



The Downeast Beacon  
of Liberal Religion

# The NUUS

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Ellsworth  
121 Bucksport Rd., Ellsworth, ME 04605

(207) 667-4393

www.uuellsworth.org

Volume 41

No. 1

January 2009

## A Month of Sundays

(All services at 10:30 a.m.)

### Jan. 4 *Many Happy Returns of the Day*

What is the best we can wish for?

Rev. Leela Sinha

### Pot Luck Lunch

### Jan. 11 *Roots Go Down, Plant Goes Up*

UUCE's growth team (Ruth Eveland, Cynthia Perkins, David Towle, Sonia Turanski, and Leela Sinha) have been working with a UUA program to inspire and educate. Come hear the stories, sing the songs, and celebrate the possibilities!

### Jan. 18 *The More Things Change...*

Things are changing all over, from the coming inauguration to our very own children's religious exploration program. How do changes lift up and reinforce the constants in our lives?

Rev. Leela Sinha

### Jan. 25 Rev Sara H Huisjen, guest speaker

Due to a snowstorm, the **winter solstice service** that was scheduled for December 21 has been postponed until Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Hi folks,

My name is **Caitlin Tunney** and I'm your new church office person/bookkeeper. You can find me in the office Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons from 1-5 p.m. In addition to bookkeeping, I'll be taking care of scheduling for building events, managing the church calendar, working with the church website, and generally tackling all things administrative. I'm so pleased to be working here at UUCE, and I look forward to meeting all of you over time. You can reach me at [caitlin@uuellsworth.org](mailto:caitlin@uuellsworth.org) or at 667-4393. Stop in to say hello!

## Down East Discussion Group

The Down East Discussion Group will meet on Wednesday, January 14<sup>th</sup> at noon at the church. Bring a lunch for yourself. Don and Jean Martin will provide beverages and dessert. Our topic will be "New Year's Resolutions". This will also be a planning meeting for February through June so bring ideas for topics.

**This edition of 7 Jan 09 has been corrected with phone number of page 1 and President's letter on page 12. (md)**

## Unexpected Grace

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Dear Ones,

I love you, you with your hopes and prayers and pains and idiosyncrasies, you with your big vision and fear and joy, you tucked away in the woods and staying in the city because you can argue for both praying in the closet and praying on street corners and both are real and both are important and both are you.

And so I come to you, because I don't know what to do. I want to grow roots and wings here, to thrive and expand and deepen my ministry. You have every reason to want the same, and so you have said: we want more children in RE and more adults in programs; we want more people in worship and working for justice and singing and talking; we want a choir and we want instrumentalists and we want to be financially stable and we want to welcome those who need our message, all of these things and much, much more.

So we want the same thing: a wonderful and thriving church community. But in order for this to work, we need to talk. We need to talk with each other a lot. Not just clusters of friends, but people who never talk to each other usually, people from different places and with different interests...and people with similar interests from right next door. Most important, we need new folks and savvy veterans and leaders and people who really don't want to lead—we need everyone talking across all the lines.

We need this for a few reasons: we need it to build community; we need it to establish trust; we need it to dispel anxiety; and we need it to smooth the rough edges of change. If we are to be a healthy system, each to the other, we need to say what we need, hope, dream, fear of one another, knowing that in the end we all want what is best for the institution, because we are tied together through the framework of the church.

Right now, we're not doing so well at that. When there is satisfaction or joy or anger it is most often expressed in small groups of friends. As a first step, that's fine. But if it's something important, we are

too big to hope that word gets around. Rumors are not actionable. If you have opinions about something, it's probably headed up by a person or a committee. Find the committee. Find the person. Have a conversation. Get to know each other, to respect and trust and understand one another, and share your ideas and your feelings. If you don't know whom to contact, call or (better) email me and I'll put you in touch.

