



# The Shooting Star

## December 2025

the monthly newsletter of

# First Parish Chelmsford UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

2 Westford St. Chelmsford, MA 01824

[Uuchelmsford.org](http://Uuchelmsford.org)

### Office Info & Deadlines

#### Sunday Announcements:

Weekly, Wed. by 7pm

**Newsletter:** Fourth Sunday of the month, December 28

To receive the newsletter via email, please contact the church office at (978) 256-5133 or [office@uuchelmsford.org](mailto:office@uuchelmsford.org)

### December Soul Matters Theme: *Nurturing Gratitude*

#### December 7

Choosing Hope

– Rev. Ellen Rowse Spero

#### December 14

Joseph's Story

– Rev. Ellen Rowse Spero

#### December 21

Intergenerational Solstice Service – Rev. Ellen Rowse Spero and Dolores Heredia-Wood

#### December 24

Christmas Eve Candle Lighting Services:  
5pm Family Service with Christmas Pageant  
7pm Lessons and Carols

#### December 28

Pancakes in the Vestry!

### Worship Service: Every Sunday at 10am

YouTube: [www.youtube.com/c/UuchelmsfordOrg](http://www.youtube.com/c/UuchelmsfordOrg)

LiveStream: [www.uuchelmsford.org/worship-service](http://www.uuchelmsford.org/worship-service)

### From Rev. Ellen Rowse Spero

Minister • (978) 256-5555 • [minister@uuchelmsford.org](mailto:minister@uuchelmsford.org)

Dear First Parishers,  
Sunday's Ingathering Thanksgiving service was so much fun! It is one of my favorite services. We sang and we listened to the Meetinghouse Ringers ring. We shared different kinds of bread and the stories that came with them. We helped our larger community by collecting food and money (\$2475!) for the Open Pantry of Greater Lowell. In this time of inflation and high food prices, your generosity is even more needed, a sacred gift to our neighbors. Our table was indeed wide!

This service always marks the beginning of what I call the "holiday gauntlet", the time from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day, filled with special services and events. Because Thanksgiving is late, this year's will be particularly tight. Do read the website, the newsletter and the announcements to keep up with what is happening. There will be greens and donuts; evening Advent events and services; our traditional Christmas Eve services (the pageant at 5pm and the "Lessons and Carols" at 7pm). We conclude with our "Pancakes" service the Sunday after Christmas, a community breakfast in the vestry!

Who are we, as Unitarian Universalists, in this season? What are we celebrating when we celebrate these winter holidays? Many of us grew up with Christmas and love the traditions around it, even if we don't believe literally in the story of Jesus' birth. But the truth of sacred stories is rarely in the supposed facts. As Walter Brueggemann, one of my favorite biblical scholars, said: "We think in terms of systems and continuities and predictability and schemes and plans. The Bible is to some great extent focused on God's capacity to break those schemes open and to violate those formulae. When they are positive disruptions,

the Bible calls them miracles. We tend not to use that word when they are negative, but what it means is that the reality of our life and the reality of God are not contained in most of our explanatory schemes. And whether one wants to explain that in terms of God or not, it is nonetheless the truth of our life that our lives are arenas for all kinds of disruptions, because it doesn't work out the way we planned."

If there has ever been a time of unexpected disruptions—both positive and negative but definitely surprising—it has been these past few years. And it has only accelerated over the past year. I feel the tug of despair at times, as I watch families torn apart by cruel policies, violent political rhetoric that dehumanizes whole groups of people, and the rise of authoritarianism. In between, I feel moments of hope: the generosity I witness within and beyond our congregation; communities coming together to challenge and withstand these cruel policies, and politicians, some unexpected, taking bold stands. Our Soul Matters theme for December is "Choosing Hope". Hope, as climate activist Rebecca Solnit notes "...locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act. When you recognize uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to influence the outcomes—you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several million others. Hope is an embrace of the unknown and knowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists."

