

# THE AMHERST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST NEWSLETTER

121 North Pleasant Street, P.O. Box 502, Amherst Massachusetts 01004

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**



**December 2023**



## Important Information

### **STREET ADDRESS:**

121 North Pleasant Street, Amherst, MA 01002

### **MAILING ADDRESS:**

P.O. Box 502, Amherst, MA 01004-0502

*The following staff can be reached by email or by calling the office and leaving a message: 413-253-2848*

**MINISTER: The Reverend Rachael Hayes**

[revrachael@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:revrachael@uusocietyamherst.org)

**CONGREGATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR:**

Lea Douville [office@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:office@uusocietyamherst.org)

**Office Hours: Tuesday - Friday 11:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.**

**DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:**

Andrew Coate [dre@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:dre@uusocietyamherst.org)

**Office Hours: Wednesday 9:30 A.M. - 4:30 P.M.,**

**Sunday 10:00 - Noon, evenings as requested**

**YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT COORDINATOR:**

Eden Richardson [youthandya@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:youthandya@uusocietyamherst.org)

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC:**

Brenda Miller [music@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:music@uusocietyamherst.org)

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES:**

[board@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:board@uusocietyamherst.org)

[link to board minutes](#)

**Co-Presidents:**

Jeff Clark and John Gerber

**Clerk:**

Ashley Carter

**Treasurer:**

Eric Murphy

**Members At Large:**

Linda Callahan

Sue Kelly

Deeya Pavelle

## NEWSLETTER

Copy Editor:

Janis Gray

Calendar Creator:

John Foster

Deadline for submissions: 20th of each month.

Email them to Janis Gray (contact Lea in the office if you need her email address).

Please understand we cannot cut and paste PDF files into the newsletter, so submissions should either be Word documents, rich text files or written in the body of the email. Submissions may be edited to save space or to maintain a consistent style.

Thank you!

Printed on recycled paper



---

## Schedule of Services

---

*We encourage you to attend our Sunday services in person. As of this writing*, masks are optional\* given the decline in COVID numbers in our area. You may also attend online. Click <https://bit.ly/463gaOt> Meeting ID: 998 5370 0822 PW: 599092 Or call in +1 646 876 9923 and enter Meeting ID: 998 5370 0822.

\*The UUSA Board of Trustees has voted unanimously to change the COVID-19 Building Use Policy to “mask optional” in most of the sanctuary when the risk level is low. A “mask required” area will be maintained on the balcony, next to the windows. Masks are always welcome. Our new policy will depend on weekly tracking of wastewater using BioBot Analytics COVID-19 website. If wastewater tests remain below 1000 copies/mL in Hampshire County, the UUSA will remain in Low or Green risk level and continue as “mask optional.” If the risk level increases above that level, we will move to “mask required” or more stringent limits, if necessary. For details, please see the revised policy here: [https://www.uusocietyamherst.org/covid\\_policy/](https://www.uusocietyamherst.org/covid_policy/)

**Sunday, December 3, 10:30 A.M. – *All Sacred Beings***

**The Rev. Rachael Hayes**

**Sunday, December 10, 10:30 A.M. – *Hanukkah: More Light***

**The Rev. Rachael Hayes**

**Sunday, December 17, 10:30 A.M. – *The Solstice Badger***

**Presented by our Religious Education participants!**

**Sunday, December 24, 10:30 A.M. – *Christmas Eve: Bless the Child***

**The Rev. Rachael Hayes**

**Sunday, December 24, 7:00 P.M. – *Christmas Eve: Candlelight Peace***

**The Rev. Rachael Hayes**

**Sunday, December 31, 11:15 A.M. – *NOON Year’s Eve***

**Andrew Coate, DRE**

Gather at 10:30 A.M., before the 11:15 A.M. service, for coffee and nibbles. Then count down to the new year at *noon* instead of midnight — a celebration for people of all bedtimes!)



