



A United Church of Christ/ United
Methodist Church & a LGBTQIA
Welcoming Congregation

No matter who you are, or where
you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

UCUP

December Newsletter

2021

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SERIES - THE INN: HOUSING THE HOLY



Did you ever consider that YOU are a "House for the Holy?" Your life – your very being – is a place where hope, peace, joy, and love are housed. At Christmas, we remember that Jesus was born into a simple stable because there was no room in The Inn. Our lives, too, are containers for the Holy, places where Divine Light can shine into the dark corners of this world. You are sacred. You are worthy. You belong.

As we study the biblical prophets that call us to care for our neighbors and "make room in the inn," the lonely and frightened spaces within us are filled with the light of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Please join us this Advent season with our worship theme *The Inn: Housing the Holy*. Let us make room to House the Holy in our lives and shift our focus to care for our neighbor.

BLUE CHRISTMAS / LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

Tuesday, December 21st at 7pm

As we move closer to the "longest night"—the Winter Solstice—we will hold a "Blue Christmas" service to acknowledge and remember the losses in our lives. Join us in a service for those who are struggling with grief, loss, pain, or stress during the Christmas season. A special service for those who are finding it hard to rejoice and instead feel a heaviness in their heart.

CELTIC CHRISTMAS EVE

December 24th - 7pm

While we won't have pipers in the sanctuary this year, come and join us for this holy and sacred night of ushering in the birth of the Christ Child. This will be a hybrid service. You are welcome to join us for worship on zoom or come in person **ready to show your vaccination card**. Vaccination cards **WILL BE required** when we anticipate more than 50 people in the sanctuary at one time. (See reopening update article p.2)

CELEBRATION OF LIFE FOR WINNIE BJARKE

December 26th - 2pm (see obituary on p.5)

One of our beloved charter members of UCUP died on November 7th at the age of 97 (or in Leap Year birthdays almost 24.5 years). Win was a servant leader at UCUP for many decades, most notably teaching Sunday School well into her 90's.

This will be a hybrid service. You are welcome to join us for worship on zoom or come in person **ready to show your vaccination card**. Again, vaccination cards **WILL BE required** when we anticipate more than 50 people in the sanctuary at one time.



President's letter ~ Praise for our Many Gifts



Hello, Siblings in Christ,

Our Stewardship campaign was a success! Built around the theme, "Many Gifts, One Spirit," our campaign included heartfelt and honest messages from Jeff Andersen, Kay Shaben, Roger Balcom, Dave Higby, Tom and Allison Milligan, and of course, Janet Wicks. Thank you so much to all of you for sharing the gifts of your experiences, humor, and hopes with our congregation!

At the time of this writing, our pledge total for 2022 is \$155,328, with a projected final total of \$181,948. This represents an increase over last year, positions us well for the year ahead, and will enable us to continue to support our staff, take care of our building, and carry out the mission of the church through our many programs.

And about that building Brrr, it's been cold in the sanctuary! We have two furnaces that serve the sanctuary, and both have failed in the last couple of weeks. With four service/repair calls and counting, we hope to have warm air flowing into our worship space soon. Two new, replacement furnaces are scheduled to be installed the week of Dec. 13, at a cost of over \$13,000. This experience points to the importance of maintaining our financial health and of putting in the hard work to maintain our building. Many thanks to Jim Cash, Don Thompson, and Judy Thierry for their work to troubleshoot the problem, schedule service, and persist with the service calls.

Sometimes, stewardship is the stuff of the photo-worthy volunteer and mission work we see in our beautiful music videos each Sunday, and sometimes it's the gritty business of septic drain fields and furnace repairs. It's all part of being together in community, bringing many gifts, with one spirit.

Thanks to all of you who pledged time, talent and money to United Church in University Place. If you have not submitted a pledge, yet, there is still time! Please contact the church office if you need a pledge form or Time and Talent sheet.

As we move into the Advent season, our hearts are full. With gratitude and wishes for a joyous Christmas season,

Marilyn Thompson,
President

Reopening Plan Update for December

The UCUP. Reopen Ad Hoc committee continues to monitor recommendations and protocols for activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. In November, the church resumed hybrid worship services, with the option to attend services in the sanctuary, to join on Zoom, or to view the service at any time on FaceBook/YouTube.