And then we must trust each other. If a committee or staff member or individual makes a choice, honor the work that they did by respecting the decision. Assume that they thought hard about it. Assume that they researched well. Assume that they want the best for us, as all of us do. If you have questions, ask them in the spirit of gathering information. If you are asked, try to answer without defensiveness.

These are hard times, and everyone—not just in church—seems to have a bit of extra crankiness. Our best defense against that is honest kindness and honest grace.

As we enter this new year may we all speak so we may be heard and hear truly what has been spoken, with graceful openness and with love.

Blessings for this new-turned year,

Leela



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## Joys and Sorrows

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The Committee on Ministry has been deep in conversation about the best possible options for serving the congregation's need for sharing joys and sorrows. We are grateful to everyone who came to the discussion in November or otherwise offered opinions, and also grateful for everyone's patience as we have worked through the situation. Clearly, individual sharing of joys and sorrows is very important to some people and its absence is very important to others. With your input, we have decided to try an experiment, which we hope will allow people to choose. Starting January 11, we will offer Joys and Sorrows before the service, at 10 AM. All those who are interested will gather in the sanctuary and a congregation member or friend will facilitate the sharing. This will allow more time for sharing in an intimate and supportive setting. When we are done we will have some time to make the transition to worship, taking care of personal needs and greeting each other and visitors out in the community room before the 10:25 announcements. The COM will be inviting people to be part of the facilitation team—if you are interested please speak to a member of the COM.

Sincerely,

Your Committee on Ministry (Judy Rothrock, Tom Stipe, Bob Dickens, Meredith Norris, and Leela Sinha)



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## Winter Common Reading

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The Winter Common Reading is chosen! Thanks to everyone who suggested titles. I have, in fact, chosen two titles for our shared reading (winter is long—we've got time) and anyone choosing to participate can of course read either one or both. The nonfiction title this winter is Joel Garreau's Radical Evolution: The promise and peril of enhancing our minds, our bodies—and what it means to be human. This engaging and accessible read discusses all kinds of possible additions to our natural abilities, and what it might mean to use them.

The fiction book is Terry Pratchett's Small Gods. Pratchett has written a number of novels about the Discworld, a giant flat world (everyone knows the world is flat) that sits on the back of four giant elephants who stand on the back of a giant turtle A'Tuin who swims through space. This world is a little like ours—just enough to be recognizable, if things had turned out entirely differently. Every book including this one chooses both a culture and an accompanying institution to satirize, and in *Small Gods* he's making fun of the church, but lifting up belief.

To participate in the Winter Common Reading series, simply get your hands on a copy of one or both of these books, and read them before March. Over March and April we'll have book discussions, facilitated by you, so if you'd like to facilitate one please contact Leela Sinha by email. Put "Common Reading Facilitator" in the subject line so I can find your email when I search for it come spring. Happy reading!

## Personnel

### Minister

Reverend Leela Sinha: 667-4393  
[minister@uuellsworth.org](mailto:minister@uuellsworth.org)

### Church Office

Caitlin Tunney: 667-4979  
[caitlin@uuellsworth.org](mailto:caitlin@uuellsworth.org)

### President of the Board

Ruth Eveland: 288-5727  
[president@uuellsworth.org](mailto:president@uuellsworth.org)

### Director of Religious Education and Exploration

Sonia Turanski: 667-4393 (H); 266-9530 (cell)  
[Sonia@uuellsworth.org](mailto:Sonia@uuellsworth.org)

### Music Director

Wayne Smith: 667-9482

### Newsletter Editor

Lance Funderburk: 276-3301  
[lfunderburk@roadrunner.com](mailto:lfunderburk@roadrunner.com)

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## LOAVES AND FISHES FOOD PANTRY

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The Food Pantry is expected to have increasing demand as the winter progresses. Use was up 38% in October and 25% in November over the same months last year. Monetary donations to the pantry are an excellent investment. Sixteen cents buys one dollar of food from the Food Bank in Brewer. Therefore, a \$5 donation buys \$31.25 worth of food, \$10 buys \$62.50. Donations can be sent to:

Loaves & Fishes  
P.O. Box 5504  
Ellsworth, ME 04605

Please note on your check that you are a member of UUCE.

