



ITHACA

UU Connections

2024/2025 Issue No. 4

December 2024

Our Spiritual Journey

"Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness." – Anne Frank

As darkness falls and winter quiets the land, we are invited into a time of stillness and reflection. Amidst the season's bustle of preparations and gatherings, there's a call to pause, connect, and listen—to the world, to each other, and to ourselves. What does it mean to be fully present? Whether it is a quiet moment with a friend, stillness under the stars, or the glow of candlelight at our holiday services, these simple moments are where the true spirit of the season lives. In this time of uncertainty, simply being present for one another can be an act of love and resistance. May we all embrace the opportunities we have to be present and share the gifts of connection, compassion, and peace, and to kindle the flame that illuminates the dark.

Emily Richards, CRE

Community Candlelight Christmas Services

at Sage Chapel
on the Cornell Campus
Monday, December 23
5:00 pm and 7:30 pm

More information on page 8.

Sunday Services in the Sanctuary at 10:30 am

Live-streamed on our YouTube channel

**Nursery childcare and Religious
Exploration classes for children**



Winter Solstice and Yule Celebration

Saturday, December
21st at 5:30 pm
RoseBarb Farm

Please join us for a celebration of the longest night and the return of the sun with ritual, light, and song. Dress warmly and bring an LED candle if you have one. All ages welcome. 108 Landon Road (off Rt. 79 South) in Ithaca.

Our Mission

Our mission is to
create connection,
find inspiration and
engage the world.
Connect. Inspire.
Engage.

Religious Exploration News

For information about Religious Exploration, please contact Emily Richards at CongregationalLife@uuithaca.org.

Greetings from Religious Exploration

This month we are Living Love Through the Practice of Presence.

In the event-full month of December, it is easy to become overwhelmed with everything going on, so please be easy and gentle with yourselves.

You are invited to let go of the hustle & bustle of the holidays and notice the deeper gifts of the season, our children, families, and communities. May you both give, and receive, the gifts of presence and stillness, of togetherness and connection, of peace and joy.

The year is coming to an end but we, we are still here.

"Nothing in the past is as powerful as what we choose to do in the present moment." -Louise Hay

Classroom Sundays

Elementary: This month the elementary aged children will be focusing on our monthly theme of Presence through stories, activities, crafts, and games.

Middle School and High School: The youth will continue to explore what role they will play in "Building A Better World", an RPG (Role Play Games) -based curriculum that will lead youth and adults through the process of creating a game setting as a faith development and community-building exercise reflecting Unitarian Universalist values. Please have participants bring a set of gaming dice to each session if they have them.

Please register your children below for the 2024-2025 Religious Exploration program! This information helps us to plan for the upcoming year.

[First Unitarian Society of Ithaca RE Registration Form 2024-2025](#)

Religious Exploration Wishlist

If you are looking to support the RE program and would like to purchase a gift, here is a list of items that would be useful and deeply appreciated.

[RE Wishlist](#)

We have so much appreciation for all of the community members who enrich our community through participating in our Religious Exploration programming. Being a part of the lives of our young people is deeply meaningful and the effects last a lifetime. This important programming can only happen with the support of the entire community.

[FUSIT 2024-2025 RE Volunteer Sign Up](#)

Please join our [First UU Ithaca Parents Facebook Group](#)!

Emily Richards CRE (Credentialed Religious Educator) - Director of Congregational Life
Madeline Natale - Religious Exploration Coordinator

Our Whole Lives (OWL) for 8th-9th and 10-12th Graders

The First Unitarian Society of Ithaca and the First Congregational Church of Ithaca are offering Our Whole Lives comprehensive sexuality education program during the school year 2024-2025. The 8th-9th graders will continue their program through January and our 10th-12th graders will have the opportunity to participate in OWL this spring.

Religious Exploration Schedule for December

December 1 - Classroom Sunday

December 8 - Classroom Sunday

December 15 - Creative Sunday -
Holiday Party

December 22 - Multigenerational
Service: No Rehearsal Holiday
Pageant

December 29 - Multigenerational
Service, Nursery is closed.