### **Check out the UUSA YouTube Channel!**

Original content from our Sunday services are now uploaded to our website, [uusocietyamherst.org](https://www.uusocietyamherst.org), with optional closed captioning! To view them, click [here](#) — and don’t forget to SUBSCRIBE!

---

## Dedicated Offerings

---

From September to June, our Society donates each month to a dedicated offering recipient and splits 50/50 every Sunday’s offering plate with the recipient organization. We will report in future newsletters what we raised since September for **UUA Disaster Relief Fund** to support the Montpelier VT UU congregation, which suffered a great loss when the Connecticut river flooded its building, for **Maui Strong** to support victims of the wildfires which devastated Lahaina in western Maui, Hawaii, and the **Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC)**.

The Dedicated Offering for the month of December will be given to **Etta International, Empowerment Through the Arts**. This is an Amherst organization that serves the community of people labeled as disabled,

a label the members of the group don't like. In fact, they refer to themselves as the unlabeled. It is a joyous group of people who came together to create the Rainbow Players, a theater troop, led by Ezzell Floranina. Several of the members lived at the Belchertown State School before it was closed, and several of the members are regular attendees/helpers at the UUSA Wednesday morning breakfasts.

Their website is [etta-international.org](http://etta-international.org). I encourage you to go to this website and look at the photos and the short video. It states: "We treat all human beings as whole, using self-expression as a method of mending the past to shape a better future."

They are in fact international, having taken their troop to European countries two different times.



In June of this year, the organization used the UUSA social hall to have one of their joyous celebrations, and **Lea Douville**, our Congregational Administrator, saw how good it was, and recommended that the Dedicated Offering Committee consider donating to them. We have in turn chosen them to receive the offerings for the month of December.

Anne Perkins

Dedicated Offering Committee member

### More about our Dedicated Offering Committee

The Dedicated Offering Committee selects non-profit organizations that our Society will support with donations from our Sunday collections. We solicit UUSA's members for names of organizations through form which is available in the office and on-line at <https://forms.gle.hypMGzMJHgeAVf26>. A representative of the chosen organization is asked to speak about it on the first Sunday of the month. We welcome new members. If you are interested in learning more or joining DOC, please contact **Anne Perkins, Mary Beth Seminario, Linda Callahan, Carolyn Holstein, Linda Honan** or **Brenda Bushouse**.

---

## Minister's Message

---

Dear UUSA,

December is a busy time in our congregation and, depending on life circumstances, in the other places of our lives. In these long nights, I invite you to come back to your quiet center, to take a moment to find a little bit of peace before rushing on to the next thing. Light a candle, sing a song, say a prayer, take a breath, have a hot drink, just sit still, or do whatever calls you back to yourself.

Our congregation had the opportunity to host the interfaith Thanksgiving service this year [Zoom screenshot below!]. If you did not have the opportunity to attend in real time, I invite you to watch the recording on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcDRnS1IH10>

Brenda and the choir created a wonderful space for us all, and my interfaith colleagues shared eloquently what is on their hearts.

We will honor Hanukkah and Winter Solstice during regular Sunday services, on the 10th and 17th. Christmas Eve is a Sunday this year; we will hold a children-and-carols service at 10:30 A.M. and a peace-and-candles service at 7 P.M. New Year's Eve is also a Sunday, and Andrew will lead a NOON Year's Eve service: arrive at 10:30 A.M. for coffee and snacks, and the service will begin at 11:15 A.M. with a New Year's



Eve countdown to noon for people of all bedtimes.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Over the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, our congregation was targeted by scammers. Unfortunately, congregations of all religions and geographic locations get these from time to time. Thank you for reporting these messages to me and to **Lea**. Please remember that I will never ask you over text or email to buy things to help me out.

I *will* ask you to make gifts to our Minister's Discretionary Fund online here (<https://uusa.breezechms.com/give/online>) or to send your checks to our office with Discretionary Fund or MDF in the memo line. It has been a rough year for members of our community, and the MDF balance is running low. We use this fund to help one another out. Please donate to the MDF as part of your holiday giving.

