

Text for December Newsletter

From the Minister

I simply love this time of year but this was not always the case. I guess it wasn't so much that I "disliked" it as much as I was sort of neutral about it. This attitude and perspective developed during a period in my life when I was still quite willing to criticize Christmas and its theology of a savior being born for humankind. I was also very verbal about what Thanksgiving meant to our First Nations brothers and sisters, all in the name of being sensitive and right! Yes, there were the Solstice Celebrations, and Kwanzaa, Ramadan, and Chanukah; yet my attitude was so what!!! Why bother celebrating? I was smiling on the outside but a real Grinch lurking on the inside. After all, I was seminary trained and was well versed in comparative religious studies. I really knew what it was all about. Don't these folks get it? Oh what fools these mortals be!

Needless to say I had to grow up and use other ways of channeling this energy, this anger, but also to learn to see the good in the season and what that good meant and did for others. It wasn't all about me. My inner child was so wounded that it would not come out and play and enjoy the spirit of the season. In short, it was a low down dirty shame. As life would have it, I married a woman that just adores Christmas. To this day it is her favorite holiday and she really gets into it. Now so do I. Her love and joy is contagious and I cannot wait to celebrate. Our family ritual is to get a tree up the day after Thanksgiving, and to have it decorated soon thereafter. Needless to say, our 7 year old daughter Kevyn is nothing short of ecstatic this time of year, and why not? To give and receive; to see the smiles on people's faces; to spend time with family, even the difficult family members....I had taken all of this for granted, until Judy rekindled the spark in me. So many times in life it takes another to do this for us. I am ever grateful for those people in my life who bring me back to myself when I forget who and what I say I am about. Perhaps you are fortunate enough to have an individual or a group of individuals who do this for you as well. If so I am happy for you. If not, I pray you find them. They are a price above rubies.

Whatever holiday or ritual you acknowledge this time of year, the child in each and every one of us needs to be acknowledged. It is a season of rebirth in so many ways and I do find that folks appear kinder, happier, friendlier, and really are ready to spread the good cheer.

Or perhaps it is just me.

And if it is just me (which I really doubt), than I am co-creating my experience of the season and that is just fine with me. I want to live in a kinder, happier, friendlier world.

I am also fully aware of the other side of the coin during this holiday season. Depression. Suicide. Family quarrels and violence. These are not fun stories to hear about, to read about, to experience. Yet for me, I can feel for those in the midst of this kind of pain and despair. Perhaps I can offer a kind word, a genuine and gentle smile, some comfort. I can also remind myself that there for the grace of God go I, and I have so much to be thankful for and to share. I can remind myself that there are and always will be people, places, and things that I have no control of. This is not to say that one does not try to comfort and assist, yet the gift of acceptance is a hard won gift. This is the experience of life on planet earth and we can all attest that it isn't always an easy one.

Many of us will experience what can only be counted on as life being life, which we sometimes refer to as "change." In all of its fullness, life is another word for change. Speaking of change, many of you may already know by now, Sybil Argintar, our Religious Education Director, has decided to move on and pursue other interests. We will miss her terribly. Her dedication to the growth and nurturance of our youth and this congregation is well known. We owe her a deep debt of gratitude for her commitment and a job well done. We wish you nothing but good Sybil and many blessings on the next phase of your journey. Remember us, for we will remember you!

Our congregation has undergone many changes as well. Our congregation and its leaders have really worked hard this year. We have a new board, a 5 year budget plan, more adult education to offer, as well as a few new members to boot. We have soooo much to be thankful for. We have an extremely bright future ahead of us. That said, I am also urging you to take time to breathe amid the hustle and bustle of the season; to smell the roses or coffee or whatever it is we're supposed to be smelling when we slow down. Hug your loved ones a bit tighter; to say what is in your heart when the time allows; Be wasteful with the "I Love You's," (only if you really mean it however), to take the risk of reaching out

and realizing that it really isn't all about you or me.... That the true meaning of this time of year is not so much about being grateful for our gifts, (and that is important) but how we use them!

May the Spirit of Love and Light envelop each and every one of our hearts this holiday season, and may a rebirth of consciousness and loving transformation be with you now and in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

The wise and profound insight of Max Coats from his book, *Seasons Of The Self*:

“....This time of year seems a time between times. Autumn's gone!But Winter has not quite come. If we had a sense of seasons we'd make a holiday for solitude, as our fathers and mothers made one of first fruits. Between seasons is a good time to listen to one's own thoughts and make peace with one's environment, a good time to put aside the getting of too many things, a time to solve old puzzles we had no time to solve in summer months.