At its November meeting, the UCUP Board approved the progression to the full Stage 3 of our reopen plan, which allows for up to 50 participants at indoor gatherings. Face masks and physical distancing are still required. It is no longer necessary to sign up in advance to attend in-person worship. All other safety protocols remain in place. In further action last week, the Board approved the following:

1. For regular Sunday worship services, two to three soloists may perform in the sanctuary during in-person worship, provided the singers are fully vaccinated, separated from each other by at least 10 feet, and that the singers wear masks. Allowable time in the sanctuary was extended from one hour to 75 minutes, to allow in-person attendees to participate in "Prayers of the People." Communion will be served on the first Sunday of the month, on the bridge, outside.
2. For the Christmas Eve service, the Board approved allowing up to 100 people to attend, provided all attendees wear masks at all times (celebrants may remove masks while speaking), and provided the event is limited to those who are vaccinated. Proof of vaccination will be required at the door. The ad hoc committee will work with Pastor Cathy to set up a process for checking vaccinations that is consistent with the church's commitment to hospitality.
3. For memorial services, the Board approved allowing up to 100 people to attend. (Same protocol as above.)

Questions regarding our reopening plan and COVID safety protocols can be directed to members of the ad hoc committee: Marilyn Thompson, Chris Berry, Tanya Sorenson, Judy Thierry, Dave Higby.

Excerpts from a reflection from UCC Conference Minister, Rev. Mike Denton about the new COVID variant:

I know the news about the omicron variant of COVID-19 has sparked a lot of concern. In some ways, the fact we know about all of this is good news. When a new disease (or, in this case, a variant of one) pops up that may be dangerous, world governments are *supposed to pay attention, see if it's present in their own country, and respond appropriately. South Africa modeled how to share this information in a direct, transparent, and honest way. This is how infectious disease alerts are supposed to work.*

It's sometimes been hard to tell how much each country's response is political or scientific; or how much a response gives a *sense of safety as opposed to real safety. Travel bans have sometimes given countries more time to respond to a COVID variant but have rarely given a country immunity. Omicron is probably already here. A travel ban might reduce the points of origin in a country and slow its initial spread, but if omicron does turn out to be highly transmissible, it will still spread widely.*

This moment highlights the reality that inequity continues to be a far larger threat. There are some concerns that travel bans may be ultimately counterproductive since they make the outcome of reporting an outbreak more costly - particularly for countries that are already suffering from inequity. This outbreak in South Africa, one of many countries that have pleaded for more vaccines, also highlights the reality that the best response to COVID is not isolation or marginalization but a more equitable sharing of medical resources. If that had been the approach of various governments all the way along, omicron might have never emerged.

We all have to figure out how to respond in light of the facts instead of reacting out of our fear. It took a while to move from my *assumption that omicron was a new, more dire threat to the reality that we don't know that much yet. South Africa shared the news well, but we won't know if this variant is more contagious or vaccine-resistant for at least another week or two. We should prepare for the possibility that omicron might be dangerous, but it might not be. We don't have enough information to know.*

I suggest that churches do what you've been doing to be safe based on the protection of your at-risk members, the COVID conditions in your area. If you were planning any significant loosening of these practices over the next few weeks, you may want to pause, wait for more information, and make preparations for a more dangerous variant.

It's also a good time to reach out to elected officials in your community about domestic and international vaccine and health equity. We are aware that inequity and COVID are clearly connected. The more people who are protected, the fewer people infected. The emergence of this variant does not stand alone, but is a result of the vaccine and health inequity that infects the fabric of our world.

In these first days of Advent - these days of waiting and preparation for a holy event - it, once again, feels as though faith and certainty are in a staring contest. There are different things we are called to by these different ways of knowing. However, at their best, these ways of knowing are not competitive but complementary. That which is required for faith and that which is required for certainty requires the gifts each other bring. We might not always have certainty about our future, but our faith can help us while we struggle without it. There may be times our faith may be shaken, but certainty can help us form a faith that is responsive to God and God's people instead of reacting to every new piece of information. Blessings on all of us we prepare for what is yet to come.



Pastor's letter ~

Excerpts from Pastor Cathy's sermon on the 1st Sunday of Advent:

Every year as Thanksgiving ends, I want to skip the hassle of decorating for Christmas. Skip getting the tree, skip unearthing the boxes of decorations, skip untangling the lights, setting out the nativity. It means moving things around, creating a bit of chaos and clutter. And yet, every year, after going through the effort to make room, creating space in our home to accommodate Christmas, I sit in the glow of the lights and say begrudgingly to myself, "OK...it was worth the hassle to create space and time." There is something powerful about the rituals we create. The liturgical season of Advent calls us to the ritual of clearing space in our spiritual lives to prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ child. Our Advent theme this year is called "The Inn: Housing the Holy." It invites us to make room in "The Inn" of our lives - to take time to sweep out the corners of our hearts, clean up the clutter, to make space, to take time to connect with the Holy, thereby creating space for compassion and hospitality to take root, to bring more hope, peace, love, and joy into our lives and into the world.