I close this letter in gratitude for you, for all the people of our congregation, who remain committed to building a better world together, starting with ourselves, our relationships with one another, and our local community. You are a glimmer of hope in an uncertain world.

In faith,

Rev. Rachael

### **Feedback Wanted by the Board of Trustees**

The UUSA Board of Trustees would like to hear from you about your thoughts on the leadership, management, and general governance of the UUSA. Governance is a shared responsibility of the Minister, the Board of Trustees, and the many committees, ministries, groups, circles, and teams of the congregation. Please share your thoughts and suggestions using this "[digital suggestion box](#)" (an email).

Our Congregational Administrator will forward your feedback to the Minister, Board of Trustees, and/or committee leader, as appropriate. Members of the Board will also be available during the coffee hour after the services to hear your thoughts. In addition, you are invited to speak directly to the Board at our next meeting. To be included on the board meeting agenda, please contact either of the co-presidents. We'd like to hear from you!

---

### **Co-President's Letter**

---

*Who are we?*

*How do we want to be known?*

*Why does our congregation exist?*

These are a few of the questions we will be asking ourselves this year. Reverend Rachael and the Board of Trustees have asked the good members of the Committee on Shared Ministries to lead us through a process to "clarify and affirm our purpose as a congregation." If we put our hearts into this work, we may achieve something more than just writing a new mission statement.

"Who are we?" seems to be such a simple question. At least until we ask who is included in the word "we." Does this mean our current membership? Does this mean our current membership plus a few others like us who want to join? Or are we committed to doing the hard work of "[widening the circle](#)"?

We see ourselves as a welcoming and inclusive congregation. Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, the author of this year's UUA common read, challenges us in her new book, *Mend the World*, to go beyond inclusion to celebrate what she calls expansion. For UUs, expansion, or "widening the circle," means that we are willing to be changed by the people who show up in our midst. It means celebrating and centering people with historically marginalized identities.

The new [UUA draft of Article II](#), which we will vote on at GA this year, states that "systems of power, privilege, and oppression have traditionally created barriers for persons and groups with particular identities, ages, abilities, and histories." I wonder if we will hold this truth in our hearts and minds when we ask ourselves "who are we" and "how do we want to be known?" Personally, I hope so. I find this work exciting – and sometimes a bit uncomfortable. If our efforts to clarify our mission this year don't result in a bit of discomfort, I suspect it is because we are not truly doing the work necessary to "widen

the circle.”

The Committee on Shared Ministries will help us clarify and affirm our purpose as a congregation. No matter what we write into a new mission statement, our purpose will be made clear to visitors and potential new members by the way we are in relationship with others. Our purpose will be reflected in the people who show up and decide to stay and be in community with us. As our hymn says, “we shall be known by the company we keep.” I hope you will join us in this important work to clarify and affirm who “we” are.

John Gerber; UUSA Co-president

---

## Social Events

---

**SAVE THE DATE!** Holiday Cookie Swap Saturday, December 16, 3:00-6:00 P.M. Stay tuned for details!

**Free Community Breakfast**, every Wednesday, 8:00 -10:00 A.M. in our Social Hall. Co-sponsored with Craig's Doors. *Volunteers welcome (Questions? contact Sophie Rogers)*, or just come to eat and chat!

**The Men's Breakfast**, our no-agenda Men's Group, meets each Wednesday at 7:00 A.M. at The Stables, 326 Russell St. (Route 9) in Hadley.

**The Women's Circle** is a supportive and social group of UUSA women open to all. We meet at noon on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month, sometimes on Zoom, sometimes in person. If you are not already on the email notification list, please contact **Lea** in the office to request the link — or to ask her to let **Sophie Rogers** know you want to be added to that list!

