



The Messenger

FIRST UNITARIAN

Albuquerque ✧ East Mountains ✧ Socorro

December 2020

December's Theological Theme Is Stillness.



The UU minister of my childhood, the Rev. Alan Deale, once mused that Christmas is a time of so many symbols, it actually gets confused with the symbols. "There is a combination of religious and secular symbolism; there is a contrast of spiritual and material symbols. Yet all of it is Christmas," he wrote. He compared Christmas to a huge basket holding the contributions of a long and full heritage of midwinter celebrations. Thus, he said, a sense of priority becomes the saving grace of the season.

The idea that we might still be in the midst of the pandemic at Christmas first occurred to me back in late spring, when it became clear that our country's initial response to the novel coronavirus had been too little, too late. The worship staff began brainstorming what we could possibly do to get people together safely. All options were on the table. What if we meet in the courtyard? In a sports field? In a park? What if we hold ten small services with everyone six feet apart? Isn't there any way to save Christmas??

Well... as cases rise far beyond even the highs of March and July, it has become clear that gathering in person, even outdoors, just isn't safe. We understand now that rather than remaining attached to our treasured symbols—a live Christmas

choir, a crowded sanctuary decorated with a twinkling tree, hundreds of candles reflected in the windows on Christmas Eve—the saving grace of the season really is going to be our sense of priority. That priority is love.

Because we love one another, we protect each other and we won't leave anyone out. Because we love our neighbors, we continue to do our part to slow the spread of this terrible virus beyond our church, too. Because love has gotten us this far, we know we can hold on a little longer.

Advent, the weeks leading up to Christmas, is traditionally celebrated as a time of waiting in faith that hope is on the way. Never was that truer than in December 2020, with the whole world watching as we get closer and closer to having an effective vaccine. In the beginning of the year, there was no guarantee a vaccine could be developed. Now we rejoice with scientists as early trials show great promise. There will be a vaccine. Hope is on the way. Let's hold fast in our virtual community a little longer, so we can all get to the other side together. It will be the Christmas that we always remember, because love was our guide.

Wishing you peace and abundance this holiday season,

Join Us on Zoom

Worship with us this month on Zoom. Go to www.zoom.us to set up your free account, download the app to your computer or smart device, and select "Join a Meeting." **You can also call in without a computer or smart device to (669) 900-6833** and, when prompted, enter the meeting number.

Virtual Worship

Sundays at 11:00 am

Led by our ministers and music director, all of our Zoom worship services are intergenerational, and contain a message for all ages as well as music and a homily.

Meeting ID: 168 223 701

Virtual Vespers

Wednesday Nights— 7 pm

We have a special schedule for December vespers. See Page 2! Please note that there is no vespers service on December 23. Instead, all are invited to the Christmas Eve service the following day.

Meeting ID: 593 831 292

Sunday, December 6

“Stillness”

The Rev. Angela Herrera

In her poem “Today,” Mary Oliver writes, “I’m taking the day off. Quiet as a feather. I hardly move though really I’m traveling / a terrific distance. Stillness. One of the doors / into the temple.” Today we’ll look through that “door,” in an introduction to this month’s theological theme.

Blue Christmas

**Wednesday,
December 9**

7:00 pm



Even in normal times, the December holiday season can feel heavy for many of us. For some the expectations of peace, love, and joy surrounded by family and friends has not been their experience. For others December may be the anniversary of a memorable loss in your life. Fewer hours of daylight make some of us blue at this time of year. And 2020, of course, brings its own holiday blues. If, for any reason, this time of year finds you longing for a calm, reflective approach to the season, you are invited to the Blue December service. Music, silence, companionship, and thoughtful words will welcome and comfort us all. Led by our ministers, music director, and lay leaders.

Sunday, December 13

“Gratitude and Expectation”

The Rev. Angela Herrera

A sermon about gratitude and the blessing of low holiday expectations. First preached by Angela in 2011, this message has fresh relevance today as we reshape our holiday plans in the world’s pandemic year.

A Musical Vespers

**Wednesday, December 16
7:00 pm**

Join Music Director Susan Peck for a musical vespers service. We’ll celebrate and meditate on solstice, Chanukah, and Christmas with candlelight, poetry, singing, and prayers.

Sunday, December 20

“Kings and Their Gods”

The Rev. Bob LaVallee

In 2008, Catholic priest and activist Daniel Berrigan wrote a book called “The Kings and Their Gods” about the pathology of power, using the books of Kings from the Hebrew Bible as a leaping off point. Twelve years later, Rev. Bob reflects on power and morality in this moment.

