



The Messenger

Unity Church in Albany • 21 King Avenue • Albany NY 12206 • 518-453-3603

The Birth of Christ

WE ARE ABOUT TO CELEBRATE the birth of Jesus of Nazareth who is remembered throughout history as Jesus the Christ. The birth of Jesus may be understood on two levels. At the human level we may recall the birth of a child (a "son of man") who would rise from obscurity to become one of the greatest teachers and healers this world has known. On the spiritual level we may understand his birth as the re-birth of awakened consciousness into a world lost in dreams of physical bodies, separated identities, and conflicting agendas.

Our Christmas stories, found in Matthew and Luke, each offer a family genealogy and stories about a person, a human being. Each presents us with images of the nature of Jesus as portrayed by the history and actions of his family and others. These stories tell of worldly obstacles to be encountered and overcome. They also offer hints of events that will follow during his life and ministry. Such is the human side of the story of the birth of Jesus.

In the Gospel of John we find the story shifted to a different level, the level of Christ Consciousness. Now instead of being linked to human genealogies, Jesus is linked to the creative presence of God itself. "He was with God in the beginning." Theologians often confuse matters by interpreting this teaching about the spiritual nature of Jesus as a teaching about the human person of Jesus. Even a quick reading of John will reveal that it is a set of spiritual insights, seven to be exact, not the personal history of a man.

Many churches have taught us to read Matthew, Mark and Luke, our more historical gospels, through the lens of a "traditional" interpretation of John; Jesus as God, Jesus as sacrifice, Jesus as redeemer and also judge. These interpretations are heavily influenced by earlier "Old Testament" understandings of Jehovah-God; the very God Jesus was struggling to redefine for his followers.

A Course in Miracles describes Jesus as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, of the Spirit of God. It describes him as a man who saw the Christ nature in those around him and in doing so remembered God. It then reminds us that we each have that same capacity, not in some distant future but here today. As we become willing to see our brothers and sisters more clearly, as sacred beings, we can also begin to understand God more clearly, and ourselves as well.



By Rev. Jim Fuller

Throughout human history there have been other saviors like Jesus. Each came to save the world; not by their birth or death but by bringing light and freedom to minds that had fallen into dreams of darkness and density, to a world filled with the appearance of separation and conflict. Each new light arrived in its own unique form, in its own unique way. Our Christmas stories are metaphoric reflections on the light that was experienced shining through the person of Jesus.

Are these stories still relevant for the time in which we live, for a world where Jesus is thought of in the past tense? The human infant "born in Bethlehem" did grow up, complete his work here and move on. But just as the child you once were has not been lost to you in the growth and maturing of the person you have become, so too the wisdom and light that Jesus embodied is still present with us. That light, the light of the Spirit of God, continues to share its love and wisdom with all. In truth nothing "of God" is ever actually separated from God, and that includes the light and wisdom embodied in the man the world knows as Jesus.

This Christmas I invite you to think of the birth of Jesus as the birth of an ever-emerging idea of the Di-

*Ideas always remain
connected to their
Source . . .*

Continued on page 3



The President's Corner

By Heather Diddel

'Tis the Season...

Frankly, I am not usually a fan of country music. So, imagine my surprise this afternoon when I found myself touched by a country singer crooning on the radio:

"How do I wrap my heart up for Christmas and give it to you?"

A gift of love. What a lovely image as we head into this holiday season. Can you imagine what this holiday season would be like if we decided that we would gift one another our hearts? No push for Black Friday bargains, no rush-rush-rush, no panicked "How-on-earth-am-I-going-to-get-everything-done-by-Christmas???" thoughts. Imagine, instead, simply centering in on the love in our hearts, allowing our hearts to soften and open, and be given to, and received by, one another. What a gift that would be! I say YESSSS! to that. What do you say?

How perfect to look at the gift of love as we head into this season where many people celebrate the birth of a baby, or the consciousness that birth represents for us. As a small child, I saw paintings of Jesus with a heart encircled by a ring of flames. He was always depicted as kind and loving, teaching the wisdom that came from that blazing heart. For me, years later, that heart image symbolizes the light of love that illuminates our being. How fitting then for Jesus to be described by some as both a man who walked a path of love, and as "the light of the world."

The light of the world.

That's a powerful image as we head into the darkest season of the year, isn't it? Have you ever noticed how many different cultures and traditions fill this darkest time of the year with light – whether in the form of menorahs for the Festival of Light (aka Hanukkah), or Christmas lights draped over trees, houses, and shrubs, or the seven kinara candles of Kwanzaa, and endless other light-giving celebrations? Our yearning for light seems to deepen as the sunlight hours melt away and darkness grows.