*The Nursery will be open every Sunday from
10 am-12 pm for young children between the
ages of 0 and 4 except for December 29.*

Religious Exploration Events for December

Holiday Decorating Party

Sunday, **December 1st**

11:30 am-1:00 pm

FUSIT Parlor

It's time to deck the halls for the holidays! Please lend a hand during Coffee Hour after the service to bring some light and festivity to our spaces. Decorations both provided and welcomed.

Holiday Cookie Decorating

Sunday, **December 22**

11:30 am-12:30 pm

FUSIT Parlor

The holiday season is upon us and that means baking and sweet treats! All are welcome to stay after our annual No-Rehearsal Holiday pageant for holiday cookie decorating.

Bakers needed to provide cookies and icing, gluten free, vegan, and allergen friendly varieties appreciated.

[Holiday Cookie Decorating Sign Up](#)

Music for Little People

Wednesday, **December 4th and 18th**

10am-10:45am

Arch Room

Share in the joy of music in this class which is free and open to the public. Children 0-5 and their caregivers are welcome to meet us in the Arch Room each month. Sing, play, dance, explore instruments, and connect through music.

Small Group Ministry for Parents - Childcare Provided,

Sunday, **December 15**

12 pm-1 pm, FUSIT Library

A Small Group Ministry for individuals who are actively parenting. The group will follow the Soul Matters themes with a focus on how they are related to the journey and experience of being a parent. Gatherings will take place monthly on the third Sunday of the month from 12pm-1pm, with childcare available. We invite you to join us for an opportunity for fellowship and community within our larger First UU community, in a safe, confidential and nurturing environment.

DECEMBER

Worship Services

The theme for December is "Presence" and the Celebrations Team is looking forward to speakers whose voices can help us to explore this theme as individuals and as a community.

Sunday, December 1, "Give Light: Finding Hope in Darkness"

Guest speaker Geoff Kaufmann

Geoff Kaufman is a UU folksinger based in Connecticut. He has performed and given services at many UU churches including Binghamton as well as performing at General Assembly in 2003. Special music by Stephanie Ortolano

Sunday, December 8, "How Shall We Nourish An Abiding Presence of Hope"

Rev. Janet Shortall

"Hope provides a haven from pessimism, fear and dread. It galvanizes our courage and mobilizes our energy and vitality. It enhances our mood and focuses our creative thinking... Heroism is frequently spawned by the presence of hope during times of danger and destitution. It is one of the great human motivators, engendering a sense of purpose and aspiration during desperate times." Levine, Saul
Special music by Jayne Demakos, harp

Sunday, December 15, "Living Love Through the Practice of Presence"

Rev. Peaches Gillette

Special music by Ana Florencia

Sunday, December 22, "No Rehearsal Holiday Pageant"

Emily Richards, CRE

This all-ages service is filled with the wonder of the holidays. Come and take on the role of a child born, the star above, a menorah, yule log, a sheep or donkey, one of our choir of angels, or even one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa. Together we will create a joyful tale of the miracles of the season. Costumes are provided and cookie decorating to follow. Special music by Pick-Up Family Choir

MONDAY, December 23, Candlelight Christmas Service at Sage Chapel, Cornell campus

Emily Richards, CRE, 5:00 pm and 7:30 pm

We continue our Christmas tradition of a holiday worship service for everyone in the Ithaca community at Sage Chapel on Cornell's campus. A Christmas celebration with music, story, and candlelight, where we explore ancient tales and how their messages of radical love and acceptance can bring us together and inspire us in the present moment.

Special music by FUSIT Choir and guest musicians

Sunday, December 29, "Gifts from the Past Year, Hopes for the Next"

Worship leaders will be members of the Celebrations Associates Team.

Special music by Charlotte Greenspan and Carrie Regenstein, 4-hand piano.

