



FIRST CHURCH VISION

FIRST CHURCH UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST LEOMINSTER, MA

REVEREND DR. SUSAN SUCHOCKI BROWN, MINISTER

LAUREN SOUCY, Choir Director JESSE BLACKMAN, Musician

January 2016

Happy New Year and welcome to 2016.

This year has brought interesting and unexpected events around the world and locally. The offer to work with students at Andover Newton Theological School has been delightful. This is my second year there and it is a nice way to expand the ministry we do at First Church with students and with having theological thinking be relevant and meaningful. Yet Andover Newton has found itself in tough financial straits. The cost of theological education has affected enrollment and the cost of running the school and continued deficit budget has brought them to thinking about the future in bold new ways. There are a number of options on the table, some include becoming part of another school, or working more intensely with congregations and offering more focused theological education and on-line courses. They are thinking about selling the campus to become more solvent. All these changes are intriguing to be in the midst of as they think about how to plan ahead. What is most interesting for us to think about is the nature of church, the future of church and ministry and how to remain relevant as a Unitarian Universalist congregation.

The other day I had a retired UU minister come to visit. He had never seen our building before so I brought him up to the sanctuary. His first comment was "Wow, this looks like a church. A place where worship happens. The energy in this building is sacred and special unlike church buildings who lack the more traditional face." His comment made me think about how we worship together and how even though we have a somewhat formal and traditional setting for worship, we are able to build and

maintain a community that is alive, lively, vibrant and fun too.

A former member who has moved away but who comes to visit us about once a year was commenting during his visit about the wonderful flags out front of the church. The Justice flag in particular had caught his attention. His comment was that the world needs to see more justice demonstrated. First Church Leominster and Unitarian Universalism is willing to be vocal about the need for justice. I think gathering gifts for the Toys for Tots, seeing that the youth got gifts, speaking out against issues of racial and gender discrimination, working to assure the safety of families, supporting voting rights and political activism, engaging in dialogue about refugee's -even if there are disagreements about this issue, providing food and socks to the homeless and less advantaged. All these and more are putting acts to a theology of justice. The Golden Rule is perhaps the most effective way to sum up justice- "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you?" I also say, give to others not because it brings a reward or recognition, but give because you can and because it is needed. Work to make the world a fairer, more equitable place in all the ways you can.

We do not know what 2016 will bring, though we do know it will bring changes. Dialogue, compassion and justice will help us keep an even keel as we seek to remain relevant in our sacred worship space.

May your coming year be bright and wonderful.

Rev Susan



Debra's Doodles

Well, folks this is my final quarter for my internship, so I will be done in June. I feel like we are just getting started and we still have a lot we could do together. I am writing this on Christmas day so I am sort of still living in the glow of last night's service – it sure was beautiful.

Looking forward, January and February, I will be working with the pledge committee; helping with the pledge drive like I did last year. In January, the Mission Task force will be meeting to see where we will be going from here. We are asking ourselves if we should have another event to gather information or if we should begin disseminating the information we have. If we choose the latter, we will have to decide how we will go about that.

I have to confess when I came to Leominster, I was a little disappointed because I wanted an internship where I could have made a comfortable stipend. Leominster does not pay much at all but it sure has been fun working with Rev. Susan and you all and I would not give it up for a barrel of hundred dollar bills. That's the truth. But seriously, does anyone know where I can get a job?

See ya in church, Debra



Sermons

Jan. 3rd: The annual labyrinth service with Lauren and Bob Soucy.

Jan. 10th: "Finding Peace"

Jan. 17th: "A Dream Still Lives"

Jan. 24th: "Everwidening and Transforming Circles of Love" and Pledge Commitment Sunday.

Jan. 31st: "The Courage to be Wrong"



Loose collection Donation

On **Jan. 31st** the loose collection will be given to the Montachusett Interfaith Hospitality Network.

On **Jan. 3rd**, right after church there will be a small group ministry discussion and planning. See Betsy Moran with ?



On **Jan. 17th** from 11:30 to 2:00 the Martin Luther King Jr. Coalition will be hosting the celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s life with a brunch and a speaker. It is \$10 per person. Please join us.



Committee Meeting Dates

At FCUU:

Jan. 13th: Committee on Worship at 4:30 pm.