We hear the promise of the Prophet Jeremiah who offers words of encouragement to a community of exiles living in Babylon who have lost everything - their homes, their livelihood, their temple, their worship, their beloved ones. We need those words of encouragement today as well. Although not in physical exile, there are similarities with the pandemic. The pandemic has exacerbated economic disparity. It has also heightened a depth of loneliness and separation that has left many feeling cut off like a stump referenced in this text. People are exhausted and feeling a loss of control. We are tired of pivoting, tired of being resilient, and facing new challenges like a new variant that might be coming our way. We are overwhelmed by it all. Jeremiah offers a reminder that God will fulfill God's promise. One promise is the time when God will raise up a righteous branch from David's line.

Righteousness is often paired with justice. The righteous branch springing forth is the process of lifting others up. It is synonymous with doing what is just and right. Often we consider doing the right thing with sacrifice, with having to give up something. A professor at San Francisco Theological Seminary Jon Berquist says: "Righteousness is not a duty. Our righteousness is what it feels like to come alive again. Righteousness is tied to the wellbeing of the community. When we do the right thing, growth happens. We want a God who lifts up the lowly and raises us up out of the muck. But God doesn't raise us out of the muck or keep us from getting dirty. Instead, together with God, we get down on our hands and knees in the dirt and plant things that will grow like a righteous branch. And the branch someday becomes big enough that it can provide housing and shelter. But on the day we plant it, we don't see it. Someone planted and someone else nourished it."

How do we, the people of God, embody justice and righteousness? How do we learn to see not just the injuries and the scarcity in the world, but to also see the potential that exists in what we think of as dead stumps. Whether taking care of immediate needs, like food and shelter, or pursuing systemic change, let us join God in the muck to be part of raising righteous branches out of dead stumps.

A prayer poem from Rev. Stephen Garnaas Holmes:

I don't need to be able to imagine how in the world a righteous branch might spring up and save us.
I only need to know you are here, and in the root of the trees even now letting their last leaves go ~
you are here, your bud already swelling, ready for the cold,
you are here, your light already turning,
in the dust and dark and final confusion, in the sharp rocks and edges of the last road,
your child already coming, among us, maybe even within us, ready for the risk,
his beautiful little face lifting us into a different life, your arms already sweeping us up.
Snow falls, and a bud ripens.



Blessings,
Pastor Cathy



Winifred Bjarke was born February 29, 1924 near Stamford, Connecticut and passed away, surrounded by her family, in Renton, on November 7, 2021. Winnie truly was an extraordinary lady, born on an extra-ordinary day, and led an extraordinary life. As a Leap Year baby, she celebrated only 24 birthdays, yet filled her 97 years with a devotion to education, a passion for adventure, a love for her family and a commitment to her community. One of her earliest callings was to teach. She herself excelled in school, graduating from Stamford High School at age 17, near the top of her class of 560. After Danbury State Teacher's College, Winnie began a career as an Elementary School teacher, 9 years in Connecticut then 19 years in Tacoma, the majority at University Place and Narrows View. She was beloved by her students, filling her classrooms with warmth, wit and animals. She was also a lifetime Sunday school teacher at United Church in University Place.

Without question, Winnie was a seeker of adventure. She always had a strong desire to go beyond the horizon, to explore the world, the people, the cultures and the creatures she met along the way. At age 24 she purchased a Nash automobile, equipped with the "famous Nash convertible bed": the rear seat folded down into the trunk. The Nash became her beloved mode of transportation. With her younger sister Eleanor, she dove down the eastern seaboard, circled the coastline of Florida, visited her brother Ted in Texas, detoured to Mexico, then turned north to explore Zion, Bryce and Yellowstone National Parks. Her meticulous logbook recorded the details of their trip: 7 weeks, 11,000 miles, 3 countries, and 3 oil changes.

Over the following summers she would log another 30,000 miles, crisscrossing the country (long before interstate highways). 1949 took her through all the National Parks of the west coast states and Canada, from Yosemite to Lake Louise.

In 1950, Winnie changed her mode of transportation, taking her bicycle across the Atlantic to Lisbon to pedal around the Mediterranean (stopping in Tunisia for a camel ride). She also pedaled through Mexico, putting her knowledge of Spanish to good use, delighting in the people she met.

In 1953, Winnie loaded up her Nash to begin one of her most life changing adventures. She drove solo across the country to Tacoma for a teaching job at Clover Creek Elementary. Upon seeing Mount Rainier, she stated "I've got to climb that". Through a friend, she joined the Mountaineers, soon completing her Basic and Intermediate climbing courses. In 1958, over the span of 5 weeks, Winnie summited three volcanoes: Mt St Helens, Mt Adams and Mt Rainier. And it was on these climbs that Winnie got to know one of her rope mates: Nels Bjarke. Less than a year later, they wed.