The sacred stories of this season—the Solstice, Hanukkah and Christmas—are about choosing hope: trusting in a time of unknowing and darkness, in a Spirit of Mystery, in the possibility of these positive disruptions and what might emerge that we do not expect.

Here's hoping.

In faith,  
Rev. Ellen

## **Standing Around – News and Notes from the SC (Standing Committee)**

*John Schneider, Standing Committee Chair*

I have some very exciting news to share. An anonymous donor has pledged a matching gift to First Parish for up to \$20,000 for the Carlene Merrill Fund! To secure the gift, we need to raise matching funds, either through donations or pledges to fund.

The Carlene Merrill Fund (CMF) will address staff issues that are difficult to resolve in a single year's budget. The goal isn't to move staff funding out of the Annual Budget, but to help cover big changes in staff costs in a budget year to give the Annual Budget some time to absorb the increase, a bridge from one fiscal year to the next. The fund will be used to support the staff, as determined by the Standing Committee with input from the Human Resources subcommittee. Our staff is essential to the First Parish. Staff provide our Sunday Worship Service, our Faith Formation Program for Youth and Adults, Pastoral Care, support for our volunteers in their ministries, and they keep the church running doing whatever else needs to be done. In our covenant we commit to bear witness to justice, and to be good stewards of our congregation. Part of living out our covenant and our UU values is being an ethical employer. We want to make sure that our staff is paid justly, has good health benefits for themselves and their family, and has the support they need to do their job to the best of their ability. Carlene's legacy will help us fulfill that responsibility.

Joan Coyne, Tom Coffey, and I will be leading a fundraising drive to match the \$20,000 gift. The campaign begins December 7 and will run through February, but donations received since the kitchen dedication in Carlene's name on September 5 will count toward the match. Watch for more information about how you can help us meet the match.

I'm closing with a quick note of gratitude. Ron Deschenes and the members of the safety

committee have been hard at work improving First Parish's safety procedures. Ron has connected with other churches in the area to learn how they are addressing safety concerns, established a relationship with the Chelmsford Police Department, attended workshops and trainings on church safety, and secured radios for ushers and greeters to better communicate during Sunday services. Just to be clear, there are no current threats to First Parish. But Ron and the safety team are doing the behind the scenes work to keep us safe during challenging times and we are very grateful for taking this project on!

As always, please feel free to reach me at [jrs.gateway@gmail.com](mailto:jrs.gateway@gmail.com) or 617-620-4758. Enjoy the holiday season!

Have mercy,  
John

## Church Announcements

### Online Advent Retreat with Rev. Ellen

November 30 begins Advent and over the past few years, I have facilitated an online Advent retreat (supported mightily by Joan Coyne) using the writings and artwork of Jan Richardson. If folks are interested, I am happy to do it again. I will use the same book we used last year, "Night Visions."

#### How does it work?

From November 30 through Christmas Eve, I post a daily reflection and prayer from Jan's book via our online Advent group. (I have copies of the book available for those of you who do not have it from last year.) Through the online group, you can share your own reflections and reactions. Or you can just read along. Each week has a theme. Week 1 is Darkness; Week 2 Desire; Week 3 Preparing a Space; and Week 4 is Hope.

If you are interested, email Rev. Ellen at [minister@uuchelmsford.org](mailto:minister@uuchelmsford.org).

### Holiday Prelude: Donuts and Greens December 6th and 7th

We are once again helping you get into the holiday spirit by selling greens, wreaths, poinsettias and donuts! You can order by **December 1** via this form: <https://fpchelmsford.breezechms.com/form/e152d307749783> and pickup will be after church on December 7 from 11:30am - 2:30pm. We are also looking for helpers who can spare an hour or two to sort greenery and flowers for these orders, decorate our sanctuary for Advent on Saturday, and make donuts Sunday morning and also to sell at the Holiday Prelude on Sunday evening. You can sign up at the table in the vestry after church or contact Susan Woodmansee at [Susan.Woodmansee@gmail.com](mailto:Susan.Woodmansee@gmail.com) or 617-216-8032.