---

## Meet our Newest Members!

---

**Introducing Jyl Gentzler** “As a little girl, I loved being embraced by a Lutheran community in which my grandparents, great-grandmother, and great-aunt played an active role in the religious education of children. They spoke of God’s unconditional love toward all of us, but also of our responsibilities toward one another. They led us in song. As an adult, I couldn’t embrace Lutheran doctrines and creeds, even as I deeply valued the loving (and singing) community my dear ones supported. I have wished for, but didn't know where to find, a community that would share my values and challenge me to live them more fully, but that didn’t also commit me to endorsing doctrines about God that I saw no reason to accept. Over the past year, I have found that community in UUSA. I have joined the choir. I am so delighted to have the opportunity to give to as well as receive from this blessed community.”



**Introducing Jacob Torres** “I am a UMass student studying computer science. I grew up orthodox Catholic, heavily involved in my Church. As my involvement increased, so did my Biblical scholarship, which brought me to many questions people within my Church were not willing to engage with. In my own time, these questions brought me to many humanist conclusions that separated me from Catholicism. As several people in my life left from the conclusions I came to, I felt isolated in these views. That was until I walked by the UU congregation in downtown Amherst for probably the 20th time, looked up what Unitarian Universalism was, and found a whole community of people with similar ideas, that were willing to engage with what I find central to my worldview. For that alone I am grateful to now be a part of this community, and look forward for what is to come.”



---

## Finance Committee

---

The Finance Committee will meet on **Monday, December 11, at 7:15 P.M. on Zoom.**



OWL and Badgers and Noon Year, oh my!

There's so much happening in the religious education world right now! At the forefront of everyone's mind is our Winter Solstice pageant, The Solstice Badger! Adapted from the picture book of the same name by Robin McFadden, the Solstice Badger tells the story of the first winter, as lonely Sun finally finds a friend in the cave dwelling badger and, because he's so excited to have a friend, he rises later and sets earlier each day to spend more time with his new friend. Please plan to come out and support our religious education classes on December 17 at 10:30 A.M.!

In addition to the pageant, **Alyson Bull** will be offering the Our Whole Lives (OWL) Sexuality program for children in Kindergarten and 1st grade this winter.

This **Sunday, December 3** during the service from 10:30-11:30 A.M. there is an informational parent meeting and orientation session to the OWL program. This meeting will provide an overview of the program and will answer any questions you may have. We will also be discussing the story of conception that we would like our group to use. Your input is important! We are offering the much anticipated, revised and updated K-1 curriculum this year, so even if you have had older children participate in previous OWL sessions, please try to attend the orientation meeting.

Please let **Alyson Bull** know ([alysonrbull@gmail.com](mailto:alysonrbull@gmail.com)) if you are able to attend the meeting. If you are unable to attend the meeting this Sunday, but would like your child to participate in OWL this coming January, please reach out to **Alyson Bull** so she can connect with you before the program begins.

Lastly, on December 31, our regular Sunday service will be a NOON year's eve celebration! Join us to count down to 12 P.M. together and celebrate what we are bringing in to the new year and what we are leaving behind. That Sunday we will hold social hour *first* from 10:30 to 11:15 A.M. and then gather in the sanctuary and on Zoom for songs, crafts, sharing our hopes for a new year, and a raucous welcome to 2024... 12 hours early! All are welcome!





### Blending of Caring Circle and Pastoral Care Team

We have a bit of good news for the UUSA community. The Caring Circle and Pastoral Care Team are joining together and we are now one, complete team here to help You! The two teams met to discuss the way we each attend to the community and felt that we could do a better job if we could collaborate and become more efficient in offering help.

Let us know if you or someone you know would like a phone call or visit, perhaps a ride or a meal. Our mission is to see that no one goes unnoticed and everyone in our community gets the help they need.