Director of Congregational Life

Emily Richards

CongregationalLife@uuithaca.org

Pastoral Care Associate

Rev. Janet Shortall

pastoralcare@uuithaca.org

Preacher and Program Associate

Rev. Peaches Gillette

pgfreedom09@gmail.com

Religious Exploration Coordinator

Madeline Natale

reasst@uuithaca.org

Childcare Coordinator

Melissa Heslop

childcare@uuithaca.org

Music Director

Stephanie Ortolano

music@uuithaca.org

Choir Director

Jayne Demakos

choir@uuithaca.org

President, Board of Trustees

Fred Balfour

fred.balfour@gmail.com

Director of Congregation Administration

Michelle Waffner

office@uuithaca.org

Administrative Assistant

Loretta Heimbuch

adminasst@uuithaca.org

Sexton

Rachel Seymour

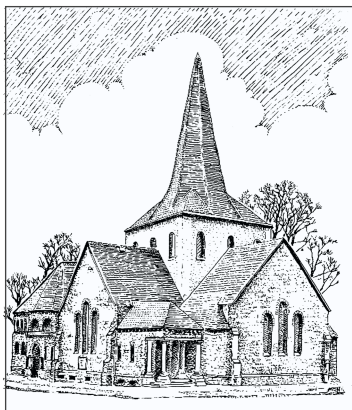
sexton@uuithaca.org

Bookkeeper

Lauren Ponzone

office@uuithaca.org

The First Unitarian Society of Ithaca
306 North Aurora Street
P.O. Box 6
Ithaca, NY 14851-0006



Visit our Website and get
your newsletter:
www.uuithaca.org

Possible Ponderings

*The theme for December is Living Love
Through the Practice of Presence.*

*Possible Ponderings is an offering of ways you might consider
engaging more deeply with the theme or reflecting on the ways the
idea of **Living Love Through the Practice of Presence**
shows up in your life.*

December 1-7: How do you want others to feel in
your presence? Loved? Accepted? Heard? Held?
Judged? Unimportant? Understood? Something else?

December 8-14: Whose absence feels most present
to you during the holiday season?

December 15-21: Do you remember the first time you
felt completely comfortable in someone's presence?

December 22-28: What can anyone give you greater
than now, starting here, when you turn around?

December 29-31: What if you stopped measuring
days by productivity and started experiencing them by
degree of presence?

Head Ushers Needed

This year we will be holding **two** services at Sage Chapel on
Monday, **December 23**, one at 5:00 pm and one at 7:30 pm.
We are currently looking for 2 head ushers for each service.

Head ushers will secure ushers (easy to do), send out a
reminder to all ushers and assign and oversee tasks at the
service. This short term volunteer project is a nice way to
contribute to the community for this special event.

Training will be provided.

If you would like more information or can volunteer as a head
usher, please email office@uuithaca.org. (If you would like to
volunteer as a regular usher, please hang tight. There will be
separate correspondence about regular ushers).

*Did you know you can text
in your donations to the offering plate on
Sundays? Simply text 607-260-6616
with the amount + offering
(eg: \$5 offering) to donate by phone.
It's super easy!*

Social Justice

We hope you will consider joining us in our social justice efforts and encourage you to reach out and learn more about how you can get involved. Find more information about various teams on our website.

Side with Love and Shared Plate

Teams, Committees, and Small Groups are invited to sponsor a month for our Side with Love and Shared Plate Collections. The group would be responsible for choosing the organization, communicating with that organization about needed items for Side with Love, delivering goods, and communicating any pertinent information to Michelle and Loretta for the Newsletter, Weekly Announce, and Order of Service.

This is a wonderful opportunity to lift up and support local or national organizations that do work that is meaningful to your team or group. Sign up information can be found below.

Side With Love and Shared Plate 2024-2025

For the month of December, *Ithaca Welcomes Refugees* will be the recipient of the Side with Love collection. At this time, they are in need of the following items:

Wipes, Facial tissue, Shampoo, Toothpaste, Toothbrushes and Hand lotion

8th Principle Action Ministry

The 8th Principle Action Ministry (8PAM) will no longer be meeting on a monthly basis. Look for future program offerings including book discussion and film viewing opportunities.