Christmas Eve Service

**Thursday,
December 24**

6:00 pm

This year we’re consolidating our Christmas Eve gatherings into one all-ages service with an online Las Posadas, fabulous traditional music, and a homily by Angela Herrera. Bring the whole family!



Sunday, December 27

“Inside the Chrysalis”

The Worship Coordinators

We’ll contemplate stillness and metamorphosis as we welcome the New Year together. How are you transforming in this time of waiting? What will you become? This interactive service will incorporate our annual worship stations, modified for Zoom.

Participate in Las Posadas

This year we’re doing our annual Christmas Eve pageant over Zoom, and we still want families to participate! We’ll be reading the story aloud, but **we need visuals to go with the story**. Visuals can be drawings or staged photographs that portray:

- Mary, Joseph, or the donkey;
- The travelers looking for a place to stay;
- Shepherds, angels, stars, royalty, and farm animals;
- An Inn, a manger, the traveler’s road; or
- Any other image that suits the story!

Get your family together, get creative, and send your images to cpaul@uuabq.org. Thanks!

We Light a Candle

We grieve with the friends and family of Beatriz Mitchell, who has died. A memorial celebration is being planned for 2021 when it is safe to gather in person again.

We mourn the death of former church member Elaine Marr, who died in late October.

We grieve with Jenni Johns as she mourns the death of her dear niece Gwen from COVID. We hold their family in our hearts.

We send healing thoughts to Chris Johnson, who is dealing with some health issues.

We hold Gretchen Fanslow and Janelle Campbell in our hearts as they recover from falls.

If you're experiencing difficulties, health issues, or transitions, you can reach out to the Caring Network of First Unitarian at caring@uuabq.org.

Membership Milestones

A warm welcome to our newest members, who joined the church in November!

- ♥ Toya Abatso-Diaz & Juan Diaz
- ♥ Carol Hobart
- ♥ Debbie & Gary Norris
- ♥ Patricia Milner
- ♥ Ferris Todd

Happy Membership Anniversary to the following members of our community:

One Year

- ♥ Alfredo Alvidrez
- ♥ Graham & Nicola Bowkett
- ♥ Susan Hering
- ♥ Judith Lake

Five Years

- ♥ Megan Cox
- ♥ Pamela Livingston

Ten Years

- ♥ Rayonelle Baldwin
- ♥ Betty & Lee Higbie

Thirty Years

- ♥ Gale Borkenhagen

Thirty-Five Years

- ♥ Michael McDonald
- ♥ Bronwyn Willis

Are You Ready to Join the Church? We will have our next virtual joining ceremony on **Sunday, December 6 at 12:15 pm**. If you have not done so yet, please fill out an “I’m Ready to Join” form on our website under “Connect—Becoming a Member.” We will confirm your attendance and send you the information to log in for the ceremony.

Virtual Auction Success!

Thank you to everyone who made the 2020 Social Justice Online Auction a success! To the many people that generously donated their time, skills, items, etc., and to the many people that supported the auction with their bids, thank you. The money raised will go a long way to aid the social justice groups that are providing such vital services in our community.

Angela Will Be On Sabbatical Soon

From February 1 – May 31, our Senior Minister Angela Herrera will be on sabbatical leave. Sabbatical is an ancient concept relating to a period of rest. The root word means “ceasing” and is also found in the word “sabbath.” In recognition that ministry is difficult, consuming work, congregations grant ministerial sabbaticals as periods of rest, renewal, and study equal to one month for each year of service. In our congregation, ministers typically take a four-month sabbatical every four years.

It has now been six years since Angela’s last full sabbatical, and they have been eventful years! In just the last three, Angela became Senior Minister and she led us through an overhaul of our pastoral care program, a capital campaign and major building renovation, and a national search for an Associate Minister. That search brought Bob LaVallee to us—just in time for First Unitarian to become a virtual church. (Who knew Bob’s internship experience at a virtual church would come in this handy?) Under her leadership during the pandemic, we’ve added a second weekly worship service on Wednesdays, developed a new Technical Arts Director staff position to support our virtual services, and created a full slate of COVID-safe church policies with an interdisciplinary, science-based COVID Advisory Council. Through all of these projects, we’ve continued to have high-quality worship services week after week. It’s time for our busy Senior Minister to pause and rest as we prepare for the next big chapter in our congregational life.

