Faith is by no means dead in the world.  
A devil’s plenty of it is loose on the planet.

“A man bears beliefs,’ said Emerson, “as a tree bears apples.”

- James Luther Adams

My son Sam and daughter-in-law Molly are spending their first holiday season as Peace Corps volunteers in Armenia. I ask them questions about their experiences of how Armenian lives are shaped by the things that animate me...like religion.

Armenia identifies as the oldest Christianized culture in the western world. They identify as the land of Mount Ararat, where, it is told, Noah's ark came to rest after the flood.

From this mythic Judeo-Christian center they became, in 1921, a secularized Soviet Socialist Republic. This effectively diminished the religious influence and public practices of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Yet, the majority of Armenians, still identify as being of this faith tradition and are proud of its history in their culture.

So when I ask about Christmas in Armenia Sam tells me that he and Molly taught school on December 25. I wasn't surprised by this and reminded them that the Eastern Orthodox Christian traditions celebrate Christmas on January sixth, or the Feast of Epiphany.

“No, no” they say to me, “you don’t understand.”

“The important holiday here is New Year’s Day, not Christmas”

New Year’s Day was the secular, Soviet celebration and remains the cultural holiday.

While their host families (they have had two) take them to church, Sam and Molly report that it is only to look at and admire the buildings - their architecture, age, historical significance, and artwork.

The Armenian celebration of New Year’s Day suggests to me a kind of parallel with something Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams identified about having faith. The important religious question, he said, is not if one has faith...as he notes in the opening quote above. He goes on to conclude that what is important is to

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continually reflect upon *where* we placing our faith, and how that measures up to where we believe it is right and good to place our faith.

These holidays we celebrate in late autumn through the early winter season have as many different meanings to us as there are varieties of faith in the world.
The need to celebrate as a community, as a culture, is a basic human need.

So if we remove Christmas - the Christian story of it as the Soviet socialist ideology did, or if we remove the focus of celebration away from the need for liquor, or various overindulgences, or blood relatives as its source of meaning......
human beings will still find reason to join in common rituals of celebration!

It is the human spirit seeking something inevitable about human being:
the need to celebrate the Holy, Good, Beautiful, Sacred as we discover it in our lives; to celebrate life and connection in the face of inevitable death; to acknowledge Mystery and to show gratitude.

For many of us these seasonal holidays remain a difficult time. Self-protectiveness may lead us to remove ourselves from public celebrations. They may remind us of our losses, our unmet expectations, or provide us with too many triggers for our own worst behaviors. We may well feel relieved that the season is over, the New Year arrived.

As a congregation in this time of “development”,
what kinds of ministry to and with you might have been useful in this season?

How might we begin to listen and share experiences with each other that could develop into new rituals and traditions that we would welcome and find supportive this time next year?

This is the unique and wonderful work of being a Unitarian Universalist congregation.
We are each invited to consider and perhaps move the focus of our celebrations into a broader, wider expansion of spiritual understanding.

We do not, in general, celebrate the birth of the Christ, but rather the birth of Jesus as a symbol of a larger Love and as a prophet of resistance to the ever-present powers of corruption and domination that plague all of us. For many of us it is a celebration of the return of the Sun as a symbol of life’s ongoing and enduring cycles of birth, life, and death. For some of us it is a celebration of the Mystery of the creation of stars and humans out of the nothingness. For others it is a time to simply be gathered in human community finding joy in the simple warmth and presence of others singing aloud, holding the light and warmth of a single candle in the company of many candles on a dark, chilly, night. Our unique faith invites us to create something new and unique alongside and from the Eternal strands of many traditions.

On Christmas Eve the gathered congregation was invited to think about what Love could be born in each of us that night? Implicit in that question was any and all nights.
Today, in this New Year, how can we birth this Love first in ourselves and then into new and vital congregational life?

May the New Year be one of fertile development within, among, between, and beyond.

In Faith,
Rev. Abigail
**Upcoming Worship Services**

**January, 2016**

**Services Begin At 10:00 AM**

January 3 – *New Beginnings: Manifesting Hope* with the Rev. Abigail Stockman
Being intentional, and realistic, as we welcome in the New Year

January 10 – *Both And* with the Rev. Abigail Stockman
The Holy and the Sacred in life invites and inspires us to look beyond an either, or perspective and begin shifting into a both, and perspective.