Now late Autumn or early Winter or whatever its name may be is a time to see farther than we could when leaves cut off the view. Now the world reveals itself in more dimensions, and neither things nor human beings nor issues can hide in the leafless woods. We may it looks all stark and bare, and I suppose it does, But it also looks clean and clear, for those who look without the screen of leaves and grass that covered so much before the frost came on....things balance out, they usually do if you give them time...Right now, between two seasons, I'd make a holiday of solitude, with that clear view leaves allows, and with a clear view the loss of leaves allows, and with a faith that in its time, my life, like that of the earth is balance out, If I have patience enough to see, and if I make a time to touch the earth again and see the sense it makes out of the seasons and me.”

Rev. Michael Carter
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Sunday Programming

Sunday, 1 December 2013, 11 a.m.

What's With The Zombies?

Michael Carter

In case you haven't noticed, there's a zombie apocalypse happening in our culture. Not that zombies are new. They have been around since 1935 (Ouangha) and have appeared from time to time in the horror film genre. But lately there has been a tsunami of zombies showing up in theaters and on our home screens (which are practically as large as theaters). From 1991 through 2011, there were close to 900 zombie movies made. Not quite one a week but close enough to ask the question, "What's With The Zombies?" On the Sunday after Thanksgiving (on the eve of Cyber Monday when Americans imitate the "undead" at online retailers across the country) we will be asking why we find ourselves drawn again and again to the undead. Zombies may be less than a century old in terms of their appearance on the big screen but our attraction to them goes back millennia.

Michael Carter (not our regular Michael Carter, but rather that other Michael Carter) is a graduate of the Emory University Chandler School of Theology. He served in the United Methodist Church for eight years working in parishes in Georgia and Kentucky, as well as serving on the staff of one of the oldest statewide peace organizations in the United States. He spent many years in the corporate world and now is a starving entrepreneur living near Brevard.

Sunday, 8 December 2013, 11 a.m.

The Gift of Patience

Rev. Michael Carter

Many of us are familiar with the upcoming season of Advent and its emphasis on anticipation and expectation. Yet the flip side of this coin is that one must somehow learn to live a life of patience in order to really be present for whatever that anticipated moment presents to us. Patience is indeed a virtue, and a sometimes difficult one at that. Without it we are like a rodent on a treadmill, running and running and getting nowhere. Yet with just the right amount, exercised at the

right time, we can live a life of serenity and acceptance. Is it worth the work that we have to put in to develop the gift of patience? I think so. Let's explore what patience can bring to us in our day to day relationships with each other, our planet, and our lives!

Sunday, 15 December 2013, 11 a.m.

H. Byron Ballard

H. Byron Ballard, BA, MFA, is a ritualist, teacher, speaker and writer. She has served as a featured speaker and teacher at Sacred Space Conference, Pagan Unity Festival, Southeast Women's Herbal Conference, Glastonbury Goddess Conference and other gatherings.

Her writings have appeared in print and electronic media. Her essays are featured in several anthologies, including "Birthed from Scorched Hearts" (Fulcrum Press), "Christmas Presence" (Catawba Press), "Women's Voices in Magic" (Megalithica Books), "Into the Great Below" and "Skalded Apples" (both from Asphodel Press). She blogs as "Asheville's Village Witch" (myvillagewitch.wordpress.com) and as The Village Witch for Witches and Pagans Magazine (witchesandpagans.com/The-Village-Witch)

Her pamphlet "Back to the Garden: a Handbook for New Pagans" has been widely distributed and her first book "Staubs and Ditchwater: an Introduction to Hillfolks Hoodoo" (Silver Rings Press) debuted in June 2012." Byron is currently at work on "Earth Works: Eight Ceremonies for a Changing Planet". Contact her at www.myvillagewitch.com, info@myvillagewitch.com

Sunday, 22 December 2013, 11 a.m.

[to be announced]

Sunday, 29 December 2013, 11 a.m.

This I Resolve: A New Year Transition

Linda Tatsapaugh

Although the calendar year that we follow, and thus the date of the "new year", is somewhat random, we embrace it as a tool to help us with our own transitions. In this interactive service, we will hear stories of transition and resolution as we bring this year to a close and prepare for the new one. Come prepared to share your own closures and goals, while we take a contemplative moment in a noisy holiday season.

Linda Tatsapaugh was a religion major many years ago, and is a continuing student of religion and spirituality. Over more than 20 years helping young people with special challenges learn to master their world, she has found that everyone has gifts to share and goals to work toward, and when we do these in community, we can accomplish much more.

