

## **R.E.flections & R.E.minders**

**First Parish of Sudbury UU**  
**week of Sunday, December 2, 2007**

### **Welcome note from Tracy Duncan, Direction of Religious Education:**

Welcome to the inaugural edition of R.E.flections & R.E.minders—a new publication for families in the Religious Exploration program at First Parish of Sudbury. We hope this will support you and your family on your spiritual journeys together. It will focus on topics beyond the boundaries of the Meeting House. As the “mother of liberal religious education,” Sophia Lyon Fahs, said, “Life is religious whenever we make it so.” In that spirit, you will be offered “non-Sunday” ways to participate in First Parish, things of note in the larger UU community, and *Taking RE Home*—my reflections based on the week’s Spirit Play theme, which are of general interest.

And please remember that I am always available to you as a resource, physically and theologically.

*In faith, Tracy*

### **“Beyond Sunday”--ways to participate this month**



**Holiday Swap** is this Saturday, Dec. 1. There will be a special area for children to “shop” and wrap gifts for the family. It’s all **free!** And there’s a free lunch catered by Caraway’s for those who “rsvp’d” to Katie Lee, plus ideas for “green”, earth-friendly decorating.

To get involved, you can:

- Come Saturday for any or all! Make ‘green’ tree decorations from 10:00 on. Lunch is at 1:00 and the swap takes place from 2:00-4:00.
- Donate items from your home—things you don’t want that are in good enough condition you’d give them to a loved one. Drop them off any time before 10 a.m. on Saturday in the “old” church entry.



**Prison Gift Bag Project** During your weekly shopping, pick up a few items for the Prison Gift Bags. (Clip this to take with you to the store.) Explain to your child/ren that these will be gifts for men who don’t normally get any holiday presents. Even though these things look like normal, everyday things, when you don’t *normally* have them, they are special.

*Needed items you could contribute:*

- 1 bar of deodorant soap
- 1 6 oz tube toothpaste
- 1 pack #6-3/4 envelopes (6-1/2 x 3-5/8")
- 1 writing pad (no wire: 6"x9")
- 1 pair white socks (no tube socks or knee highs)
- 1 bottle (plastic) shampoo (15 oz max)
- 1 stick deodorant (no roll-ons)
- 1 pocket calendar (no wire)
- And a holiday greeting card (“Happy Holidays, Seasons Greetings, Merry Christmas; no religious cards) signed with first name(s) only. Handmade cards are appreciated



**Tuesday Lunch** If you are an at-home parent, you and your child/ren are welcome to come join us for lunch each Tuesday from noon –1:00 in The Commons. Katie Lee, Fran and Tracy have lunch with whoever decides to join us. Just bring your lunch and come.

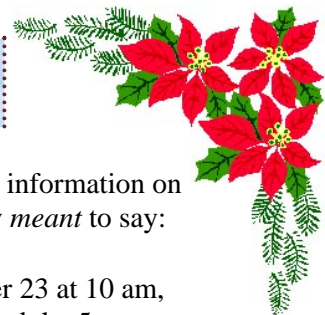


Where can you find a variety of excellent family resources from a church that has a minister, a DRE, an administrator, but no building? Hint: It's our LARGEST UU congregation!

**Church of the Larger Fellowship** Originally, CLF was created to serve small and remote fellowships, and families living in rural areas that couldn't get to church. Now it's a vast online community. One of their free resources is **KidTalk: connecting kids to Unitarian Universalism and each other--** an online magazine for children ages 8-12. This month there are articles and activities on Rosa Parks Day, Rohatus (Buddhist), Yule/Solstice (Pagan), Christmas (Christian), Hanukah (Jewish) and Kwanzaa. You can access KidTalk via [www.clfuua.org](http://www.clfuua.org)



### *Holiday Services at First Parish of Sudbury*

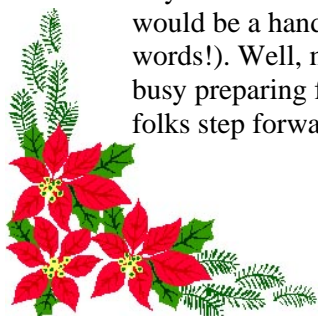


It came to Katie Lee's and Tracy's attention that the newsletter gave some unclear information on the Christmas services this year. For that, we heartily apologize! Here is what they *meant* to say:

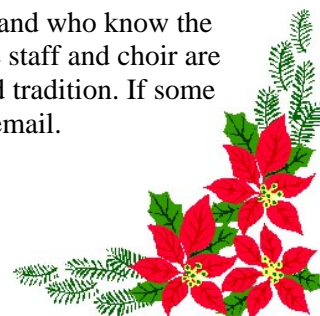
Family Service This year, the family holiday service will be on Sunday, December 23 at 10 am, not on Christmas Eve at 5 pm. One could conclude that we've completely eliminated the 5 pm Family Service on Christmas Eve. This is not the case! The decision is based on how near Christmas Eve is to a Sunday and other factors. (For instance, there was no 5:00 service last year as Sunday *was* Christmas Eve.) Next year, we fully expect the 5 pm Family Service to return for a few years until, once again, Christmas Eve is either on Saturday, Sunday or Monday. We always welcome your feedback about this decision and any others that either work well or don't especially work for you and your family.