Our members remain the same: **Fran Plumer, Charlie Atwood, Pete Rogers, Carol Johnson, Rob Fuderich, Rev. Rachael Hayes, Jeanne Ballantine, Carolyn Cave, Mary Latham, Linda Callahan, Sophie Hermann, Lynn Sussman, Kate Dahlstedt, Gordon Wyse, Lauren Croce, Karen Mack, Catharine Porter.**

To make a contact we suggest you either call or e-mail in the UUSA office or Caring Circle Chair **Catharine Porter**. (If you do not have access to our online directory, Lea can connect you with Catharine.)

---

### Social Action



**Not Bread Alone** It's our turn to help at our local soup kitchen, Not Bread Alone, on December 30. If you'd like to end your year helping those in need, you can help provide a nourishing lunch time meal. Cooks are needed from 9:30 to 12:00. Servers 11:45 - 1:00; Clean up 12 - 2:00. No experience is needed as we work under the direction of the kitchen manager. Not Bread Alone is located in the lower rear of First Church (Congregational) in Amherst, with access off the Spring Street parking lot. If you can help (or want more information), contact **Mary Beth Seminario**. THANK YOU!

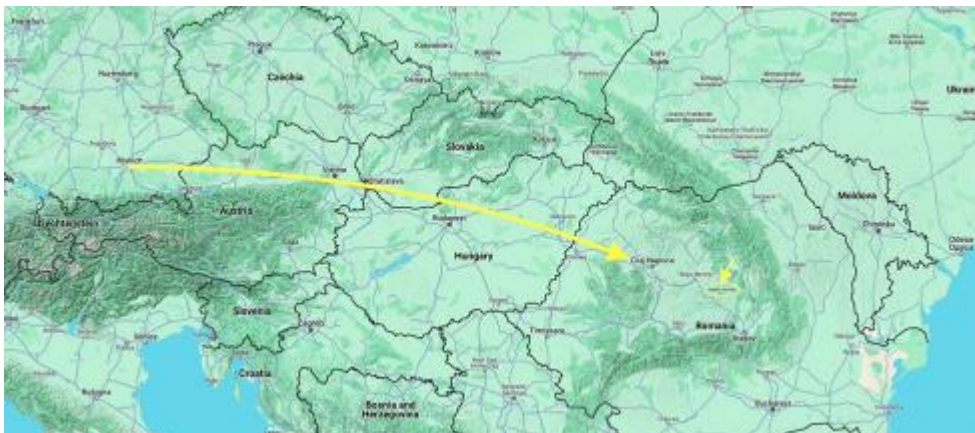
---

## THREE WEEKS IN TRANSYLVANIA, THE CRADLE OF THE UNITARIAN RELIGION!

By Pat Brinkman

On September 20, my spouse **Rodger** and I were among the 12 UUs from the First Parish in Concord (FPC, MA) going to Transylvania, a part of Romania since 1920. We went to commemorate 30 years of our partnership with a Unitarian congregation in Szekelykeresztur (or simply "Keresztur"). Seven of our fellow travelers had never been to Transylvania.

Rodger and I joined FPC in 1993, the year that Concord and Keresztur were partnered, and have been involved in the partnership since 1993. Rodger's first trip of 18 was in 2003. Mine was in 2007, the first of 9. Sadly, this was our last official trip, so it was bittersweet. This trip was planned by Rodger (former co-chair of Concord's Partner Congregation Committee) and Tim (current co-chair). Tim's first trip was in 2018. Rodger and Tim met every week for months, planning the trip along with Keresztur's new ministers and members of their Partner Congregation Committee.



