Eve. Feeling inspired, I started this tradition--and have continued it all these years. It is a gift to be able to look back on my thoughts from all those years ago, and to watch my growth and change, my ups and downs, across 25 years. Even at 11, I knew the importance and value of ritual, and began developing my own.

Rituals help us feel connected to our history, to our families, to our culture, and to the world. They ground us in the now, and help us open to all of the emotions the holiday season might bring. Over the past few years, many of our rituals have had to change--travel plans, holiday parties, meals together--these things have had to happen in new ways, and the ways we engage them continues to change.

And yet, there is much we can do to maintain that feeling of sameness, of ritual, of connection--even without too much energy and effort. What are the simple, meaningful rituals for you? What simple, meaningful rituals might you develop? Could you light a candle at dinner every night this month? Might you bring out that festive tablecloth from last year? Is there a movie or a song that marks the holiday for you, or even just a favorite mug with your preferred warm beverage?

This holiday, let's create these simple rituals that bring us into the here and now, while connecting us with what is meaningful. I would love for you and your family to share those rituals with me at DSG@uucss.org, or on Facebook on our UUCSS page.

RE Schedule (December and January)

December 5th: Children's Chapel outside at UUCSS - 10:30AM
YRUU - in person at UUCSS - 10:30AM

December 12th: Virtual RE for PreK - 8th grade - 10:00AM
YRUU - in person at UUCSS - 10:30AM

December 19th: Interactive, multigenerational service with outside activities

December 24th: Christmas Eve service

December 26th: NO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OR YRUU

January 2nd: NO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OR YRUU

January 9th: Virtual RE for PreK - 8th grade - 10:00AM
YRUU - in person at UUCSS - 10:30AM

January 16th: TBD based on weather and vaccination rates
Turn in your Guest At Your Table boxes!

January 23rd: Virtual RE for PreK - 8th grade - 10:00AM
YRUU in person at UUCSS - 10:30AM

January 30th: TBD based on weather and vaccination rates

CONNECT

Events

Recurring and committee events can also be found on the Church Calendar at <https://uucss.org/calendar/>

December 1: 7:00 pm. Rainbow Alliance. We will be discussing several ongoing projects and later in the month we will have our monthly movie discussion.

December 6: 7:30 - 10:00 pm. Online Men's Group.

December 10: 8:00 pm. Ladies Night Out. Currently, a Zoom chat for UUCSS women interested in connecting with other UUCSS women. To join the group and receive announcements, subscribe to the the church's UUCSS | Ladies-Night-Out listserv, which is a subgroup of the main UUCSS [groups.io](#) listserv.

December 13: 7:30 - 10:00 pm. Online Men's Group.

December 20: 7:30 - 10:00 pm. Online Men's Group.

December 27: (tentative) 7:30 - 10:00 pm. Online Men's Group.

Committee Updates

UUCSS Seeks Volunteers for new Afghan Resettlement Task Force

Answering Rev. Kristen's call to look for opportunities to Welcome the Stranger, UUCSS has recently formed an Afghan Resettlement Task Force to explore ways to help meet the intense need for support for newly arrived refugees and other families displaced by recent events in Afghanistan. The Task Force is exploring options to work with a local service provider, such as Lutheran Social Services (LSS) or Lutheran International Relief Services (LIRS), both of whom have extensive experience sponsoring and supporting displaced families.

After being matched with a family, UUCSS plans to welcome and help support them through their first 12 months in the U.S. Once we have our match, there will be much to do, and the Task Force welcomes additional volunteers. There are likely to be regularly occurring volunteer opportunities, such as English tutoring, as well as more immediate day-to-day needs, such as providing rides to doctor and dental appointments. We will especially need volunteers with weekday availability to help with this type of service.

In addition, we welcome volunteers for the behind-the-scenes work such as identifying, collecting, and storing donated household supplies, fundraising, and creating spreadsheets to help organize tasks. If you would like more information or would like to join the Task Force please email Resettlement@UUCSS.org to be added to the logical email group.

The Task Force has not yet established a regular meeting day/time, but meetings will be via Zoom and on the UUCSS calendar. Please note that any volunteers who would like to work directly with the family will likely need to complete a background check, as well as participate in a cultural training session. A recent article from [DCist.com](#) explains some of the unique challenges facing families arriving in the DC area, including high housing costs, as well as a bit about local service providers and programs assisting Afghan families. [Afghan Refugees Arriving in the D.C. Area Face a New Challenge: High Housing Costs.](#)

News from the Racial Justice Task Force and Upcoming Service

So we've adopted the 8th Principle and committed to building a Beloved Community through accountably dismantling racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions. Great! How do we do that? That's a question we on the Racial Justice Task Force (RJTF) have been considering intently and coming up with lots of answers to. The Board is committed to studying the UUA's Widening the Circle report, and the Program Council is discussing what we might learn from the UUA report and how best to support committees in their 8th Principle work. We've been attending monthly meetings with Paula Cole Jones and other congregations who've adopted the 8th principle, sharing ideas and questions. And we've met with Rev. Kristin Grassel Schmidt and Dr. Laura Solomon to plan out what the future of racial justice in our church might be.