As I think about this deep yearning for light, I am reminded of the light and love of Spirit that is always present within us. And that brings us back to the consciousness that emanated from one called the Light of the World, and that emanates from each of us when we choose to walk the path of light and love.

This Christmas season, may we choose to be the light of the world, emanating the light and love of Spirit that is always flowing through us, to us and from us. What a true Festival of Light it will be as we choose, one by one, to be a beacon of light and love for one another, both radiating and receiving that love. May we give the gift of our hearts to all who cross our paths.

With a grateful heart, I give thanks for the beacons of love and light that this community is, in all seasons. And so it is!

Unity Church Prosperity Report

First, your Unity Church Board of Directors affirms that Unity Church in Albany is prosperous! We are overflowing with abundance in so many ways. Our finances are sound and more than meet our needs. Our level of volunteerism is beyond fantastic. The number of programs, classes, workshops and opportunities for spiritual growth we offer exceed the "norm" for a small congregation. We have an abundance of music, energy, community, fellowship, spiritual enrichment and vision for the future.

Our year-to-date income from love offerings, workshops, and other sources for the first ten months of this year (Jan-Oct) was \$180,302. That is an increase from our income of \$153,401 for the same period last year. As always we have kept our expenses within our income for a positive year-to-date balance. Our financial reserves for upkeep and expansion are \$106,843; up slightly from last year. We have not needed to tap these reserves during 2011. We did choose to make an end of year purchase of sixty new chairs for our fellowship hall at a cost of \$3,600.

Our board of trustees continues to hold a vision of \$200,000+ for income during 2011. We see this manifesting as we receive our final two month's offerings. We give thanks for the 4T Prosperity classes which have helped increase both our offerings and the prosperity consciousness of the congregation.

We continue to affirm our vision for a prosperous, growing, enlivened and thriving church community. Our Sunday worship service attendance continues to grow. Our minister is constantly challenging us to a higher consciousness....and we are responding. Newcomers are welcomed, hospitality flows. Long-term congregants are appreciated for their dedication and continued service. Divine ideas for service continue to prosper us. We expect a continual flow of new and higher ideas, more opportunities for healing, for awakening, for Love and Service.

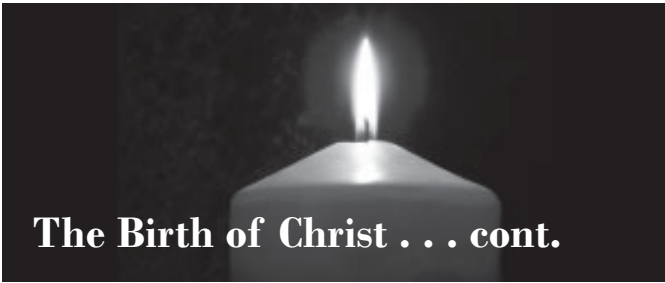
Thank you God for a prosperous 2011 and for continued prosperity in each year to come.



Listen to Sunday Services & Music

You can now listen to or download our Sunday messages on our website.

Just go to www.unitychurchinalbany.org and click on "listen". New talks are added weekly. And don't forget our website's "music" page.



The Birth of Christ . . . cont.

vine Nature of all of humanity, yourself included. I invite you to think of the ideas Jesus shared as universal ideas originating not in his human mind but from the universally shared Mind of God. These ideas are present both within the body of his teaching and within the continuing essence of his being. Ideas always remain connected to their Source and that includes the Divine Ideas we call Jesus, and you, and me.

May our minds remain open to the teachings of Jesus and the ongoing inspiration of the Christ Mind which he embodied. May we feel his ongoing love and support for us as we move from our spiritual infancy into a mature awareness of our own Christ Nature. Amen

Food Pantry

During the cold winter months we continue to give for the benefit others. Thank you for your generous donation!



Week #1

December 4 & January 1: WOMEN'S WEEK! Needed are feminine pads, tampons, washes, shampoo, conditioner, tooth brushes & toothpaste, deodorants & soap.

Week #2

December 11 & January 8: MEN'S WEEK! Needed are shaving creme, razors, deodorants, shampoo & soap, toothbrushes & toothpaste.

Week #3

December 18 & January 15: BABY WEEK! Disposable diapers, baby wipes, lotions & shampoos.

Week #4

December 25 & January 22 & 29: HOUSEHOLD WEEK! Toilet Paper, laundry soap, paper towels, household cleansers.