Contact joAnn kowalski for inquiries or to offer ideas or suggestions at jmkowalski10@gmail.com.

The Environmental Interest Circle (EIC) Meeting

Wednesday, **December 4**, at 7:00 pm
in the Parlor and over Zoom

The Environmental Interest Circle meets to discuss/exchange ideas and actions that further sustainable living for each one of us, for the FUSIT congregation, and for our congregation's role in the greater community. This group meets the first Wednesday of the month in the parlor and over Zoom.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/81644753524?pwd=SDBqaTN5elM3ejltbGdJeGhPa3QxQT09>

Meeting ID: 816 4475 3524

Passcode: 894885



LGBTQ+ Group Meets Monthly

This Small Group is especially for FUSIT's LGBTQ+ community and meets monthly. ***All who identify on the LGBTQ+ continuum are welcome.***

Come enjoy this opportunity for fellowship and community within our larger FUSIT community, in a safe, confidential and nurturing environment. Please reach out to Ely at eleanorwillard97@gmail.com for more information.

LGBTQ+ Days of Remembrance

World AIDS Day December 1 is a day a time to unite against HIV/AIDS.

LGBTQ+ Business Week December 2-8 is a week to support LGBTQ+ businesses and raise awareness of economic issues.

Trans Youth Day December 28 is a day to celebrate trans youth.

Women's Circle on December 23

Women's Circle usually meets via Zoom on the 4th Monday of the month from 7-8:30 pm. All who identify as women are welcome. This is a drop-in group, so no need to sign up; just come. Anyone is welcome to bring a poem or a reading. For information or questions contact Nancy Miller at ananda7733@gmail.com or 607-539-7733.

Zoom Link: <https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/82169260621?pwd=ZDkyaRKMmo2czhqSWgrSVhmbGFqdzo9>

Meeting ID: 821 6926 0621. Passcode: 015515

December Board of Trustees Meeting

The Board will meet on the third Tuesday of the month, on **December 17**, at 6:30 pm. Board meetings are a hybrid format, taking place in the Francis Ellen Watkins Harper Room and through Zoom.

All FUSIT members are invited to attend these meetings. Ten minutes are set aside at the beginning of the meeting for congregation feedback. Please join us!

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/88258776990?pwd=VUxUTUMraVZDUUFQzQndSVFRraFIPdzo9>

Meeting ID: 882 5877 6990

Passcode: 602445

Nametags

If you would like a nametag, please fill out the **nametag request form** at the Welcome Table or contact adminasst@uuithaca.org and we'll make one for you. Then look for your new nametag in the Narthex nametag cabinet (corner of Buffalo and Aurora Sts.).

Emergency Pastoral Care

In case of pastoral need, call Kathy Hopkins at 607-592-3025. She will direct pastoral needs for weddings, memorial services and emergency pastoral care to Rev. Janet Shortall.



**Beacon on Aurora - An Evening with
The Rough and Tumble, Sunday,
December 8, doors open at 6:30 pm,
concert begins at 7 pm**

The Rough & Tumble, a dynamic duo comprised of Mallory Graham and Scott Tyler, have been captivating audiences with their unique blend of dumpster-folk and thrift store-Americana for over a decade. The Pennsylvania-born Graham and Central California's Tyler have a knack for weaving together elements of joy, sorrow, comedy, and drama in their music, leaving audiences on the edge of their seats. In May 2023, the band released *Only This Far*, a 12-song collection drawing from the highs and lows of their lived experiences over all those years.

The songs are a symphony of raw, unbridled emotion, weaving together tales of love, loss, and longing with a deft touch that could only be crafted by these two songwriters who have quite literally lived on the road for the better part of a decade. It's a true testament to the band's unwavering dedication to their craft.

\$20 suggested donation at the door. Cash preferred. Electronic payment options (direct to artist) will also be available.



Sage Chapel Christmas Choir!