UUCSV Treasurer

Opportunity Awaits! Are you super organized? Good with figures? How about computer savvy? You can be the next UUCSV treasurer! Training provided! The current treasurer will be stepping down Dec 31st due to work and family duties (pssst, she's going to be a grandmother). Call or email Dawn Wilson at treasurer@uusv.org 828-776-6657

Social Action News

Stephanie Arrington, along with her partner Cassie Cagle and two children, will soon be moving into their new Swannanoa Habitat home. As a part of her work hours required by Habitat for new home owners, Stephanie decided to host a potluck dinner for volunteers from Global Village. These special people came to the Asheville area from all parts of the United States to do home repairs and home building. Two of the ten were recent high school graduates, taking a

gap year before graduating college. One woman brought her twenty year old autistic son who is interested in construction work. Another person's goal is to work on a house on six continents. Asheville, representing North America, was his fourth continent. He plans on going to South America in June and Asia in the fall. Our congregation is presently working on a Habitat house in Swannanoa. Susan Culler needs more people to help out and would be happy to have you volunteer. Please call Susan at (828)-779-2120 to sign up.

UUCSV member Teresa Ballinger, who is Stephanie's mom, and Helen Bell, representing the Social Action Committee, helped to coordinate the event. Other guests included another Habitat family and two Habitat staff members. All were appreciative of the community and home cooked meal. Many thanks to the cooks from our congregation who made it happen: Fern Martin, Connie Krochmal, Diane Hutchins, Sue Phillips, Teresa Ballinger and Helen Bell. Special thanks to photographer Monroe Gilmore.

Choir News

In December, the choir will sing for the Christmas service on the 22nd. We will be singing "Carol of the Bells," the beautiful Ukrainian song in four parts. We will also sing "O Little Town of Bethlehem" in this service which will feature traditional Christmas music.

We will rehearse on Sunday, December 15th at 12:15, and again on WEDNESDAY the 18th at 6:30, a change of our midweek date just for this month.

Come sing with us!

—Linda Metzner, Choir Director

Friday Fling

December's Friday Fling, a fun party for grown-ups every third Friday of the month, will be held on 20 December at 6:30 p.m. at the church. Refreshments (red and white) will be provided. Bring some simple food, so that we can make a potluck supper out of it. The movie "Slaughterhouse-Five" (2004; based on the novel by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.) will be shown. For further information call Norm Kowal (458-4537).

Miscellaneous items

Volunteer Spotlight

Ever wonder who that man was in the back of the sanctuary week after week, twisting the knobs and dials to various machines? Meet Emory Underwood. An original founding member of UUCSV, Emory and his wife Angie moved to Black Mountain from Montgomery, Alabama. In addition to running the sound and media equipment most Sunday services, Emory also serves on the Building and Grounds Committee, and maintains the church's website (<http://www.uusv.org>) which he created in 2004. A self-described "jack of all trades," Emory was part of the renovation crew that remodeled the sanctuary when the congregation bought the building in 2000 and also helped recently to renovate the bathrooms (which made one of them 95% ADA complaint). He has also served on the Social Action Committee and the Board of Trustees.

A lifelong volunteer who was active in civil rights issues, the League of Women Voters and the Civitan Club in Alabama; when Emory moved to Black Mountain he jumped right into service at UUCSV. "I've done it (volunteering) for so long, it feels natural." In fact you could say Emory has been involved in the congregation since day one. Many of the start-up meetings for the planning of the Swannanoa Valley congregation took place at Emory's and Angie's house.

We are looking for at least 2 more volunteers to be trained to run the audio visual equipment. No experience necessary. Please contact Emory if interested- underwoode@charter.net

Flowers

A floral arrangement set in front of the pulpit always adds a touch of beauty and grace to our Sunday worship service. Occasionally a Sunday comes along and we all notice when there is an absence of flowers up front! We have not had a committee responsible for this task nor do we have a formal process in place for making sure this detail gets done. Someone, actually many individuals, just seems to take this on. The Sunday Service Associates would like to extend an invitation to all members and friends to consider volunteering for this pleasant assignment. There is a sign-up sheet out in the foyer that will encourage forward planning and enable even more folks to get involved. Please think of a person or special event in your life you would like to recognize with this thoughtful act of service. Your design can run the spectrum from simple to elegant, native to cultivated, whatever inspires you! Then select the Sunday you plan on bringing your floral arrangement to church and sign up to reserve your day. Many thanks!

UUSC Holiday Card Sales

Many thanks to all the Members and Friends of UUCSV who recently purchased UUSC Holiday Cards. Social Action appreciates your support with this worthy project. All of the proceeds go to UUSC to support their work around the globe.

—Connie Krochmal, Social Action Holiday Card coordinator

Yoga by Willow

Monday nights 7pm - 830pm and Wednesday mornings 10am - 1130am

Come join your UU friends for gentle yoga in the sanctuary on Monday nights and/or Wednesday mornings. Classes are led by Willow, a 230 hour Yoga Therapist. Movements are tailored to individual's needs and abilities. A practice of gentle yoga invites oxygen and movement into your body for health and well-being. Class focus is on safe movements, increased balance and flexibility and breath awareness. Appropriate for all ages. Cost=\$12 per class or \$60 for 6 sessions. Part of class proceeds is donated to UUCSV.