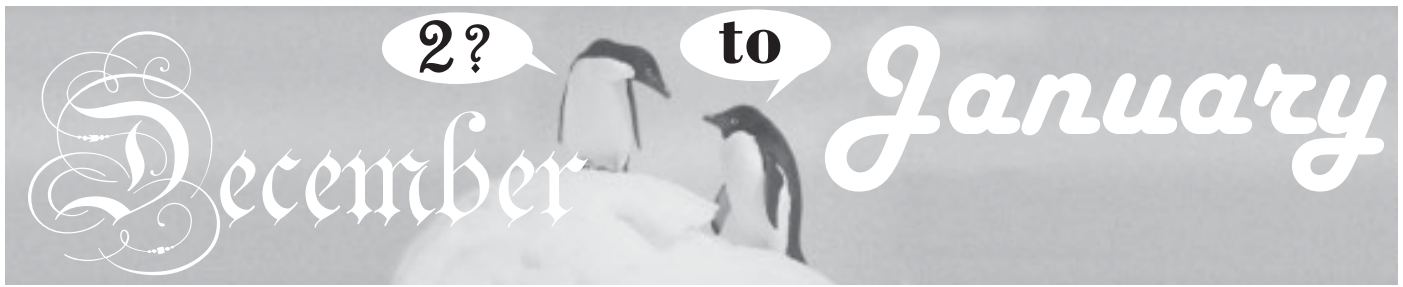
It's Christmas Time Again

By Bob Lazzar-Atwood

*Put your problems on probation
Run your troubles off the track,
Throw your worries out the window
Get the monkeys off your back.
Silence all your inner critics
With your conscience make amends,
And allow yourself some happiness
It's Christmas time again!*

*Call a truce with those who bother you
Let all the fighting cease,
Give your differences a breather
And declare a time of peace,
Don't let angry feelings taint
The precious time you have to spend,
And allow yourself some happiness
It's Christmas time again!*

*Like some cool refreshing water
Or a gentle summer breeze,
Like a fresh bouquet of flowers
Or the smell of autumn leaves,
It's a banquet for the spirit
Filled with family, food and friends,
So allow yourself some happiness
It's Christmas time again!*



Church Directory

Plans are in process to update the church directory! Would you like to take part?

The directory is a listing of church members and non-members with photo, contact and personal info. It is a wonderful resource to get to know your church community! Sundays in January have been set aside to gather information and take your photo. Please plan to participate on January 8th, January 15th, January 22nd or January 29th either between both services or after the 11 AM service. Your participation will make it complete!

If you have Microsoft Publisher experience and would like to assist in putting the booklet together, please contact Sheila Healy or Bonnie Kriss. Sheila can be reached at sheilahealgovrel@nycap.rr.com or at 428-0848. Bonnie can be reached at tedandbonkriss@hotmail.com or at 373-2135. Your help will be much appreciated!!!



December Savings in our Book Store

During December we are holding a month long inventory reduction sale. All new books, CDs and DVDs are 10% off, and as always we pay the sales tax. That means you save 18% off retail. It also means we get to make room for more new titles in 2012. That's a win for everyone.

Unity Church Christmas Party

December 3rd 7:30 PM

Please come join us in the fellowship of spirit as we celebrate this joyous season with song, snacks and community. This year we will be having a grab bag exchange. For those who are interested, please bring a gift of no more than \$10-\$15 to be exchanged with some lucky person. The grab bag is optional. We are also hoping that Santa Claus

Worship Services with Jackie Hawkins

Sunday, December 18th at 9:00 & 11:00 AM



Our own Jackie Hawkins will be taking a break from her studies at Unity Village to visit us and share a special Christmas message on December 18th. Join us as we welcome Jackie back for this holiday visit and receive her special gift of love and inspiration.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

December 24th at 5:30 PM

Rekindle the Christ light in your heart this Christmas. Join Reverend Jim and our Unity musicians as we sing and celebrate the birth of Christ Consciousness into our world. We have scheduled our service at 5:30 PM so that you can participate and still have the evening free for family and friends. Join us as we listen to the Christmas story, share prayers, songs, and light our Christmas candles together. What a wonderful gift to give the Christ child in you!



