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New Horizons – December 2019

Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto

Vol 8, Issue 3

Upcoming Services

Sun December 1 10:30AM– [Bah Humbug!](#)
Rev. Shawn Newton

Sun, December 8 10:30AM– Tis the Season of Compassion
Rev. Lynn Harrison

Sun, December 15 10:30AM– Bethlehem Revisited: Participatory Christmas Pageant
Rev. Shawn Newton

Fri, December 20 6:00PM + 8:00PM– Solstice Vespers: Winter Solstice Celebration
Rev. Lynn Harrison and Rev. Shawn Newton

Sun, December 22, 10:30AM– Better to Light a Candle: Celebration of Chanukah
Rev. Shawn Newton

Tues, December 24 7:00PM
Candlelight Christmas Eve Service
Rev. Lynn Harrison and Rev. Shawn Newton

Sun, December 29, 10:30AM– The Unbearable Art of Doing Nothing
Rev. Christopher Wulff

Sun, January 5, 10:30AM– Fire Communion Service
Rev. Lynn Harrison and Rev. Shawn Newton

Sun, January 12, 10:30AM– [Lives Lived: Those We Lost in 2019](#)
Rev. Lynn Harrison and Rev. Shawn Newton

Celebration

Well, I was knocked out of the game this year before it really even got started. On the morning of November 12th, mere hours after the close of Remembrance Day, I heard Wham’s “Last Christmas” piped through the speakers of my dentist’s office. Some of you are no doubt aware of this “game” called “Whamageddon”; it’s the annual effort to make it as far as possible into the holiday season without hearing that sappy song from the 80’s that isn’t actually a Christmas song at all, but, rather, a break-up anthem that is nonetheless played non-stop through December and now, apparently, mid-November, as well.

I suggest I was playing the game, but I was only playing by default. I first learned of the Whamageddon phenomenon a couple of years ago on Facebook, as many of you likely did, as well. Now, whether I really want to take part or not, I’m in. I’m participating. I’m playing the game. By simply being aware of the tradition—and the lengths to which others will go to avoid the song, including wearing headphones in malls(!)—I’m an unwitting contender in this recent ritual to mark the season. Whether I like it or not, I’ve gained a new holiday tradition (and by my bringing it up, I offer my apologies for recruiting you into this tradition, as well).

There are many paths through the season now upon us, this season of so many wonderful and complicated

celebrations. As we journey through the weeks ahead, it's worth examining what exactly we are celebrating. To wonder at the what, why, and how of our holidays and holy days. Do we participate in traditions simply out of habit, or is there some enduring meaning to the activities we partake of at this time of the year? Are we intentional about the place of celebration in our lives, or are we simply going along to get along? What, if there were no constraints, would we choose to celebrate this month? What traditions in our lives are waiting to be rekindled or born anew?

In whatever ways you choose to celebrate, may you honour this season in a way that stirs your heart and connects you to all that matters most. I wish you comfort and joy along the way.

In faith and love,
Shawn

Questions to Live With

As has become our practice, be sure to engage these questions in advance of your group meeting and find the one that “hooks” you most. Then let it take you on an adventure. Live with it for the entire month. Allow it to break into—and break open—your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Journey Group meeting prepared to share that experience with your group.



1. What important event, achievement or milestone did you celebrate well? What made the celebration effective?
2. What happened today that you can celebrate? In the last week? In the last month? What form would you like that celebration to take?
3. What aspect of yourself would you like to celebrate? How might you do that?
4. What are you celebrating this holiday season? What ritual or tradition are you called to share with those you love?
5. In this festive season, what can you do when you don't feel like celebrating?

For Inspiration

As always, the following texts are not “required reading”. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our groups. They are simply meant to spark your reflections—and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about this month’s theme.

Celebration is about honoring yourself. It refuels the fire. It soothes the soul. And, it *feels good!*
— Mary Allen

Celebrate life in all its glory - challenge yourself to let the routine sing, and the new dance.
— Maximillian Degenez

Celebration is an active state, an act of expressing reverence or appreciation...Celebration is a confrontation, giving attention to the transcendent meaning of one's actions.

— Abraham Joshua Heschel

Celebration is a kind of food we all need in our lives, and each individual brings a special recipe or offering, so that together we will make a great feast. Celebration is a human need that we must not, and cannot, deny. It is richer and fuller when many work and then celebrate together.

— Corita Kent

As we celebrate, we allow the stresses of life to fall behind and we spend our time doing things we love with the people we love. There is something about a great celebration that reminds us of the purpose of our life and of the power of our closest relationships.

— Kirstine Pallette

When love is felt or fear is known; when holidays and holy days and such times come; when anniversaries arrive by calendar or consciousness; when seasons come — as seasons do — old and known, but somehow new; when lives are born or people die; when something sacred is sensed in soil or sky; mark the time. Respond with thought or prayer or smile or grief. Let nothing living slip between the fingers of your mind, for all of these are holy things we will not, cannot, find again.

— Max A. Coats

[While we tend to celebrate]...things like birthdays, holidays, anniversaries...huge business deals, or [achieving] long terms goals...it is also important to celebrate the little things, like having a hard conversation with someone...going to the gym when you just really didn't want to get out of bed, learning a new skill, trying something for the first time, fixing your broken bike; maybe even making someone laugh, or getting the grumpy cashier to smile today. While celebrating the big things is important, it's the little celebrations that count the most.

— Nicole Winkler-Schaefer



Once you start celebrating the little victories in life, you will realize just how infinite they truly are.