Rehearsals are underway for two beautiful services at Sage Chapel on **December 23** at 5:00 pm and 7:30 pm. Our dedicated FUSIT Choir has been joined by many singers from the Ithaca community making a choir of about 75 singers! At these times, we find singing is really good and important medicine.

Jayne Demakos, Choir Director

Soul Matters Material for December

The Soul Matters theme for December is *Living Love Through the Practice of Presence*. This month's packet includes a few short readings, spiritual exercises, and discussion questions for you to consider. The material can be found at:

<https://tinyurl.com/SoulMattersDec2024>

Care Cafe - December 8 and 22

2nd and 4th Sunday of each month in the FUSIT Library

Rev. Peaches Gillette and Christine Kapral invite you to the Care Cafe. During our time in the 'cafe', we openly express our thoughts, reaching into ourselves and deeply touching upon and sharing what it means to be fully human in a complicated world.

Facilitated by Rev. Peaches Gillette and Christine Kapral, both professionals trained in counseling, pastoral care and spiritual directions, each gathering will focus on a loosely structured theme around spirituality, encouraging participants to freely explore all aspects of their spiritual journeys. Past groups have been excellent and enriching, as the flow of participants from week to week has created perfect cross-currents of relationships, broadening and securing FUSIT's sense of community. Time together in the Care Cafe allows many of us to meet and know one another more intimately.

Rev. Peaches Gillette pgfreedom09@gmail.com
Christine Kapral christinekapral@yahoo.com

People of Color Affinity Group

Are you a person of color looking to connect with other UU's of color? Please consider joining a newly formed group dedicated to growing a multicultural community and promoting diversity here at FUSIT. For more information, please contact poc@uuithaca.org.

Joys and Sorrows

Joys and Sorrows are now shared during Sunday Service. Please send notices to the team at joysandsorrows@uuithaca.org. When considering what is shared in Joys and Sorrows, please note, these services are live streamed and available to the public on our YouTube Channel.

-A joy that the Newcomers Brunch on November 16 was such a great success with over 22 guests! As an SGM service project, the event was coordinated by Kathy and Carl Hopkins, Sara Catterall, Liz Einstein, Matt Hare, Sue and Don Rakow, Wendy Wolfe and Carol Whitlow who provided the food and labor to make it happen. Appreciation to Edna Brown for taking photos for the Breeze directory.

Appreciations

As we nurture a culture of appreciation at FUSIT, let's sing praises to the many people who help make our community the wonderful place it is. Who here at First Unitarian Society of Ithaca have you noticed doing something above and beyond, who has been a quiet unsung hero, or who is doing an exceptional job? It can be a member or staff or friend to our community. Send your submissions to joysandsorrows@uuithaca.org.

-Thanks to the Hospitality Team for once again stepping up to make sure everything ran smoothly, helping out with the wonderful celebration of the work that the Environmental Interest Circle did to have heat pumps installed in the Annex. Thank you for ensuring that this is a community of connection and care.

-Thanks to Emily Richards, Stephanie Ortolano, Rev. Janet Shortall, Madonna Stallman, Nancy Dolge, Seema Mathur, Madeline Natale, Nancy Miller, Jens Wennberg, and everyone who assisted with the pre and post election vigils and offerings. Now is the time to hold each other in love as we search for a way forward, together.

Expanding Community

For many this charged political time can bring about increased feelings of isolation and division. We always welcome new members to our community and faith and hope to provide a safe space of connection and learning for all. Please continue to invite any and all people that you know that you believe could find meaning by exploring what the Unitarian Universalist faith can offer.



Holiday Poinsettias

Purchase a poinsettia to honor someone in your life or the memory of someone special. Purchasing a poinsettia plant adds festive color to the sanctuary and brings joy to fellow

- congregants. After service on December 22, you are
- welcome to bring your plant(s) to another congregant as a
- gesture of community or take it home to add holiday
- cheer for your family.
- A list of individuals honored in this way will be
- listed in the order of service on December 22.
- Orders will be accepted until **December 16** or
- until we sell out.
- [Click here](#) to order your poinsettia.