January 17 – *Hymn Sing Service: Songs of Justice and Freedom* led by our Choir Director, Roger Grow

January 24 – *Widening Circles* with the Rev. Abigail Stockman
The Love we claim as doctrine inspires us to expand and attend to what is often just at the edge of our peripheral vision.

January 31 – *Imbolc: Nurturing signs of new life* with the Rev. Abigail Stockman
In Celtic spirituality February invites us to honor and the signs of returning light and life. What vitalities shall we nurture into fuller expression in our common spiritual life?

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**Jeanne Lohmann: "Praise What Comes"**

surprising as unplanned kisses, all you haven't deserved of days and solitude, your body's immoderate good health that lets you work in many kinds of weather. Praise

talk with just about anyone. And quiet intervals, books that are your food and your hunger; nightfall and walks before sleep. Praising these for practice, perhaps

you will come at last to praise grief and the wrongs you never intended. At the end there may be no answers and only a few very simple questions: did I love, finish my task in the world? Learn at least one of the many names of God? At the intersections, the boundaries where one life began and another ended, the jumping-off places between fear and possibility, at the ragged edges of pain, did I catch the smallest glimpse of the holy?
THANK YOU TO ALL WHO WORKED TO MAKE OUR SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS
AND SERVICE WORK SO WELL

From the decoration of the Sanctuary, to the preparation and responsibilities for the additional and celebratory meals in our outreach Community Breakfast which included lunch this month, decorating the Sanctuary (and removing in time), reading, singing, ushering, lighting candles, counting the collections:

over $400. on Christmas Eve for the People’s Health & Wellness Clinic
and $80. for the Christmas Day gift cards

Making soups, sandwiches, answering questions, cleaning up, eating your share of cookies, participating in the Friday Faith Development Group, checking the books, staying in touch.

WITHOUT YOU THERE IS NO CONGREGATION
FOR ALL THIS AND ESPECIALLY FOR YOUR PRESENCE AMONG US...
We offer grateful thanks!

January Wayside Pulpit

This Wayside Pulpit, located in the corner of the building that has a quote that can be read from the street is one of the best ways to share ourselves as Unitarian Universalists with the greater Barre community. George Plumb and Michael Marcotte are now replacing the quote on the first of each month. The signs are printed locally at Copy World and cost $20.00 each.

If you would like to sponsor one of the monthly signs please contact George Plumb at plumb.george@gmail.com or call the church office and Doug will get your information to George and/or Michael.

Give thanks for
Unknown blessings
already on their way
~ Native American Prayer

BACK IN JANUARY - DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED...
SINGING CIRCLE FOR HEALING, HEALTH, and HOPE

Simple chants and candlelight form this meditative practice calling us into healing and hope for ourselves, our community, and for the earth.
Soup & Sandwich Luncheon
Our December Soup and Sandwich raised $210 for Circle. This is an agency which shelters battered women. The January beneficiary is Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity. Central Vt Habitat for Humanities is all about families who need simple, decent housing, but who are unable to get a loan through any conventional means. Habitat is not a giveaway program. Habitat offers partner families a no-interest mortgage for their house. In addition to a down payment and monthly mortgage payments paid to the Habitat chapter, homeowners invest hundreds of hours of their own labor (sweat equity) into building their Habitat house. Habitat for Humanity, powered by volunteers in local communities like ours worldwide, has been building homes in partnership with families in need for more than thirty years.

Food Shelf Report
I brought the food from the baskets in the back of the church to the Capstone food shelf. They have new directors for Community Action and another for the food donations. Now they are weighing the food and telling us a value for what we donate. This week we gave 60 pounds and they figured the value at $120.

I think this is good for us to be able to know what we are donating and how much it means to Capstone Community Action. They have to buy food from the food bank for their shelf and what we have donated is saving them $120.