— Alicia Emamdee

If we celebrate life with all its contradictions, embrace, experience, and ultimately live with it, a chance exists for a spiritual life filled not only with pain and untidiness, but also with joy, community, and creativity.

— *Derrick Jensen*

Celebrating your achievements and applauding your triumphs is a sure way to refuel your enthusiasm and keep yourself motivated for your future endeavours.

— *Roopleen*

The most beautiful things are...memories and moments. If you don't celebrate those, they can pass you by.

— Alek Wek

Each day holds a surprise. But only if we expect it can we see, hear, or feel it when it comes to us. Let's not be afraid to receive each day's surprise, whether it comes to us as sorrow or as joy. It will open a new place in our hearts, a place where we can welcome new friends and celebrate more fully our shared humanity.

— Henri Nouwen

Shall we walk through the woods;
dance through the meadows;
and celebrate the miracle
of this garden world?

— Leland Lewis

Grace is the celebration of life It is a floating, cosmic bash shouting its way through the streets of the universe, flinging the sweetness of its cassations to every window, pounding at every door in a hilarity beyond all liking and happening, until the prodigals come out at last and dance, and the elder brothers finally take their fingers out of their ears.

— Robert Farrar Capon

Good food is a celebration of life.

— Sophia Loren

Celebration

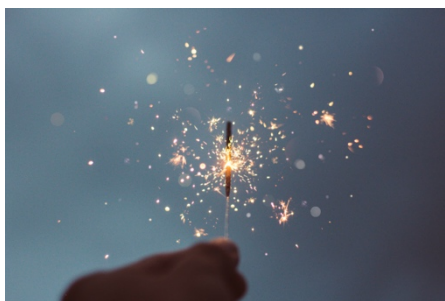
Brilliant, this day – a young virtuoso of a day.
Morning shadow cut by sharpest scissors,
Deft hands. And every prodigy of green –
Whether it's ferns or lichens or needles
Or impatient points of buds on spindly bushes –
Greener than ever before. And the way the conifers
Hold new cones to the light for the blessing,
A festive right, and sing the oceanic chant the wind
Transcribes for them!

A day that shines in the cold
Like a first-prize brass band swinging along
The street
Of a coal-dusty village, wholly at odds
With the claims of reasonable gloom.

— Denise Levertov

I see the Advent tradition for UUs not as the idiosyncratic and historically inaccurate superstitious remnant of a repudiated religion, but rather, the specific cultural idiom by which one culture, our culture, expresses a universal human hope for the breaking forth of more light upon the whole earth -- literally, spiritually, and figuratively.

— Scott Mclsaac



One Small Face

Out of the darkest time of the year
out of the bleakest days,
we make a season shine with lights.
With mounds of greenery,
the brightest ornaments,
we bring high summer to our rooms,
as if to spite the somberness
of winter come.
In time of want,
when life is boarding up
against the next uncertain spring,
we celebrate
and give of what we have away.
All creatures bend to rules,
even the stars constrained.
There is a blessed madness
in the human need
to go against the grain
of cold and scarcity.
We make a holiday,
the rituals varied as the hopes of humanity,
the reasons as obscure as
ancient solar festivals,
as clear as joy on one small face.

— Margaret Starkey

There will come a time for most of us when we've got to decide whether we'll light our lamps, even when we're sure there isn't enough oil to keep them burning . . . We light a candle, take a breath, and reconnect with the flow of a life infinitely larger than our little beating hearts—a life we are part of no matter what, that calls us back, lifts us up, and sustains us. Light the lamp, though the oil has run out. Light the lamp, and we'll do what we can.

— Kathleen McTigue

When your heart is open to love,
Sounds become music,
Movements become dance,
Smiles become laughter,
Thoughts become meditation,
And life becomes a celebration.

— Rishika Jain

Join a Journey Group!

Journey Groups are the best way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small gathering of people for a couple of hours each month.

Groups meet at First and in people's homes and are scheduled at different times throughout the month.

For more information about joining a group, please visit our website, look for the link in First Light, or visit the Engage & Connect Table on Sundays.

Upcoming Themes include Broken and Whole (January), Radical Inclusion (February), Owing Our Story (March), Our Whole Lives (April and May).

I glimpse a single candle in a barren window
And suddenly know that this is the window of my soul

As the season's decorations invite me to look deeper into life.

... one still listens for celestial voices of hope

... one still awaits bearers of the gifts of wisdom

... one still looks into the awed eyes of children

And in the breathing, pulsing of the season

we too find a live spirit of hope and, for a moment,
the star of tomorrow shines ever brighter

— Rev. Dr. Randolph W. B. Becker

Let this be the year
we fully welcome the world,
and treat her right,

and lift our glasses in a toast to her,
and thank her,
and keep our resolutions,
and mean it when we say,
Joy to the World.

— Rebecca Parker, "Midwinter"

Today is your day to paint life in bold colors.

Set today's rhythm with your heart-drum.

Walk today's march with courage.

Create today as your celebration of life.

— Jonathan Lockwood Huie

Celebrate who you are in your deepest heart.

— Amy Leigh Mercree

You are worthy of capture. Of celebration. Of admiration. You are worthy of being seen and witnessed. Of being looked at with awe and with joy. Just as you are, right now. All made up and wearing the outfit that makes you feel like you can take on the world or just waking up in bed, bare skin and messy hair and eyes hazy with dreams...We are infinite and complex and ever changing. We are majestic and mundane.

— Jeanette LeBlanc

Celebrate your life. You are your own light.

— Lailah Gifty Akita

"Celebration" – Song by Kool and the Gang

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GwjfUFyY6M>

First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto



Seek • Connect • Serve

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