Jan. 20th: Cakes for the Queen of Heaven Adult RE program at 10 to 11:30 am.

Jan. 20th: Membership Committee at 5:45-6:30 pm.

Jan. 20th: Parish Committee at 6:00 gathering for food and meeting at 6:30 pm.

Jan. 27th: Finance Committee at 6:00 pm.

2016 Pledge Drive

The 2016 pledge drive for First Church UU Leominster will begin on **Jan. 24th** with Sunday service and brunch. We will be celebrating the end of the drive on **Feb 14th** with Sundae Sunday, so come to church that day with an appetite for ice cream. We are conducting the pledge drive similar to last year's drive. Be on the lookout for the pledge brochure and your pledge material. We appreciate your generosity in advance. We feel it is more important than ever that we remain a visible and vital voice of progressive religion in Leominster and your contributions of time and money are essential for that to continue to happen.



Lady's Benevolent Society

The Lady Bee's will be meeting at First Church on Monday evening, **January 11th**, 2016 at 7:00 P.M. We will share stories of our holidays and receive reports on our Holiday donations in December. All women friends and members of First Church are invited to attend. We will have some birthdays to celebrate together. Questions? See Claire at church.



THANK YOU 1st Church

On behalf of the 15 West Teen Coffeehouse, I would like to say Thank You to everyone who contributed towards helping the teens celebrate Christmas in a very special way. As some of you may know, holidays for most of our youth who attend the Coffeehouse can be lonely, depressing, and filled with feeling of little self-worth.

Combine those feelings with anger and fear of the unknown, you come up with a youth who is more likely to feel unwanted and ashamed, a youth who is more likely to silently harm themselves in some way. Although we do not have the power to remove all their obstacles as they approach adulthood, we do have the power to make them feel important, safe and cared for by 1st Church UU of Leominster.

Your willingness to keep the doors open, the lights on and the heat flowing by the pledges you commit to provides for a safe place for the youth to come and be themselves. Then you add all the special comforts as proven by some very special people as the LADY B'S who shared their decorative holiday cups filled with candy or Lauren and Bob Soucy showering them with pizza, the forbidden soda and a comforting speech from Bob acknowledging their sadness and concerns of feeling safe. "I mean really, who does that in the real world most of these youth live in!" Then, in comes Lauren with cupcakes and cake. That's right, not just cupcakes but a cake too loaded with frosting and not just frosting but...a lot of frosting!!!! With their bellies filled the youth LAID on the floor and played their favorite board game Apple to Apples.

Towards the end of the evening Erika and I gather the youth in their group room to process and do a final introduction for the two new youth who started attending the Coffeehouse that day. I presented the group with the question: What is your best memory of the Coffeehouse?

Expecting a variety of answers from the youth who have been around for years!

We hear, TODAY!!!!

In some ways it's unfortunate that "It takes a village" to raise our children/adolescents today. Although, for all of you who sit behind the scenes silently supporting the Coffeehouse through your interest and donations. You know who you are and we do too. For without 1st Church, (By the way, Chris Uhlig you have now been outed and as far as the rest of you supporters, beware you are on notice) 15 West Teen Coffeehouse would not be able to full fill the commitment to: providing a safe place for teens and young adults to have fun, be themselves, grow to be better individuals and contributing members of our community.

By the way, did you know, out of the 17 regional LGBTQ centers which provides services for the entire state of Massachusetts, 1st Church of Leominster is the ONLY church which provides Christmas gifts to LGBTQ youth over the age of 14; this also includes the centers themselves. And with that in mind:

A very special THANK YOU to Rev. Dr. Susan Suchocki Brown

For all the endless amount of work you do to keep 15 West Teen Coffeehouse a successful and important part of North Central and beyond communities, in providing services for our youth. I am so very proud to share this journey with you.
Sheila



Birthdays

Kayla Woodward.....Jan. 7
Hope Cordio.....Jan. 22
Jenny Flammia.....Jan. 24
Natalia Giordano.....Jan. 13
Marilyn Murphy.....Jan. 13
D'nece Lashley.....Jan. 16
Chris Uhlig.....Jan.16
Jennifer Scott.....Jan.18
Paula Murphy.....Jan. 21



Book Discussion Group

What: Without a Map: A Memoir by Meredith Hall

It was 1965 when Hall was expelled from her New Hampshire high school, shunned by all her friends, made to leave her mother's home, and kept hidden from sight in her father's house—all because she became pregnant. In this memoir, Hall narrates her bittersweet tale in which loss and betrayal evolve into compassion, and compassion into wisdom.