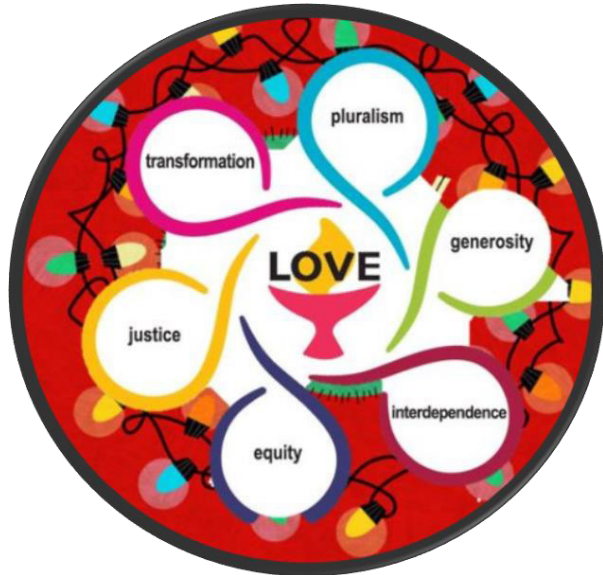
### Invitation from Rachel Hearn and Cay Outerbridge

First Parish members Cay and Rachel's annual holiday concert is coming up during the first weekend of December. Cay is directing both choruses while Rachel will be performing in VocaMotion and with her quartet "From The Top"

Get tickets here: [www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/the-secret-of-christmas-stories-and-songs](http://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/the-secret-of-christmas-stories-and-songs)



Lifespan Faith Formation  
 Shooting Star 2025  
 Connect, Engage, Belong



For more information, questions or your ideas:  
 Contact: Dolores GHeredia Wood, LFFD  
[dre@uuchelmsford.org](mailto:dre@uuchelmsford.org); 978-690-8333  
<https://www.uuchelmsford.org/faith-formation/>

Some UU Faith Formation...

Lifespan Faith Formation is higher yoUU education



It connects us from childhood to old age, to understand how & why & what & whom and where? To strengthen, to nourish, to communicate, to support, to serve, to treasure, to flourish ~ to worship, to pray. And even tackle those mysterious k-nots... Looking forward to seeing everyone during the holidays! Thank you!

FPCC offers a variety of Small Groups:

- Women's Groups
- Two Men's Groups (one 55+)
- Sacred Circle Spiritual Group
- Retirees, 70's plus Group
- Friday Night Families Game Night 7pm
- All Ages Family Jam Band, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4th Sundays 1pm.
- Families Small Group Potluck Gatherings
- Cook, Eat, Chats-beginning in Jan 2025

# Let's Enjoy!

The Holidays with family, friends, visitors, newcomers, old timers and YoUU!

## Special Advent Evening Services Sundays at 6pm

- ❖ November 30th - Hope!  
 Chapel Open for Silent Reflective Prayer. You are welcome to come in, light a candle and write a note/reflection about Hope/Your Hopes.
- ❖ December 7<sup>th</sup> - JOY!  
 For this evening service the First Parish Chapel will be open & filled with Joy during the Town's Holiday Festivities as a place to retreat in joyful reflective repose. Arts & Crafts in the Chapel...
- ❖ December 14<sup>th</sup> - Peace...  
 Pizza! & Cookie Potluck-We hope everyone who can, brings favorite cookies to share. Hosted by Membership-Hospitality Committee Team!
- ❖ December 21st - Love...  
 Service reflecting on the Winter Solstice/Longest Night with special performance by Janice Tervo



❖ December 24<sup>th</sup> -  
 Christmas Eve Services Sanctuary  
 5pm & 7pm



❖ January 3rd - Epiphany Retreat  
 Saturday 2 to 6pm



## Retirees, 70's Group Meet & Greet

December 21 at Noon

Lunch will be served!