Hearing Loop

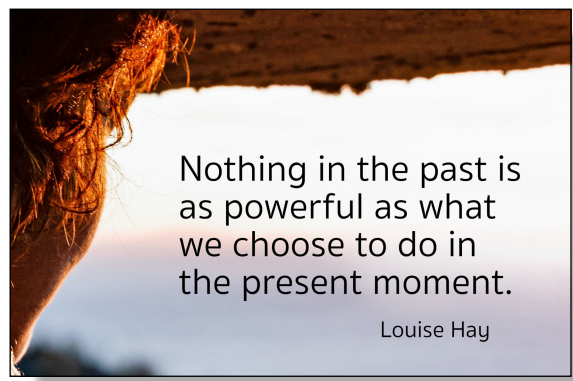
The sanctuary has a Hearing Loop System which is an ADA approved technology that transmits sound wirelessly directly to hearing aids. If you wear hearing aids and your T-coil is activated, you can pick up the signal from the sound system (if you have hearing aids, but your T-coil is not activated, please speak with your audiologist). There are also sound amplifying headphones (available on the credenza in the Parlor or from one of the ushers) if you do not have hearing aids but could benefit from amplified sound.

Ways to Engage

Curious about events and happenings at First Unitarian Society of Ithaca? Check out our Facebook page and stay current with what's going on in the community!
<https://www.facebook.com/FUSofI>

Current Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteering is a great way to meet others in the First Unitarian Community and give back at the same time! Current Volunteer Opportunities are <https://unitarian.ithaca.ny.us/index.php/connection/volunteer/>



Ministry Visioning Team (MVT)

As a part of living out our vision of ministry, which includes "Creating multiple avenues for social justice that nourish connection and community outreach" the Ministry Visioning Team is encouraging our UU community to explore new opportunities to further justice within the world.

There are already opportunities to engage further with anti-racism through the 8th Principle Action Ministry, with environmental justice through the Environmental Interest Circle, and to assist with providing tangible help to local families through Babies First.

How else might we do the work of living our shared values of equity and justice? What other groups are you passionate about being a part of? This moment is an opportunity to widen the circle of our efforts and gather together to create teams focusing on other issues such as reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights, democracy, and economic justice.

You are invited to use this form to share contact information in regards to the issues that you feel passionate about so that we can create meaningful change.

This is Love in Action.

[Social Justice Teams Interest Spreadsheet](#)

Office Hours in December

The office is generally open 9 am - 4 pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays and 8 am - 3 pm on Sundays. Michelle works remotely on Wednesdays.

The office will be closed **December 24 through January 1.**

2024-25 Diners Club: Still Open to New Members!

Did you know that you can join Diners Club any time during the calendar year? Although our 2024-25 season runs from October to May, we are happy to welcome new members interested in joining us for the three remaining small group dinners. They will occur in January/February, March, and April/May.

As a Diners Club member, you are able to participate in small dish-to-pass dinners in addition to a final all group gathering in June. Dinners are held in members' homes with each participant providing part of the meal. For each dinner, new dining groups are created, so you get the opportunity to dine with a variety of members throughout the year.

To sign up, contact the coordinator, Jane Koestler, at j.e.koestler@gmail.com. Dinner assignments for the New Year will be sent out to members in mid-December.

**First Unitarian is a
UUA-recognized (LGBTQ)
Welcoming Congregation**

Community Candlelight Christmas Services

at Sage Chapel on the Cornell campus

Monday, December 23 at 5:00 pm and 7:30 pm

Music starts at 4:30 pm and 7:00 pm

Featuring Emily Richards, CRE

The 75-voice choir will be singing at both services, including soloists Tracy Robertson, Travis Knapp, and Elisa Keeler. Erica Howard will be playing oboe before the 5pm service and the Shuhan family will be playing for the 7:30pm service. Strings for Silent night will include Tim Ball and Josephine Jenkins-Ortolano at 5pm and Roberta Crawford at 7:30pm. The Cornell Chimes will be ringing after both services.



Music.

Story.

candlelight.

Miracle.