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## Testify! The class: Articulating the Spirit

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Feb 3-5, 2009

What is the burning core of your spiritual life? Do you have a particular experience or set of beliefs that lift you up or changed you profoundly or move you to greater religious depth? In this class we will take three days to create brief statements of belief or experience that are meant to be aural, to move people, and to tell our own stories of faith.

Members who take this class will be invited to continue refining their statements for inclusion in a worship service.

This is an advanced UU identity course.

Prerequisite: membership at UUCE OR New UU class and 6 months attendance at this congregation OR at least 6 months' attendance in UU RE AND 6 months involvement at UUCE (may be concurrent) OR two years' regular involvement in a UU congregation (this or another).

If you're not sure whether this class is a good fit for you, please call or email Leela Sinha and we'll talk. If you wish to attend, please preregister with our DLREE Sonia Turanski by January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009 by calling or emailing her ([Sonia@uuellsworth.org](mailto:Sonia@uuellsworth.org)). If the class does not have at least 5 registrants, it will be cancelled.



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## The 2008-2009 Charitable IRA Rollover

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*Adapted from the UUA Office of Legacy Gifts*

Individuals over the age of 70 ½ can make annual tax-free deductions in 2008 and 2009 of up to \$100,000 from their IRAs directly to UUCE. Fortunately, this program was extended from last year. Therefore, you can make the gift now—while you are living and able to witness the benefits of your generosity.

You may contribute from your IRA if:

- You are age 70½ or older
- The gift is \$100,000 or less each year
- You make the gift on or before Dec. 31, 2009
- You transfer funds directly from an IRA or Rollover IRA
- You transfer the gift outright to UUCE

### How to Make a Donation

Send a letter to your IRA custodian requesting a rollover from your IRA directly to UUCE. Please notify the church of your intentions.

**Please plan ahead! It can up to 2-3 weeks for the transfer to take place.**

### Questions and Answers

**Q. I have several retirement accounts, does it matter which retirement account I use?**

**A.** Yes. Gifts can be made from an IRA or Rollover IRA. Pension, profit sharing and other forms of retirement funds do not fall under the new legislation.

**Q. Can I use this opportunity to establish a life income gift such as a charitable gift annuity?**

**A.** No. The gift made from your IRA must be treated as an outright gift to qualify. But we can assist you to do that through Maine Community Foundation.

**Q. Does the gift count towards my minimum required distribution?**

**A.** Yes. Donations made directly from your IRA

count towards your minimum required distribution. This is an especially effective way of giving for people who find that they do not need all of the income from their minimum required distribution in 2008 or 2009.

**Sample Custodial Letter** (phone your custodian first in case they have another process)

Dear Sir or Madam (Your Custodian),

Sec. 408(d)(8)(A) of the Internal Revenue Code permits an IRA rollover directly from an IRA custodian to a qualified public charity. As the owner of IRA account #*[Your Account]* that is in the custody of your organization, I request that you transfer from that account the sum of *[\$ Dollars]* to Unitarian Universalist Church of Ellsworth, 121 Bucksport Rd., Ellsworth, ME 04605,

It is my intention to make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) to the UUCE from my IRA as permitted by law. Under the Congressional JCT Technical Explanation of Sec. 408(d)(8)(A), this QCD will fulfill part or all of my IRA required minimum distribution for this year.

This letter is sufficient authorization for you to make this QCD gift. However, if you require any further documents, please forward those to me for my signature.

Sincerely,  
IRA Owner

**Please note: Along with others in the church, Diana and I have paid our pledge in this manner and would be happy to discuss this process with you.**

*Kay Wilkins  
Chair, Planned Giving*



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## Religious Exploration and Education

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### RE & E TASK FORCE:

Multi-generational (EVERY ONE is invited!)