In a word, we're focusing on discernment. We want to take the time to reflect deeply, both individually and structurally, on our congregation's strengths, our capacities, and our goals for the near and far future. As we begin to gather again for in-person worship, so many things are changing for our community and ourselves, and there are so many ways we want to explore this work! To start, we're putting together a service for December 12 as a discussion of community, using the varied perspectives of dendrology, deep meditation, and hopepunk (which finds its narrative motivation in the idea of optimism—embodied in acts of love, kindness, and respect for one another—as resistance [according to Merriam-Webster]). We're also excited to explore platforms for ongoing conversations, ranging from affinity groups and discussion circles to coffee hour chats to linguistic pop-up sessions and beyond!

How would you like us to live into the 8th Principle? What are your questions? What are your ideas? We know that no one thing will click for everyone, so we want to try a whole lot, and we'd love to get your feedback. Feel free to email us at rjtf@uucss.org, or chat us up wherever our paths cross.

Rainbow Alliance

Happy Holidays folk! The Rainbow Alliance is starting a book discussion group in the coming months. Our first discussion will be at our January meeting on Jan. 5, 2022, 7 pm, and we will be discussing the Casey McQuinston book *One Last Stop*. It is classified as "New Adult" fiction (ages 18-30) and is about a girl who moves to New York and develops a crush on a girl who is stuck in time on the subway. If you want to stay informed on Rainbow Alliance goings-on, please email the chairs (Isabelle Strauss-Riggs, Elise Turner, and Alexis Turner) at rainbowalliance@uucss.org and ask to be added to our email list.

Green Sanctuary Information Hub--Check it Out!

Green Sanctuary is piloting an information hub inside our subgroup on the UUCSS Groups.io site. It is under construction currently, but we hope to build it into a place where our committee and members of the congregation can share resources on everything green, from environmental justice to tips to green your home and garden, to climate news, legislative updates and cleaner transportation and more and, importantly, why it all matters. Not sure what the deal is with invasive plants? Looking to get off fossil fuels for your house or apartment's electricity? Confused about who to write to support mass transit instead of widening the Beltway? We aim to serve. What do YOU want or need? And what would you like to contribute? Email Doneby Smith (donebys@gmail.com).

Pop on over to our site to get the idea. To access the Green Sanctuary info files, you start by going to uucss.groups.io/g/main then click on "subgroups" in the sidebar on the left. Scroll down the groups until you see UUCSS Green Sanctuary.

Scroll down a little and click "Join." Then you will be able to see the Files we are starting to populate. Caution: When you join, you will also start getting Green Sanctuary emails. To opt out or to control the emails, within the Green Sanctuary subgroup, go to "Subscriptions" in the sidebar on the left. Choose how you want to receive Green Sanctuary email. You can choose "no email" if you prefer NOT to get any Green Sanctuary emails. Other than none, there are other options, so choose what suits you.

We hope you will check out the new Green Sanctuary hub and let us know what kinds of information you would like to see or what you would like to share.



Auction



“Out of This World” Auction: January 15-23, 2022: Submit donations starting DECEMBER 5!!

We are OVER THE MOON because it’s time to submit auction donations!

We are excited to see your creative and fun donations, from terrific things such as pottery, and other artistic creations to homemade baked goods. Many members and friends offer special dinners, outings, or services or lessons. Each donated event offers more opportunities to get to know fellow members and friends better.

Just go to <https://tinyurl.com/UUdonatepage> to donate your item!

Complete ONE (1) donation form for each item / event.

Have a photo/image ready to upload for your item. When planning your event, please check the UUCSS Covid safety guidelines: <https://uucss.org/uucss-covid-guidelines/>.

In case you have forgotten how to donate using our online auction software, we will have training in a breakout Zoom room following service on **Sunday, Dec. 12.**

Donation Suggestions

- Meals
- Ethnic Dinners
- Activities/Events
- Trips, Outings
- Services
- Workshops/ How-To
- Seasonal events
- Yardwork/Gardening
- Gift Certificates
- Childcare
- Pet Sitting

Let’s see donations that are “Out of This World!”

Thank you in advance for making our annual auction be “Out of This World”! We scheduled the auction later in the church year, in the hopes that we’ll be able to have a live, in-person event. Like last year, we’ll have an online auction that spans two week-ends (January 15-23, 2022). Cross your fingers that we’ll be able to close the auction with a live, in-person event. Mark your calendars for a virtual opening event on the evening of **January 15**; and a closing event the afternoon of **January 23**. Questions? Send an email to auction@uucss.org.