Candlelight Service **Children really are warmly welcome to attend this service at 7 pm!** There will be lots of music, candle lighting, readings, a short reflection by Tracy, and, of course, the traditional candlelight ending with Silent Night just as we do at the family service.

Caroling Anyone? Years ago, it was the tradition to sing carols in front of the Meeting House (or in case of inclement weather, in the Parish Hall) before the Candlelight Service on Christmas Eve. Is anyone interested in reviving this tradition? We could sing from 5-6 pm then some could stay for the service and others could go on to festivities at home or elsewhere. All it would take would be a handful of willing singers and one or two who can lead the group (and who know the words!). Well, maybe some cookies and someone to put the kettle on, too. The staff and choir are busy preparing for the service, but that shouldn't stop the revival of a cherished tradition. If some folks step forward to lead this (it's very informal) we'll broadcast the plan via email.



*Happy ho-ho-ho-lidays*



## ***Taking R.E. Home—John Murray***

Who is John Murray? He's the minister who brought Universalism to the United States. What, really, is Universalism? Technically, it's the belief in universal salvation—that God is a loving God, and a loving God would never sentence anyone to eternal damnation. Remember, Unitarian Universalism has its roots firmly in Christianity. Both "U"s were heretical Christian traditions, arising from earliest Christianity, and rejected at the Councils of Nicea, where Catholic doctrine was born. Murray was persecuted in England for preaching Universalist ideas, and fled to America.

So what does it mean to us today? The legacy of Universalism is that the Spirit of Life, of creation, of Love and Mystery, is *good*. Universalism is also tied in with our seventh Principle or Promise—we are part of an interdependent web; what happens to one, happens to all. That people are ultimately redeemable, that the seed of goodness can flower any time. John Murray's most famous quote is, "Give them not hellfire, but hope!" While many of us do not believe in a literal hell, there is enough hell on earth—war, famine, disaster, violence, hatred. But the Universalist message is that we needn't succumb to this, needn't view it as any sort of punishment for our failings; there is hope. Hope that the universe ultimately does bend toward justice. Hope that love can prevail, that wounds can heal. Hope is the way to reach people, to view the world.

And Universalism calls us to connection with *everyone*, whether we like them or not, agree with them or not, even know them or not. Universalism has a great tradition of the Social Agenda. The reasoning goes that if we are all divine children, we must work to make society reflect that truth. 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Universalists were leaders in prison reform (God doesn't give up on anyone, so we can't either.), ending capital punishment, abolition, public education, helping the poor, insane asylum reforms and women's rights. Universalists had an early tradition of ordaining women, and Olympia Brown became the first woman in the United States to be officially sanctioned as a minister by a denominational body.

There's a very strange part of the John Murray story—a miracle of sorts. Murray's boat was supposed to land in New York City, but fog intervened and it landed off the coast of New Jersey. There Murray met a farmer—Thomas Potter. Potter had built a church, based on dream he had, that awaited only a Universalist preacher. Murray did not want to preach any more; his ideas had gotten him in too much trouble in England. But Potter gave him a challenge: if there was no wind and the boat remained grounded for three days, Murray would preach in the little church Potter had built. Murray agreed. And don't you know, there was no wind and the first Universalist sermon in America was preached. A Universalist miracle—makes you wonder...

**This week** you can share answers to the wondering questions asked in class:

- ☺ I wonder if John was ever scared that people wouldn't like what he was telling them.
- ☺ I wonder if Mr. Potter ever worried that the preacher would never come.
- ☺ I wonder if you have ever had a dream like Mr. Potter's.
- ☺ I wonder what other ways God speaks to people.
- ☺ I wonder if Mr. Potter was happy or disappointed when the preacher finally came.
- ☺ I wonder if anything strange and miraculous has ever happened to you? I wonder what you think about that.
- ☺ I wonder what you wonder about.

### **You can also:**

Discuss ways your family lives Universalist ideas of valuing and helping all people, and in believing people can be good and loving, even when they don't act it.

Be part of the Social Agenda—help a cause you believe in and point out to your children how your faith is part of what you do. Try to help them articulate what's important to them about how they're helping others.