RE Brainstorming Get Together.

January 18<sup>th</sup> after church 12:00- 1:30

Soup & bread lunch, childcare provided.

*Please see separate notice in this newsletter for details.*

### SUNDAY RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION PROGRAM:

#### Nursery

Jan. 4, 11, 18, 25:

care provided by Helen Conway for our tiny tots

#### Early Youth

Jan. 4, 11, 18, 25:

Spirit play under the loving guidance of Anne Ossana

#### Sr. Youth

Jan. 4, 11, 18, 25:

ongoing creativity based classes led by Carol Rosinski

### ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM:

- Introduction to Islam with Sonia Turanski - Wednesday nights, January 21<sup>st</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup>, 6:30-8:00 pm

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, recently surpassing Christianity as the religion with the greatest number of worldwide adherents. Come join Sonia for an introductory survey covering the founding history and tenets of the Islamic faith. No text books are needed, although plenty of resources will be available for those interested in further study. Sonia has taught comparative world religion courses at Eastern Maine Community College and other local venues for the past several years.

Upcoming Events:

- Advanced UU class, Feb. 3,4,5 with Rev. Leela

Spring offerings are shaping up to include:

- Book discussion on Karen Armstrong's, "The History of Myth"
- Book discussion on Daniel Quinn's, "Ishmael"
- Mindful Living course in the Buddhist tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh

### Multi-generational Religious Education and Exploration Brainstorming Get Together!

Sunday, January 18<sup>th</sup> after church

Come join RE Director, Sonia Turanski, to brainstorm on what our lifespan RE program can mean to YOU!

- Are you an adult who is looking for a certain RE classes that you'd like to take?
- Have you done things in the past that you'd like to do again?
- Are you a parent with ideas or concerns about the youth RE curriculum?
- Are you a youth with ideas about how to make your church experience more exciting or rewarding?
- Are you an adult or youth who has something you'd like to teach (music? cooking? sign language? yoga? What are YOUR special skills?)
- Are you an experienced or retired educator with a passion for your subject that you'd like to share?
- Are there speakers in our community that you know of who you'd like to see present at the UUCE?
- Can you help us to identify worthy organizations and projects for youth service and social action involvement.
- Are you interested in volunteering for a 3-4 week block as an early, junior or senior youth RE teacher?
- Do you have movies in your home collection that would be exciting to view for church movie night?
- Do you know of any wonderful local adults who we might consider hiring next year as our nursery caregiver?

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

What multi-generational RE activities could we include in our program?

**A Soup and Bread lunch will be provided**

Nursery care will be available for at least the first hour.

Please come share your wild and wooly ideas and vision for an awesome Lifespan of RE&E!

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**Treasurer's Corner**

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Our pledge receipts for the month of November were excellent. They were up over the monthly average by \$2,000. We should be proud! By now, you should have received your pledge statement. Some of you have contacted me with questions. I encourage you to speak with me if you have any questions or concerns about your pledge or the church's finances. Next year will be a challenge for us. Our staff yearly payroll has reached \$89,500 requiring us to be very creative with our financial planning in the 2009 – 2010 church year. Peggie Geiger and the Music Committee are planning a major fund raiser on February 14, 2009. This should be a fun evening of good food and live entertainment. What a great way to celebrate Valentine's Day! Fifty percent of the proceeds will go to Loaves and Fishes. I encourage everyone to support this effort by getting involved. It is important that we make this a successful endeavor. \$6,000 was budgeted this year for fund raisers. We need to raise \$2,500 in order to reach this goal.

Don Martin  
Treasurer

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**Name Tag Posse Needs a Deputy**

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**Name Tag Posse Has a Deputy**

Perhaps you remember the team who makes or replaces nametags is all headed south? I had asked for a volunteer at least until March. Well, we have one, the very capable Johanna Stacy. So, if you need a new name tag or see someone who does. Speak to Johanna.