When: Friday, January 22, 2016 at 7:30 pm

Where: First Church



Soup with Susan

Jan. 20th

Please join us from 12:00 to 1:00 for a warm, friendly gathering of soup made by Ron, bread and dessert made by Rev. Susan and fellowship made by all. All are welcome. Invite your neighbors and friends to come with you.



Toys for Tots

Toys for Tots was a huge success. Thank you for all who pitched in to make this a great social caring project. There were those who helped with applications, John Mc Bee, Mickey, Claire, Diane, Debra, Chris, Stephanie, Lenore, and the packagers- Amy and Lenore and her gang- Stephanie, Joseph, Nolan and Emilie, Mickey – and those who helped get presents out on the 20th. Christa, John, Debra, Stephanie, Michael, Lenore, Stephanie, Joseph, Joani, Amy, Mickey, Sandra, and Erica, we did good. I hope I didn't leave anyone out because it was a crazy and hectic day giving presents to over 173 kids. Sheila was available on Monday for the person who couldn't get here Sunday and her youth helped put together an emergency bag, which I used also. I heard lots of thank you's and I also heard people say, I want to help again next year. To all who brought in toys, and who helped in many ways, Thank you also.



FCCU Website

"I want the world to know this about us!"

We are in process of building and rebuilding our new web site. We want you to reflect on the comment above. We want you to think about how we should present ourselves to the world over the web and media.

We need your help:

Please send any pictures that you have of various church happenings to Betsy at bam36uu@gmail.com so we can keep an active display of photos on the site. Also readers are needed to look over the content that we currently have. Remember the web page is our face to the outside world. What do we want to say about ourselves? What pictures, comments, and text do you want to see on a web page that is First Church Unitarian Universalist? Write to Betsy or Rev Susan with your ideas; we will show you how to review what we have up there so far and we welcome your comments and opinions.

Member Spotlight

Michael, Stephanie, Michael Jr. and Lilly Trudell

Stephanie and Michael met when she was out at a pool hall with her girlfriends. The next day when Michael called Stephanie for a date she only agreed to go

out with him after she found that their political ideals matched.

Stephanie has worked as a nannie and as a caregiver for developmentally disabled adults. She is an avid reader and she likes to write. She is a graduate of greater Lowell technical school; she is a certified infant, toddler and pre-school teacher. She has chickens and she considers herself a political junky. The three things she is most passionate about are bigotry, reproductive rights, and the environment. She marched in Washington in 2004 for reproductive rights.

Michael was born and raised in Lowell. He is the youngest of five children. He joined the Army shortly after 9/11 where he completed his education. He served in Iraq during the initial invasion. He is a former drummer and he played semi-professional baseball. He was the *Chan-alligator* (the mascot) for the Lowell Spinners baseball team. He volunteers at the VA. He is a member of the VFW in Lowell. He is a *Patriots* fan.

Micky is 12 years old. He is an avid reader and a Lego master builder. He enjoys science and history and making his sister crazy. He once read 40 books over the summer. He likes *Dr. Who* and *Harry Potter*. He is undecided about what he wants to be when he grows up.

Lilly is 7 years old. She also likes to read. She loves to make cards for people and cheer people up. She likes people smaller than her because she is a bit of a mother hen. She likes *My Little Pony* and *Harry Potter*. She is only on the third *Harry Potter* book so **No Spoilers**, please! She loves animals and wants to be a veterinarian when she grows up. In many ways she is an old soul.

Together the family enjoys coming to church on Sunday. They also enjoy backyard bonfires and hanging out at home.

If you want to use the church for any purpose, committee or event please be in contact with Lenore at First Church email to coordinate schedules.

Joys and concerns

To the Trudell's we offer our sympathy on the death of a too young family member.

To Paula Murphy our deepest condolences to you and your family upon the death of your family member.

Debra graduates from Andover Newton Theological School in January. Yeah!!! She will continue her field education internship with us until June. Wishing Debra well during this time of great upheaval and change.

Congratulations to Marilyn Murphy who won the "ugly sweater" contest.