During Angela’s sabbatical, Bob LaVallee will take the lead, and special guests will help with some Sunday services. With services on Zoom, we have the opportunity to hear from talented preachers from all over the country! Most programming will proceed as usual, and the pastoral care team will continue to ensure everyone is held within our care. As sabbatical is a full break from the constant duties of ministry, Angela will not be available for meetings, communications, etc. during that time. Angela expresses her full confidence in Bob to lead us while she is on leave. And we can also rest assured that if anything urgent should arise that causes Bob and the Board of Directors to need to reach her, she’ll still just be a phone call away.

Community News

You Can Still Pledge!

We are officially wrapping up the 2021 Pledge Campaign, but you can still make your pledge. As of this writing, we have reached \$780k of our \$1m goal. With just under 25% to go, your pledge could be the one that puts us over the top!



In 2020, we've come together to bridge our isolation, connect our families, and support one another. In such uncertain times, it's important that we know what support we can expect from our congregation in the year to come. The pledge you make can help us weather whatever storms are ahead in 2021. **We're so much stronger together.**

Please do what you can. And thank you for every way that you make us stronger! You can pledge online; call the church office at 505-884-1801; or email us your pledge at accountant@uuabq.org.

It's That Time Again!

Do you have a favorite local non-profit organization? During the **Annual Meeting on January 31, 2021**



we will vote for next year's **Change for the Future recipients**. This program gives designated funds from the weekly offering to a different nonprofit each quarter. During our virtual services this year our congregation has far exceeded the usual donations to this program!

Thank you to all who have given so generously.

To apply for 2021, a representative from the prospective organization must fill out the online form on our website by December 31. It can be easily found by clicking on the link on our homepage at www.uuabq.org. **Please review the requirements there before submitting.** The Social Justice Council will schedule each nominee for an informational Zoom presentation to the congregation prior to the Annual Meeting and expects a representative from each organization to participate. Questions? Contact Beth Orrell of the Social Justice Council at beeweaveit@gmail.com.

UUSC News: Guest at Your Table

Guest at Your Table (GAYT) is our annual fund-raising activity in support of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC). First U's

GAYT campaign was cancelled in March this year, so our UUSC support for 2020 depends on our individual donations. UUSC has provided resources for learning about its programs at <https://www.uusc.org/resources/congregations/guest-at-your-table/>. There you can find stories for all ages and videos about four special "guests" who are UUSC partners in social justice programs around the world, working in areas challenged by climate change, discrimination, and barriers to immigration. You can also watch a sermon video, create your own donation box, and make a donation online as you are able.

Board of Directors Update

I hope everyone is looking forward to the holidays, such as they are this year.

As we wrap up this year's pledge drive, board members have been busy making phone calls to past pledgers who we haven't heard from yet. I know, for some, these calls can be annoying, though we do try hard to make them pleasant. It's also a chance to hear from you—kindly, please—if you have suggestions for the board or church staff, or if you need pastoral care. We pass that information along to those who might be able to change something or help.

Why do we make these calls? Pledge amounts are needed so that the staff can propose a realistic budget, the board can do meaningful tweaking, and the congregation can vote on the budget in January at the Annual Meeting. Your pledges to the church are the foundation of our financial health. Thanks to all who pledge to help our church thrive!

In other business, the board has formed a task force to look into the ARC Building that sits just south and east of our playground. We are exploring whether the church would benefit from owning or leasing this building in the middle of our church property, which is up for sale. Thanks to all the volunteers who have done research into this, those who volunteered for the task force, and to George Bakula and Gwen Sawyer, who graciously agreed to serve as co-chairs of the task force.

You can reach me at boardpres@uuabq.org with suggestions or comments. I'm grateful for each and every one of you and what you bring to our community.

Heather Clark, President of the Congregation



Religious Education



From Our Director of Religious Education

"Peace, happiness, and joy is possible during the time I drink my tea."

Thich Nhat Hanh

Greetings!

Our families have more time than usual lately to experience stillness. Is it forced? Is it a friend? Is it a refuge? Is it boring? I think back to my own childhood and remember how much I enjoyed the peace of stillness while reading, drawing, or exploring the woods. Does your family have a place they like to go to experience the opposite of busyness? How do your family members like to spend time, not necessarily alone, but quietly?

I've heard many folks express fear over what the upcoming winter holidays will be like while still adhering to Covid-avoidance practices. It will be very different from what most of us are used to. It could also be a great chance to make room for some new family traditions. What could you fill that space with?