**Sheriff Kay Wilkins**



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## Water Project

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Connecting to the Ellsworth city water system continues to be a high priority goal of the building maintenance program, in response to three successive positive tests for coliform even after shocking the well twice. We have received quotes for the excavation work and the reconfiguration of the sprinkler system (removing tanks and pump from the community room) and are awaiting additional bids on the excavation portion. The total estimate for the project is \$15,475 with hopes that additional bids will be lower. With the board's blessing, the plan is to pay for the project via a loan from our own endowment, the loan to be repaid over time by an appeal to members and friends. The outcome will ensure a plentiful supply of healthy water for members, visitors, and other building users and will also create a more inviting space in the community room. Please contact Don Martin (664-0309 [Jzmartin2@verizon.net](mailto:Jzmartin2@verizon.net)) if you wish to contribute to the Water Project. Or contact David Towle (460-8881 [dtowle@mdibl.org](mailto:dtowle@mdibl.org)) with questions about the project itself.

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## UUSC Member?

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An easy way to become a member of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee is through a tax-deductible gift in your Guest at Your Table box. All you need do is fill out the envelope (or box) with your information. Student/youth membership is \$10; Seniors 65 and over can join for \$20, Regular membership is \$40 for a single or \$75 for a couple. Of course, you can always give more. If you don't want to use that box, you can also mail your membership directly to UUSC, 689 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139-3302. Visit [www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org) for information about our wonderful UU organization that channels funds and help around the world. You can also just talk with Martha or Sonia.

Martha Dickinson -- Peace and Social Action



## Green Sanctuary Rises Again

The UUA's Green Sanctuary Program is a framework for congregations to begin specific projects that lead to recognition as a Green Sanctuary through candidacy and then accreditation. If you want to know more about this program there's lots of information at: <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/greensanctuary/index.shtml>

Thanks to the wonderful start we received with Steve Votey's leadership, we are now ready to complete the application process for candidacy. We will be meeting on the first Sunday of the month during Potluck, taking our food and working in one of the rooms of the RE wing. The next two meetings are on:

January 4

February 1.

Please feel free to join us.

For more information, ask: Karen Wigglesworth, Margery Forbes, Pam Person or Kay Hansen



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## The Care Committee

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January Birthdays:

1/3 Susan Aripotch  
1/3 Kathy Moulton-Applewhite  
1/5 Matt Slater  
1/18 Margo Bailey  
1/19 Dusty Bailey  
1/28 Cindy Thielen

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## Singing Circle

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Everyone is welcome to attend our UU Sacred Singing Circle. For the time being, we gather the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays of each month from 5:30 PM to 7:00 PM in the RE Wing of the church. We sing for about an hour and then share our thoughts and ideas. We are currently singing songs from our hymnals and other songbooks, particularly songs from Women With Wings. We are not a performance group, rather our aim is the spiritual nourishment of those gathered in song. If you would like to be a part of this singing circle but cannot make the time, please let us know as our time is certainly subject to change.

Martha Dickinson, 667-5863 or [marthad@zwi.net](mailto:marthad@zwi.net)



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## Winter Choir

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"If you can walk, you can dance. If you can talk, you can sing." The UUCE Winter Choir invites new participants who love to sing to join in preparing songs for the February Fun(d)raiser. We will rehearse at UUCE Sunday mornings, 9-10 am, on January 11th and 25th and February 1st and 8th, presenting our music the evening of February 14th (snow date February 21st). Three songs are on the schedule so far--a reprise of "Hot Chocolate", "I Can't Help Falling in Love", and "Fare Thee Well" arranged for 3-part choir. You should plan to attend at least three of the rehearsals if you wish to sing with the group on the 14th. If you are interested in participating, please sign up in the community room at UUCE or contact David Towle (288-4121 or [dtowle@mdibl.org](mailto:dtowle@mdibl.org)).