At age 36, Winnie became a mother, first with Erik and a year later with Chris. Her career was now on hold for 7 years, as she applied her teaching skills to raising her boys. Their family life was filled with backyard adventures, car camping with their big blue tent and transcontinental train trips to New England to visit Winnie's relatives. As the boys grew older, she joined them and Nels on 50 mile Boy Scout backpacking trips through the Olympics and North Cascades, stating "I may not be the fastest, but I will get there in time." Family was extremely important to Winnie. She loved her daughters-in-law, Donna, Dawn and Barbara. And she cherished her grandchildren, Emily, Kristoffer, Kai and Truman. Family was the wellspring of her steadfast spirit.

In 1980, Winnie and Nels retired from work but became even more active. They roamed the world, first by bicycle, pedaling through France, New Zealand, Denmark, Kangaroo Island and Kathmandu. They even pedaled across the United States, "the short way" (as Winnie would say), from New Orleans to Minnesota, up the Mississippi River. Later they journeyed by train, camels and boats across Siberia, China, Pakistan and Namibia as well as both the Arctic and Antarctic.

All her life, Winnie was devoted to improving the world and the lives of the people around her. Her volunteerism, advocacy and teaching were boundless. She wore many hats at United Church, leading the Sunday school, spending nights at the church hosting the homeless, and filling in wherever needed. She volunteered as a receptionist for Tahoma Audubon (answering calls to identify birds), helped build with Habitat for Humanity, assisted at the Cancer Society Christmas House, and logged many miles on litter brigades. These are but a few of the countless acts of kindness and compassionate engagement that typified Winnie. In honor of her years of service, she was chosen to carry the Olympic torch as it traveled through Tacoma on May 7, 1996. It was a fitting tribute to a trailblazing teacher who strived to serve others.

Throughout all her endeavors, she maintained a positive, can-do attitude, never complaining, always moving forward, one step at a time. An indomitable spirit, Winnie inspired us all to venture out, explore our world, and connect with one another.



She enriched the lives of all who knew her.

Joys & Concerns

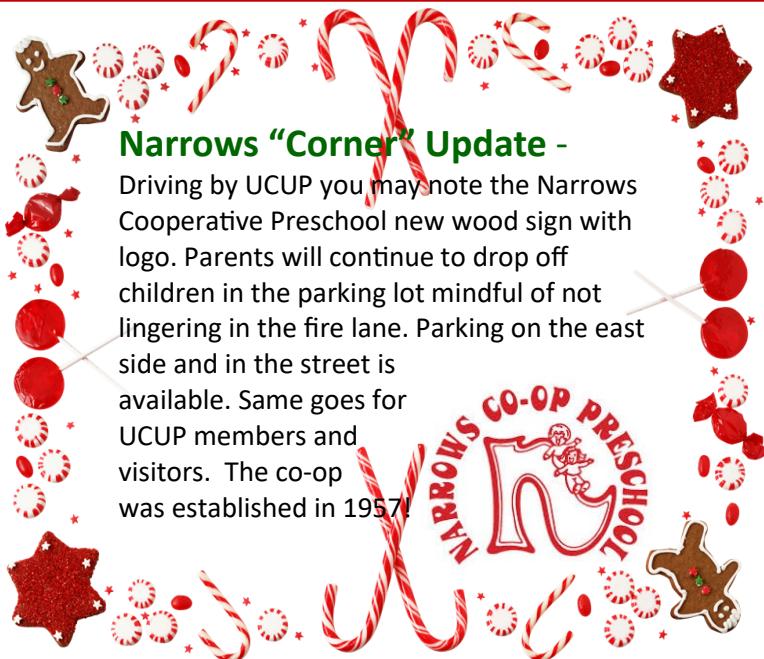


Submitted by Joyce Demarest

Our sympathy to the Bjarke Family and the United Church family, Win Bjarke. A Charter Member of United Church, died on November 7th. Her memorial service will be in person, at United Church and via ZOOM on December 26th, at 2p.m. (Vaccination cards required)

Please continue to keep Cathi Cline and Duncan Foley in your prayers, as they continue treatment for cancer...for Jenny Hartley, home now, but still recovering from a broken hip....for the many of us that lost loved ones this passed year.....give THANKS for those that have kept United Church going this pass year...the many that worked with Pastor Cathy to bring us Sunday services, take care of the church's office and for care of the building.