Share a memorable moment of winter stillness from the past with each other. Draw a picture of it, tell a story, and look for an opportunity to experience something similar again. Much of our natural world is taking a break now: dormancy, hibernation, less activity, and more rest. Go outside together and take some time to observe everything that is at rest and wonder why that happens. Give the celebration of stillness a place in your winter holiday celebrations.

Whether your holidays are quiet or busy, I wish you peace.

**Mia Noren, Dre@uuabq.org
Director of Religious Education, Credentialed**

RE Notes

Our **POP! (Parents of Preschoolers)** program had a great discussion at our second session. We'll meet again on **Friday, December 11 at 6:00 pm** to talk about Building Rituals. The materials are short and easy to access, and we'd love to have a few more people in our group. Contact me if you'd like to join us!

I created a **Bitmoji Resource Room** for our elementary children to be able to interact with the RE stories, songs, videos, and activities for the month,

whenever they want to. Have you had a chance to check it out? There are resources for parents, too! It changes every month and you can find it on our First UU Families Facebook page or on the church's website under the "Learn" tab.

Zoom Meetings

If you're not getting the notices for our online check-ins, **make sure your family is registered**. You can do so on our website under the "Learn" tab. Contact Alana Rodriguez at reasst@uuabq.org if there are changes to your information, especially email. This is the only way we have to contact you!

Volunteering

I hear that families are just stretched to the limit these days. That's a big reason to change how we do things while we are meeting virtually. Now, more than ever, we want to show our children how a community shows up for each other—community is still "the curriculum." Classes are shorter and simpler, and I still need you. Please connect with me if you think you can help!

Youth News

As we contemplate the theme of Stillness, we realize the shared feeling of the month may be one of exhaustion and grief. This is our first Winter Holiday season under COVID, and there may be grief over what we aren't able to do—the



traditions, the gatherings. It's so much. Oh! And we just had an election. Even for those not able to vote, we all felt the impact and possibly a sense of exhaustion and unrest. We will surely need some quiet stillness to find our balance.

Each week, the Youth Bitmoji Resource Room will be centered around invitations our faith makes to be a people of stillness. It invites us to step away from the busyness, listen for the voices of angels (4th UU Source focus), delve into the darkness (6th UU Source focus), and a look at justice and the shadow side of stillness (8th Principle focus). Don't forget about our weekly Sunday check-ins where we spend time connecting to each other through games, crafts, and discussion.

**Alana Rodriguez, youth@uuabq.org
Youth Programs Coordinator, RE Assistant**

Adult Faith Formation

Sunday Explorations

Sunday Explorations meets every Sunday at 9:30 am. Join us for stimulating conversation on UU faith-based topics. Bring your coffee or tea to this virtual conversation.

Meeting ID: 842 4289 2753

Passcode: 041625



“The Prophet’s Voice”

Facilitators: Jim Stewart and Angela Merkert

Throughout the ages, prophets have arisen who challenged the dominant powers that benefited the few and marginalized the many. In this three-week series, we will talk about the “prophetic voices” we hear in brief readings from Amos, Isaiah, and Matthew. What was their message for their times? In each case, how does their message of truth and compassion speak a critical word for our situation and energize us to create a more just society?

December 6

Amos: Indictment of the Powers and Vision for the Poor

Readings: Amos 2:6-8; Amos 5:11-12, 21-24; Amos 6:4-6

December 13

Isaiah: Call and Comfort

Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8; Isaiah 40:1-11

December 20

Matthew: A King’s Rage and a Prophet’s Grief

Reading: Matthew 2:1-20

December 27

Mindfulness in Dark Times

Based on a Buddhist book, “Miracle of Mindfulness,” by Thich Nhat Hanh and a second book. How does practicing mindfulness help us navigate the national crises? Does meditation have a role too?

Ron Friederich, Facilitator

Music Notes from Susan Peck



Calling all singers! Please join the Chalice Choir and Sol Singers in our winter music-making projects. We’re recording some wonderful arrangements of Christmas music using Virtual Caroling Kits by UU musician Adam Podd and his brother Matt.

If you’re feeling lonely and would like some extra music in your week, join Jetta Reynolds and members of Sol Singers for Friday afternoon drop-in visits, usually from 4:00-5:00 pm. Please contact Jetta Reynolds for more information and Zoom link, at jettaruthreynolds@gmail.com.

Contact Susan at speck@uuabq.org with your questions or for more information about how we’re continuing to make music at First U.

Albuquerque Interfaith

First Unitarian has been part of Albuquerque Interfaith (AI) for more than twenty-five years. In 1993, faith leaders in Albuquerque came together because they believed that **acting collectively we could build a more responsive democracy for all of us**. Over the years, AI has addressed issues including behavioral health, education, immigrant justice, job training, and strengthening our neighborhoods.