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## February (Fun)draiser

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Plans are underway for Saturday, Feb. 14<sup>th</sup> (Valentine's Day): an evening of musical entertainment preceded by a dinner. This event will be open to the community with proceeds to be divided 50/50 with Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry. Several special chocolate desserts have been offered by members of UUCE. We are looking for nice main dishes and salads.

The Solstice Choir will be working on new music for this evening. More singers are invited to join for the evening of Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>.

**Contact** Jean Martin at [jmartin2@verizon.net](mailto:jmartin2@verizon.net) or Peggie Geiger at [peggiegeiger@hotmail.com](mailto:peggiegeiger@hotmail.com) if you can assist with the dinner or the musical entertainment. We welcome musical groups of all sizes.

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## Membership Committee

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### “Newer Folks” Lunch

The Membership Committee is planning a “newer folks lunch” to be held after the service on Sunday, Jan. 11<sup>th</sup>. If you would like to attend, please contact Peggie Geiger at 288-2335 or [peggiegeiger@hotmail.com](mailto:peggiegeiger@hotmail.com). This is an opportunity to spend some time with our minister, Rev. Leela Sinha as well as meet other members and friends of the congregation in a relaxed setting.

### Email changes:

Kathy Combs: [kathycombs2@roadrunner.com](mailto:kathycombs2@roadrunner.com) Sally Bell: [srbell@localnet.com](mailto:srbell@localnet.com)

### Eileen Brennan

In August I moved from the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts where I had lived and worked for thirty years, to Bar Harbor. My daughter Bronwen and her partner, David and I built a house in Town Hill. I live in an apartment attached to the main house. We are surrounded by tall evergreens that wave in the wind. The smell of them sends one’s eyes skyward. I love the natural beauty of Mt. Desert Island and the vistas of the sea.

I retired from teaching in an elementary school in Sheffield, Mass. ten years ago; I had what was called an innovative classroom of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders. One superintendent called us a school within a school. Children visited for a day before they and their family chose to attend. Two children and a parent cooked our lunch each day. We convened town meetings to solve problems, built forts from blankets and crates, and held regular Arts and Musicals. My sheltie, Barnaby came to school each day. He was a favorite reading partner. In an earlier work life I was an R. E. Director for three large Unitarian churches. In those days the youth group was called L.R.Y. or Liberal Religious Youth. I thought of my later work in a public school classroom as an L.R.Y for eight, nine and ten year olds. Our classroom was a dynamic, problem-solving environment where children could influence

the nature of the experience and where problem-solving was a task for everyone.

The community I have left was full of friends and families I knew in those years, as well as friends I made in UU Meeting of South Berkshire. I have been retired ten years. During that time, making music with friends, story telling at the library and sculpting in wood and stone have been my main activities. I studied recorder with Bernard Krainis for 20 years, played with school choruses and with my piano friends in the Lutheran, Catholic, Congregational and Episcopal churches. For me making music with others is an especially satisfying way of making friends.

The subject at present is finding my way—to experience myself in a brand new setting in a place and time where I am not known for what I have done in my working years. I know I am not alone in facing that task. Many of you in this congregation have done it before me.

I’ve been a Unitarian for over fifty years. I am here in the spirit of Leela’s sermon where she often repeated: “come, come regularly. Come and be present, be a part.” I am coming. I’m glad for this new church and for being a new member. You are the community that is becoming my new home, and I am grateful for you.



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## Unitarian Universalist General Assembly

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### “A Proposal”

Next June UU's from all over the country will gather in Salt Lake City, Utah. General Assembly (GA as we like to call it) provides a wonderful opportunity to add to the depth of skills in our leadership and in our congregation.

The UUCE Leadership Development Committee has accepted a proposal from two members of our congregation that we gather funding for our current President, Ruth Eveland, to attend.

If we can put together funds from a few generous contributors as well as our Board, we can apply to the General Assembly Planning Committee to receive a grant from their scholarship fund.

The estimated cost for one person to attend GA is \$2500 - \$3000 which would include airfare from Portland or Boston.