Elephant/Yankee Swap!

RETIRING, 70'S, 80'S BEYOND...

(OR YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE?)

Let's Chat About It...The purpose of the group is to connect, participate, engage, support each other and others with the gifts, *that we are*. Tell your story...

Meet & Greets will be monthly at noon,

Knitters welcome too!

An email to share group related events will be distributed per request to [dre@uuchelmsford.org](mailto:dre@uuchelmsford.org)



## Young Adults (YA's!)

ages determined by youUU!

Babysitting needed???

December 28<sup>th</sup> Happy Holiday!

Gift / Story Recycling Swap

>> to get on more info or on text list contact [Dolores~dre@uuchelmsford.org](mailto:Dolores~dre@uuchelmsford.org)



## The Mitten Tree

First Parish UU of Chelmsford

Tradition continues...

Cold Hands, Need warm Hearts...  
to care for them!

It has been a tradition here at First Parish, to collect warm mittens, socks, hats, scarves, and other small items of clothing for those in need.

Donations accepted

December 7<sup>th</sup> until January 4<sup>th</sup>

We invite members and friends to please knit, crochet, sew or buy winter accessories

Please place them

on the Mitten Tree in the Vestry

If you have any questions, please contact:

Dolores~ LFFD [dre@uuchelmsford.org](mailto:dre@uuchelmsford.org)

Religious Faith Formation Holiday Service Project

Let the world know UU's care!

Hope, Joy, Peace, Love & Charity-  
are all gifts that bless hearts!

Thank you for your generosity!

# UU Youth Religious Faith Formation (REFF)



**December 24<sup>th</sup>, 5pm Early Christmas Eve Service (UU Style) The Nativity...**



## Annual RE Faith Formation Holiday Project

This year we are

"Choosing the Gift of HOPE!"

In the spirit of the season

REFF has adopted 3 families from the Alternative House of Lowell\*

We Hope, yoUU can help! If you are able.

We are collecting donations for individuals in each family.

If you want to participate, please see the large vestry Bulletin Board. There is also a gift wish list for misc. all year-round gifts.

For more information about Alternative House Organization:  
<https://www.alternative-house.org/>

## "RE" Youth UU Faith Formation:

**10am Sunday mornings!**

The month of December,

Will be

Holiday Celebrations! YAY!

We have activities planned in addition to the Christmas Eve play during the service (for those who choose not to participate in the play.)

That said, we are beginning to plan... (backdrop/props) and practice for Christmas Eve 5pm Early Service. Presenting... UU style "Nativity?!" Please remember it's important for youth participating in play, or not, to please be present at REFF on Sunday mornings always, so they may grow their friendship bonds and enjoy the play.

**Thank you Eliot Mayer for volunteering with Jingle Bell REFF Youth Ensemble!**

- ❖ November 30th Holiday Lights! Planning...Planning... Planning
- ❖ December 7th; REFF Holiday Projects! Alternative House & what the Mittens! and Practice, Practice, Practice 😊
- ❖ December 14<sup>th</sup>; Holiday Celebration! Peace is "All About yoUU" and... Fun! Fun! Fun!
- ❖ December 24th; Winter Solstice Intergenerational Worship Service
  - *Rehearsal for play after service*
- Nursery Room: Available for Parents/Guardians to stay with children as needed.
  - *Please do not leave the children unattended.* There is a device to listen to worship service.

REFF Sunday Mornings...

Please follow link to website for more information

<https://www.uuchelmsford.org/youth-faith-formation/>

and/or Contact Dolores~, LFFD

[dre@uuchelmsford.org](mailto:dre@uuchelmsford.org)

☞ Happy New Year!

We are looking for volunteers to share their UU Story with our youth on an REFF Sunday morning! Contact Dolores~, LFFD for more details...