In 2021, AI will begin a period of deepening our roots, expanding beyond our 17 member institutions, and stabilizing our financial base. Member institutions will be engaging in relational conversations, building trust and power as we bring forward issues to take to the coming Legislative Session in Santa Fe. This is an exciting time to engage in the process of building the “new normal” we want for our community and our state. Watch the e-broadsheet for opportunities to get involved! For more information, contact Martha Kettle, mketelle@gmail.com.

Living Alone Together

Many of us are waiting out the pandemic at home on our own. If you would like to regularly connect with other people living alone and provide mutual support, join us each Wednesday evening. Email Debbie Wolfe at lobitaroja55@gmail.com for more information.

Groups & Activities *all are welcome*

Outdoor Volunteer Opportunity

The Landscape Committee needs help for a leaf clean-up on **Saturday, December 5**. There will be a morning effort (9:00—11:00) and an afternoon one (1:00—3:00). Bring your own gloves, drinks, and snacks. All participants must use face coverings and practice physical distancing. We thank you for volunteering. Please notify Steve Phillips at nmsleep@unm.edu if you are planning to join us in the morning or the afternoon.

Empower the LGBTQ+ Investor

On **December 8 at noon**, we'll take a deep dive into the challenges that LGBTQ+ investors face and discuss potential solutions that can empower decision-making. Join Kris Kennedy, Financial Advisor and First U Member, as well as guest Kevin Healy from Goldman Sachs, for a free one-hour webinar sponsored by the Radical Generosity committee. Register at <https://tinyurl.com/LGBTQinvestor>.



Winter Solstice Wisdom Circle

On the **19th, the third Saturday morning of December from 10:30-noon**, we in the winter of life will gather around our Zoom table to make merry and talk about what we're learning from celebrating the holidays in cyberspace. Along with that, we'll reflect on the meaning of the solstice season and share childhood stories. Come join the Chautauqua—everyone welcome. If you're so inclined, don festive gear and bring something nice to sip & something delectable to nibble. To join us, email Jerilyn Bowen at jbowen1@unm.edu for the meeting information.

Report from the Earth Web Team

Our church environmental team has resumed monthly meetings over Zoom. "The Drawdown Review" is our study this year, as we continue to educate ourselves about dealing with climate change. We are currently exploring what we can do to further environmental efforts in the New Mexico Legislature. We are especially interested in supporting The Green Amendment and Community Solar. State Senator Mimi Stewart will

be a guest speaker at **our next meeting on December 13 from 12:30–2:00**. We also have a **fun Holiday meeting on December 19, from 4:00–5:30**. If you want more information and are not already on our contact list, send a message to marilynlea@aol.com.

Newbie Connections

Are you new here? We have found one of the best ways to feel truly connected to our community is to join a small discussion group. Join Chuck Blocher for a drop-in discussion about all things UU. No need to sign up or make a long commitment. We meet once a month on the last **Tuesday at 7:00 pm, with our next meeting on December 29**. Contact Chuck at chuck.blocher@me.com or Laira Magnusson at LMags@uuabq.org for meeting information.

Brothers Men's Group

All male-identifying members of our community are welcome to join for conversation and support on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 6:00 pm. Join us on **December 8 and 22** at <https://uuma.zoom.us/j/736923181>.

December Reads

Bread, Wine, and Book Club will meet **Friday, December 11 at 7:00 pm** on Zoom. We will be discussing *2 A.M. at the Cat's Pajamas* by Marie-Helene Bertino. Contact Martha Beyerlein (martha.beyerlein@comcast.net) for the meeting information.

The **Monday Afternoon Book Club** will not meet in December.

The Nonfiction Book Club continues to meet on Zoom **Wednesdays at 2:00 pm**. We are currently reading *The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Kolbert. For meeting information, contact Bob Wood at 352-0212 or roberttwood@gmail.com.

Reading on Racism Book Group's selection for December is *White Rage* by Carol Anderson. Our meeting is **December 30, 3:00–5:00 pm**. To join us and receive the Zoom link, please contact Becky Steele at d2steele2@gmail.com.



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

– DATED MATERIAL –

Send Us Your Photos!

Do you have a chalice at home?
Perhaps an Advent wreath? We'd love
to see it! Please snap a photo or two
and send them to Chris Paul, our
Technical Arts Director,
at cpaul@uuabq.org.