Any UUCE member or friend who would like to support this endeavor should contact Marta Rieman, LDC Chair, at 667-7584 or [mbteg@prexar.com](mailto:mbteg@prexar.com).

Submitted by Peggie Geiger  
for the Leadership Development Committee



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## From The Board

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The Board of Trustees was unable to meet in December. A few were away, and a few were sick - and then there was the ice. So, rather than imperil the remaining members of the Board, we cancelled.

We can move a few things forward through email, but other items require discussion so the basic result is that the January 8<sup>th</sup> meeting will be really full.

Please note that our annual winter Parish Meeting is scheduled for January 25<sup>th</sup>, right after people have obtained sustaining hot drinks and munchies. We'll need to elect a Nominating Committee to identify candidates for Board elections in the spring. We'll probably have the amendment to the Bylaws proposing reducing the size of the Board from 10 to 7 members. We may have another amendment dealing with how many officers are elected at a time. Our Treasurer, Don Martin, will let us know where we stand financially. If you have thoughts about any of these issues, please get in touch with a member of the board.

## Message from the President

I've read interviews with fiction authors in which they said things like "the characters developed differently than I had expected," and I've thought that was really odd - how could what you write dictate ... what you write? I was struggling to write this column and then I understood: something inside the author was trying to work its way from the subconscious to consciousness. So, the author had to let go of the original plan and just let the fingers on the keyboard have at it.

I've been thinking about the concept of *congregational growth*. The discussions and plans of the Growth Team have been very exciting, and we'll be explaining more about it all at the service we lead on January 11<sup>th</sup>. But that all focuses on the *growth* part, and what I realized was that I was really more concerned at the moment with the *congregation* part.

Are we a congregation? What does that even mean? The dictionary definition, of course, says "a body of assembled people, a gathering." Well, if that is all it is then, sure, we're a congregation every Sunday morning. But when we use the term we seem to be implying something more. It can also be "a group of people gathered for religious worship." That's a bit more specific, and is probably how it is generally used.

However, when I think of "our congregation" it has a sum-is-greater-than-the-parts feel to me. One more dip into the dictionary yields another insight, because it also can mean "a religious institute in which only simple, not solemn, vows are taken." Aha! Now we're getting there.

A genuine congregation, in my mind, is a group that has made promises to each other. Have we? Don't we promise to be with each other each week, and to listen respectfully? How about, do we promise to support each other, in the many and varied ways we can? And, to step it up even further, do we promise to share and to grow with and challenge each other?

This promise we make is a promise we each make individually to a collective body. That can be hard. We don't all know each other very well. Some of us know a lot of people and some just a few (so far.) There may even be some people you just don't particularly like very much. How can you make a serious promise of significant value to people you don't really know?

This is where the faith part comes in. I don't mean a belief in some specific theological idea here, but a belief in the trustworthiness and value of the collective body of our congregation. We are together, having made promises (also called "being in covenant") to each other, because we have faith that together we are more than we can be separately.

If we can keep our focus on why we are together and how we are together, then I think we are well on the way to being effective together. This doesn't mean you lose your identity and singularity, but that you are willing to be a working part of a whole identity in addition. Thanks for pondering this with me.

### *A Tree Grows in Ellsworth...*

You may have noticed a barren tree in the hallway. It needs leaves. The leaves will be the Personal Ministry statements you have written after going through the workshop described in the November NUUS. Here are some more times I will be running the exercise:

Sunday, January 4<sup>th</sup> (during or after potluck)

Sunday, January 11<sup>th</sup> - noon-ish

Sunday, January 18<sup>th</sup> - noon-ish

Not on the 25<sup>th</sup>, because that is the winter Parish Meeting after the service.

If you get a couple of people who are willing to give it a try, let me know and we'll find a time. (Have papers, will travel...)

Yours in ministry,  
Ruth Eveland, President of the Board of Trustees