

**Reflections & REminders**  
**re: the Religious Exploration Program**  
**at First Parish of Sudbury UU**  
**week of Sunday, December 9, 2007**

***A note from Tracy Duncan, Direction of Religious Education:***

Thanks to so many of you who responded enthusiastically to the inaugural edition of this e-newsletter! I welcome feedback, so please share your ideas with me. I'd love to have some children's voices in here, so if your child has a favorite story, movie or craft to share, I'd love to know.

*In faith, Tracy*

***"Beyond Sunday"--ways to participate this month***



The UU Service Committee Guest at Your Table project is ongoing until after the New Year. I encourage you and your family to welcome, or to keep welcoming, guests from around the world to your table, imagining what they might be able to tell you about their lives. Below are just a few suggestions for resources for finding visitors for your table:

- Visit the library and take out some story books that feature international characters.
- For older children and youth: Take out a book on wisdom tales from around the world and read one, then discuss it at dinner.
- Take note of TV shows or films you watch that are about places different from your town. (And remember, the UUSC serves underserved people in the United States, too.) These are good fodder for discussion.

Really, try to imagine what a "guest" would say to you. Use the library and the internet to explore questions that come up for your family. Guest at Your Table can be about so much more than collecting money for a cause—it can help grow your family's understanding of the world and of your faith. And be sure to check out the UUSC website to learn about all they do—it's truly inspiring!

[www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org)

## REminders:



**REgistration forms!** If you received a registration form in the mail, it means we don't have one on file for you this year. Please fill it out and return it to the church office as soon as possible.



### December and the Holidays in RE

**Sunday, Dec. 9** is our annual Revels service. This service is great for people of all ages! Come see the dancers, hear the songs, listen to the old stories. Please see "Taking RE Home" on the next page of this newsletter for reflections on our Revels service.

**Sunday, Dec.16** is a regular RE class Sunday.

**The Family Co-op** (ages 0-4) will explore winter and Christmas

**Spirit Play** will learn about two Unitarian Charles' who influenced Christmas and social justice: *The Flames Group* (ages 4-8) will learn about Rev. Charles Follen, who popularized the Christmas tree in the U.S. The *Mysteries Group* (ages 8-12) will learn about Charles Dickens of *A Christmas Carol* fame.

**The Breakfast Club** (Gr. 7 & 8) will debrief their visit to the Shambhala Buddhist Center, and share their experience with those who missed the visit.

**Sunday, Dec. 23** will be our Family Christmas Service for all ages. In addition to our traditional on-the-spot Nativity tableau (where anyone can participate!), there will be music from our choir and young musicians from and associated with our congregation. And, of course, a story, candles, and the traditional *Silent Night* candle communion. This service will be interpreted through American Sign Language (ASL). (I am always struck by the beauty of sign language, and feel it adds immeasurably to our worship.)

**Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at 7pm.** Children really are warmly welcome to attend this service at 7 pm! There will be lots of music, candle lighting, readings, a short reflection by Katie Lee, and, of course, the traditional candlelight ending with *Silent Night* just as we will at the family service the day before.

**Christmas Morning Service at 10:00am** Join Katie Lee and friends for an intimate and informal Christmas morning worship with carols everyone knows, stories we like to share about our own favorite holiday or the gift of a much-loved poem, reading, story or whatever. Everyone and anyone is welcome to join us and, if you wish, bring a little something to share (food for the soul or food for the body – all is welcome). We'll put on a pot of coffee.

**Sunday, Dec. 30** Join our friends from the UU congregations of Wayland and Framingham, this year at First Parish in Wayland at 10:00am, for our annual "Joining the Neighbors" service. There will not be a service in Sudbury on Dec. 30.

## ***Taking R.E. Home—Revels and Holy Joy***

This Sunday is perhaps my favorite worship service of the entire year—our holiday revels. It's not just the music and dancing, although I love them. It's that the music and dance are a jumping-off point to what can only be described as floating at the edges of a mystical encounter. Abraham Maslow, student of the psychology of religion, defines the mystical peak experience as "a feeling of intense unity with the universe and of one's place within that unity." The Revels traditions stem from ancient, earth-centered spirituality, making those who participate part of a sacred continuum, unifying us with ancestral ways of being which still resonate at our genetic core. The music sweeps up all who hear it, and the dancing binds us as a community. All of these combine into an experience of unity with the past and the present. And with this sense of unity comes joy.

So often religion is seen as a serious, heavy thing. Our faith calls us to heal the world, and that is a profound burden. But the mystical tradition, to which the Revels belong, is, at its heart, joyful. Unity brings ecstasy. Where there is no separation, there is no fear. And if we are true to our Unitarian Universalist heritage, we trust that the heart of the universe is loving, so to be one with the universe is to know the essence of love. How can this not bring joy? In mystical traditions, not only are music and dance expressions of joy, they are a means to reaching the transcendent, blissful state. Music and dance are the ultimate instruments of body/spirit integration.

Mystics and children are whole-being worshippers, celebrating with body, voice, movement and spirit. We have much to learn from children about the possibilities of worshipping with our whole selves. Psychologist Robert Ornstein wrote, "The mystical experience can be seen as a transcendence of normal consciousness and reintegration; the knowledge gained from the experience offers beneficial growth-potential." So watch and learn from your child/ren as s/he sings, dances and plays with all his/her attention—that is the essence of mysticism right before your eyes. Sing, play and dance together.

The fifteenth century monk, Fra Giovanni, wrote, *The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our reach, is joy. Take joy! Life is so full of meaning and purpose, so full of beauty . . . that you will find earth but cloaks your heaven. Courage then to claim it, that is all! . . .* This week (and every week), I encourage you to pay attention to opportunities to find your heaven cloaked in this world. And, through all the noise, hubbub, sadness and need, remember that the core of the universe is love. Our serious, groaning, world will chide you for joy, optimism and hope. It takes courage to be playful. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." I always took that to mean that the burden of those who would live a life of faith is to carry light—to carry radical love and justice into the world. To let our light shine. That, too, takes courage. So I wish you courage as you claim your joy and light up the world.

*Blessings, Tracy*



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