MERRY CHRISTMAS, from the Care & Concerns Committee



Narrows "Corner" Update -

Driving by UCUP you may note the Narrows Cooperative Preschool new wood sign with logo. Parents will continue to drop off children in the parking lot mindful of not lingering in the fire lane. Parking on the east side and in the street is available. Same goes for UCUP members and visitors. The co-op was established in 1957!

"May Peace Prevail on Earth" - prayerful greetings from our newly reset peace pole. The four sided obelisk contains English, Spanish, Hebrew and Japanese script. David Thierry shown in the photo helped reset the pole. Come bring a small stone to lay at the base. > Peace and Justice > Holy Grounds

(Photo's from Judy Thierry)



EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT

Hello everyone,

My name is Tanner Harding. Even though it's been a while since I've seen most of you in person, I've been eagerly working with the church on my Eagle Scout project. Our plan is to renovate the path in front of the church parking lot, making it ADA accessible and putting in a small bench to invite the public to sit and admire the garden area. You may see some of my fellow scouts and I working on December 11th.

If you'd like to assist financially, physically, or spiritually please feel free to reach out to me directly.

My contact information is:
tanneraharding@gmail.com



December Birthdays

2 David Ohls
16 Neil Rader
17 Duncan Foley
20 Jeff Andersen
22 Kathy Munn
24 Cathy Law
25 Jesus of Nazareth
31 Jim Cash



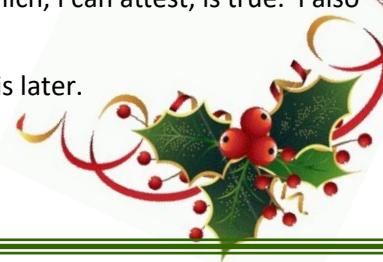
Faith Action Network

The Faith Action Network celebrated its annual dinner and fundraiser virtually on November 21. For the fifth (or more) year in a row, UCUP sponsored a table. For that sponsorship, we received recognition. At least six people from UCUP attended the virtual event. The dinner raised, by its end, north of \$111,000 thanks to the generosity of Rick Steves, who gave \$50,000 after it was matched by the attendees.

During the event, we celebrated Paul Benz, who is retiring at the end of December. He will be sorely missed as a presence at Interfaith Action Day, where his lobbying efforts shine as he passes his talents on to those who attend. He has been a force for the good. One of the speakers was Governor Jay Inslee, who praised Paul for giving him some insight into what is right to accomplish. Paul was feted by many of the FAN Board of Directors, by ministers across the state, and, most touchingly, by his family. He received the equivalent of the Lifetime Achievement Award. I have heard from Neil Rader who observed to me in a text that, "Paul never ceases to amaze me. When he sees someone only once a year, he not only recognizes them but he remembers their name." Which, I can attest, is true. I also heard from Marilyn that she enjoyed attending.

Interfaith Action Day is set for Friday, February 11, 2022. There will be more on this later.

Respectfully submitted,
Robert M. Brown



Alternative Gifts



It seems not that long ago we gathered our gifts for others under the holiday tree in the church entry. While we won't be doing that again this year, please consider honoring a loved one who already has enough by giving a gift to someone in need. Here are a few ways you could do this:

1. Donate to purchase gift cards for Family Housing Network families. This year we are buying cards for two small families and seven veterans. On your check to UCUP, make a note that it is for FHN Christmas gift cards.
2. To share your love with the wider world, a gift to Church World Service can help in many different ways. Check their website and make a gift directly, or send a check to UCUP with a memo for Church World Service. Here is the link: <https://cwsbestgift.org>.
3. Another place where there is need is with retired UCC clergy, who often do not have a benefit package that fully supports them in times of need or in retirement. Watch this touching video to learn about how your donations to the UCC Christmas Fund helped one family: - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZE3qjZuFpc> (if links won't open please copy into your browser).



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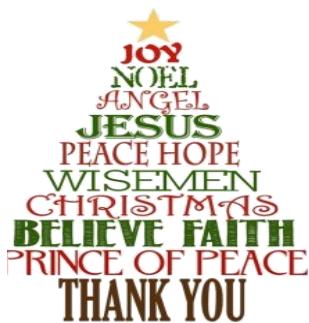
No matter who you are,
Or where you are on life's journey, **you're**
Welcome here.

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Weekly
Sundays
10am LIVE & ZOOM Worship
JOIN US!



*We are United with God,
United in Love,
and United to Serve Others*

Monthly

1st Sunday of the month
Communion during worship
1st Tuesday of the month
1pm Alzheimer's Support Group
3rd Tuesday of the month
6:30pm Men's Discussion Group
on Zoom



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