I will try and let you know each time I make a delivery just how much help we are giving to local people in need by putting the pounds and value in the newsletter. Thanks for all your donations. Keep up the good work.
~ Barbara Anne Trowbridge

COMING IN LATE FEBRUARY OR EARLY MARCH
WATCH FOR FUTURE NEWS RELEASES!!
AN EXPLORATION OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM
For THE NEW UU
Six 1 hour sessions!!
OPEN TO NEW TIMERS, OLD TIMERS, EXPLORERS,
MEMBERS, AND THOSE CONSIDERING MEMBERSHIP
Any questions please don’t hesitate to contact Rev. Abigail Stockman barreuu.minister@gmail.com or by phone at: 802-754-9963

Church Grounds Beautification Committee Update
The Grounds Beautification Committee will meet on Thursday, January 28th from 3pm to 4:30 at the Parish House. This meeting will be a review of 2015 projects and a 2016 planning session. If you have questions please call Ellen Sivret at 479-0658 or email at ellensivret@gmail.com.
Thank you to EVERYONE who supported the Mayo Assisted Living Christmas Gift Drive. Once again I am humbled and slightly overwhelmed by the generosity that has been shown to this effort to help make Christmas special for this often forgotten group of people. Thank you again on behalf of Mayo and on behalf of myself and my family for helping keep my grandmother's legacy alive. May you all be blessed with holidays and a new year filled with great joy and love. ~ Doug
Relocation Announcement From Doug Blanchard

It is with a mix of emotions that I am writing to announce that Toni and I are leaving Vermont. She has taken an incredible position as the manager for a greenhouse and nursery located just outside Nashville, TN. She starts her new job on January 15th and I will be joining her there as soon as possible. Because of some commitments already in place I could be here as late as mid-June but am hoping to be permanently moved well before that.

I have truly loved my experience here, working for the church. I have met some incredible people that, even though they may not know it, have impacted my life in such a positive way. I will be forever grateful for the opportunity to work here. I have never worked anywhere that has made me feel so appreciated for my efforts. This all came about at a time in my life when I really needed that kind of positivity and I will always be indebted to you for that.

This has all happened VERY quickly so there are a lot of details still to be worked out. I will keep Rev. Abigail up to date on events as they unfold. For those who are interested you are always welcome to contact me personally by calling the office or by dropping me an email at barreuu.secretary@gmail.com.

Four Alaskan UU Congregations Plan Fundraiser

Two WhaleCoast Alaska Tours Planned for 2016!

Have you always dreamed of visiting Alaska? Would you like to meet Alaskan UUs? Do you enjoy getting to know your fellow travelers? If so, WhaleCoast Alaska 2016 is for you! Alaskan UU congregations invite you to experience our eco-cultural and spiritual program with friendly homestays and unique tour activities this summer! See Alaska through the eyes of local UUs when we visit Anchorage, Seward and Fairbanks for 10 days in June. For our 13 day tour in July we visit Fairbanks, Anchorage, Juneau and Sitka. See wildlife, including moose, bear, whales, bald eagles, seals and caribou. Each tour will visit Denali National Park, experience Native Alaskan culture and enjoy all our beautiful state has to offer.

Programs are led by Dave Frey, member of the farthest north UU congregation. Visit www.WhaleCoastAK.org, email dfrey@whalecoastak.org, or call me at 907-32204966. We would love to share our Alaska with you!

Weekly E-News

The Weekly E-news is now being produced every WEDNESDAY and there is always room for your submissions. If you have news that needs to be communicated to the other members of the congregation prior to the next newsletter, please contact Doug Blanchard at barreuu.secretary@gmail.com or call 479-0114. Please send your submissions to Doug by 10:00 AM on each Monday.

Deadline For the February, 2016 Newsletter

Is 10:00 AM on Monday, January, 25th.

Make submissions to Doug Blanchard at barreuu.secretary@gmail.com or 479-0114.
Someone Who Loves Me Gave Me A Device Program
presented by
Aldrich Public Library
Sunday, Jan. 3rd 1:00 PM-3:00 PM

Do you have a well-meaning family member or friend who gave you an electronic device for the holidays but you have no idea how to use it? Let us help! Bring your device to the library during the event and tech-savvy staff and volunteers will help you get started with the basics. We can help with smart phones, tablets, computers, ereaders, and more! If you'd like follow-up lessons, don't forget that the library has free technology help drop-in hours. (If you are the person who gave someone a device, feel free to point them in our direction!)

For more information contact Kirsten Hansen at 802-476-7550 ext. 302 or by email yallibrarian@aldrichpubliclibrary.org

Community Conversations on Racism
January 13, 2016 @ 7:00 PM
Hedding United Methodist Church
ALL WELCOME