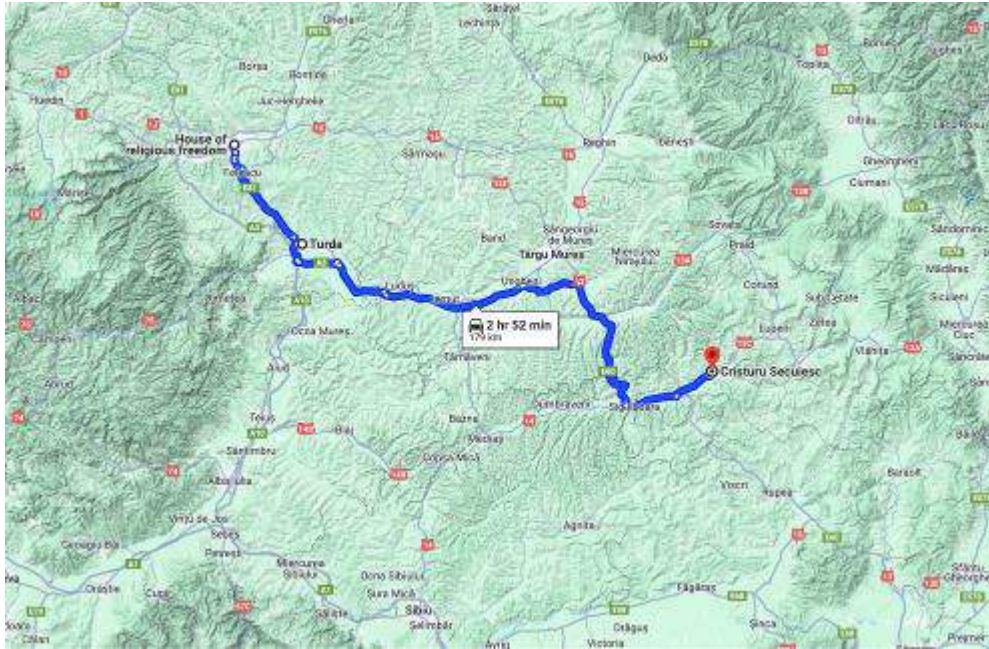
*We flew into Kolozsvár (Cluj Napoca in Romanian) from Munich.*

We spent the first few days in Kolozsvár, staying at the House of Religious Freedom, a 15<sup>th</sup> century building restored to include a museum, guest rooms, a bookstore, and a restaurant with courtyard dining. Owned by the HUC; it is in the center of town with gorgeous views from our room's balcony.

During these days we met with the Hungarian Unitarian Church (HUC) bishop in his office at the HUC headquarters. Yes, there is a Unitarian bishop! He oversees the HUC, which includes 130 independent congregations in both Transylvania (6 districts) and Hungary (1 district), its two K-12 schools (one in Kolozsvár, the other in Keresztur), and the Unitarian college in the Hungarian Protestant Theological Institute in Kolozsvár.

Rodger was recognized for his 30 years of contributions to the partnership with presents and plaques, and the Bishop pledged his commitment to continuing to foster the partnership program.

On Saturday, we drove from Kolozsvár via Torda (aka Turda) to Kérestúr (ie Székelykeresztúr - aka Cristuru Secuiesc in Romanian, or Kreuz to the Saxons)



After visiting Torda (Turda), and the church of the Edict, the local museum with the large painting of the edict, and the local Unitarian Church followed by lunch in the parsonage, the bus arrived in Keresztur, where we were greeted by about 60 welcomers with hugs, flowers, presents, and songs. Many faces were familiar and we were embraced by hospitality.

We left Concord at 4:00 P.M. Wednesday September 20, and returned to Amherst on October 23 after a warm and meaningful visit. This partnership will continue into the future! Our personal connections we've made there over the years will also continue.

*Part Two of Pat and Rodger's adventure is expected to be published next month. For now, here is a photo from one of their fellow travelers, entitled "the Székely corner of our fridge."*





## THANK YOU

to the following individuals who helped out on Fall Work Day! Shown are **Charlie Atwood, Jeff Clark, Tom Fricke, Sue Kelsey, and Ron and Louise Grosslein**. The grounds are ready for winter!



## SHINGLE MINGLE!

On November 12, UUSA celebrated our congregation's success in re-siding the meetinghouse, enjoyed a very special cake, and asked for pledges to help retire the project's financing. Many thanks to all who have pledged thus far! At right, John Gerber and Janis Gray fill out donation slips to join those already on display.