Your faithful Auction Committee--Emily Harris, Emily Tien, Linda Barrett

Volunteer Spotlight

Jan Kretz



Jan Kretz grew up French Catholic in Haverhill, Massachusetts surrounded by her 62 first cousins. She studied nursing at Fitchburg State College and was working at a local hospital when fate, in the form of an Army recruiter, came for her. He stopped by for her roommate, and he ended up with two recruits! Jan and her friend were both commissioned into the Army Nurse Corps. This seemed like a good idea since she privately identified as a lesbian and her local area was just too conservative and too close to give her breathing space. Her first assignment was at Walter Reed where she stayed for five years interrupted by a year in Korea.

Having left one church, she was not in a hurry to join another, although she has always been fascinated by theology and knew the value of a spiritual community. But, she was also busy at work and had a fulfilling life in the DC lesbian community. An accidental 2019 meeting with Don Berkemeyer, while she and her wife Lisa were walking in Silver Spring, led them to UUCSS.

Going to church was not without trepidation as she was “petrified” that they wouldn’t fit in. But from the first service, with Rev. Lyn in the pulpit, both Lisa and Jan felt warmly welcomed. In spite of the almost immediate disruption caused by the pandemic, Jan has fit right in. She has worked extensively on Racial Justice Task Forces external engagement and has deepened her commitment to RJTF. She is currently on the Leadership Development committee. Now retired, she enjoys lots of physically active sports, auction events involving cooking, and her two poodles. She feels special gratitude for the warmth of the community and the intellectual and spiritual stimulation that UUCSS provides.

December Community Partner

Minister’s Discretionary Fund

This congregation’s mission is possible because of the generosity of people like you. Thanks to the financial pledges you make, we are able to fund the ministry, learning, and fun we do together. As a community spiritual practice, UUCSS pledges its financial support to a different organization in our wider community doing work that furthers our values. We do this by sharing the gifts given and received as part of the Offering in our worship services each month. The month of December we continue this practice, but instead of sharing our offerings with a separate organization, your support will go toward the Minister’s Discretionary Fund (MDF).

The MDF offers grants to people in the UUCSS community during times of financial distress. The current policy for the MDF is that the grants go directly to creditors, such as paying a utility bill or a medical bill; that the grants are limited to one per family per year; and that the amount available for the grant is based on the amount that is in the account (usually not exceeding 10 percent of the total).

Generous donations this month will mean that larger grants may be available. If you or your family ever experiences financial hardship, please talk to Rev. Kristin about whether a grant from the MDF could help.

You can donate to UUCSS by either (1) using the Vanco Mobile Faith Engagement app from Vanco and selecting Minister’s Discretionary Fund or (2) send a check made out to UUCSS and write Minister’s Discretionary Fund in the memo line.

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

Staff Hours and Contact Information

Phil Browne, Communications Administrator

Phil performs property management tasks at church on Thursdays from 1:00pm to 5:00pm. He is available remotely by appointment throughout the week. Phil can be reached Monday through Friday at administrator@uucss.org or by calling the general church phone number: 301-273-9745

Dr. Laura Solomon, Director of Spiritual Growth

Laura is available by appointment Tuesday through Friday at dsg@uucss.org and (443) 671-2845. Monday is her day off. If something urgent comes up outside normal office hours or over the weekend please text or call her. You can schedule an appointment with Laura at www.calendly.com/uucssdsg

Michael Holmes, Music Director

Michael works Thursday evenings, Sunday mornings, and is available at other times by appointment. Michael can be reached at musicdirector@uucss.org.

Rev. Kristin Grassel Schmidt, Minister

Rev. Kristin works Tuesday through Thursday from 10:00am to 4:00pm. Mondays is her writing days and Friday is her day off. She is available at minister@uucss.org and 202-780-7164. If you experience a pastoral care emergency outside normal office hours or over the weekend please text or call her. You can schedule an appointment with Rev. Kristin at www.calendly.com/rev-kristin-schmidt

Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring

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FIRST CLASS

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Submissions are due by the 17th of the prior month.

Uniters are published monthly September-June by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring.

Send information and visuals to uniter@uucss.org.

Format guidelines for submissions: Text must be in a form that it can be edited, either in a Google Doc (preferred), Word file, or in the body of an email that can be copied and pasted. Graphics must be in a format in which they can be repositioned and resized—jpeg is greatly preferred.

Co-editors are **Lynn Cave** and **Caroline Stauss**.

To receive a PDF email version of the newsletter, contact the church office at administrator@uucss.org.

To receive a mailed copy of the **Uniter** for the year, please send **\$24 to UUCSS, Attention: Collector**.