Sunday Worship Service

December 25th 11:00 AM only

Christmas Day Movie & Lunch

Sunday, December 25th 1:00 – 5:00 PM

Reverend Jim and Kay invite you to join them for a pot luck lunch and time of fellowship on Christmas Day. This year's schedule includes film shorts from 1:00 – 2:00 PM followed by lunch around 2:15. There's no need to sign up, just bring a dish to share and come on over. Family, friends and last minute drop-ins are always welcome. Christmas is a wonderful time to gather and celebrate, won't you join

New Year's Eve Burning Bowl Service

December 31st at 5:30 PM

Clear out the closets of your mind and make room for the life your soul desires. Open your imagination and heart to the blessings God is offering you. This is our traditional ritual of releasing to the burning bowl those things that no longer serve us and writing our letter to God claiming our vision of good for the coming year. We will sing, pray and step forward into a New Year filled with wonderful possibilities for all.



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Sunday Worship Service
January 1st 11:00 AM only
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“The Mastery of Love”

Class with Barry Schwartzbach

Thursdays 6:30 – 8:30 PM

January 19th – March 8th

The Mastery of Love, written by Don Miguel Ruiz, is all about relationship... with each other and with ourselves. It builds beautifully on his earlier book *The Four Agreements* and brings the practice of awareness right to where we live.

Barry Schwartzbach first encountered Don Miguel Ruiz, author of *The Four Agreements* and *The Mastery of Love*, at the Omega Institute eight years ago. Since then he has studied with Don Miguel and other master Toltec teachers. Making regular pilgrimages to sacred sites in Mexico and Peru, and practicing the teachings in his daily life, Barry has established a deep connection with them.

Coffee House

January 14th 7:00-9:45 PM

This is an open mic night with music, poetry, humor and more. Sign in before 6:45 PM to share your talents, or just come 7:00 PM and enjoy the show. Admission is only \$5, and includes refreshments.

Unity Book Club News

The Unity Book Club is “on break” until 2012. The book club is dedicated to reading and discussing books by Unity and other New Thought writers. Look for book club updates in our February newsletter. Meanwhile we invite you to visit our bookstore and lending library and enjoy the wide selection of books available there.

Sunday Meditation Classes

December 11th and January 7th

12:45-2:00 PM

Stephen Leslie studied for many years with Swami Rama, a highly respected teacher from India. He is now passing along some of what he learned about meditation to us. Stephen is presents these classes on a love offering basis.

Matters of Life & Death Class with Reverend Jim

Wednesdays at 7:15

February 1st through March 28th

We typically think of life as progressing from birth to death; and in the case of Jesus on to resurrection. But what if that apparently linear path is only an appearance? What if our ideas about life and death are only *our* ideas? In the Gospel of Mark Jesus tells his disciples, “Remember, by trying to save your own life, you’re going to lose it; but by losing your life because of this good news, you’re going to save it.” (Mark 8:35) Through reading, meditation and interactive exercises we will explore our current ideas about life and death, and with the support of the class perhaps lose some of these and save ourselves.

This class will use the book *No Death No Fear* by Thich Nhat Hanh as a teaching text. We encourage you to purchase and read the book in advance of the class.

\$mall Business Fair

Sunday, February 5th

Did you wish to know more about your church commUnity? Come see what individuals have to offer in the way of services and products at our annual \$mall Business Fair. The event will warm you on this cold winter day ... Sunday, February 5th. A snow date is planned for February 12th.

If you have a small business and would like to share information about it, please consider participating in the \$mall Business Fair in the Fellowship Hall between both services and after the 11 o’clock service. This is a fabulous, well-attended, and successful event for all involved.

If you are interested in participating, please contact either Diane Teutschman or Bonnie Kriss. Diane can be reached at 280-4311 or at minimom45@aol.com. Bonnie may be reached at 373-2135 or at tedandbonkriss@hotmail.com.

More Joy, Less Stress in Eight Easy Steps

Reducing stress is important, we've all heard it. Stress not only impacts your happiness, but your health. The American Academy of Family Physicians reports that two-thirds of all doctor visits are due to stress-related ailments. It's also believed that 80 to 90 percent of all diseases are stress-related. And if you're female, stress may be even more damaging to your health. Study after study has found that women suffer from both stress and depression more often than men.

For some of us, our biggest stressors might be weather-related situations, such as tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, fires and hurricanes. Similarly, for most of us, we get stressed out thinking of deadlines and commitments, but stress has many other causes. It can be triggered by emotions—anger, fear, worry, grief, depression or even guilt. And stress can actually lead to high blood pressure, heart problems, fatigue, muscle and joint pain, headaches and other illnesses and chronic health conditions. If you want to avoid these problems, here are my favorite eight tips to reduce stress, promote relaxation, and bring a sacred balance back into your body and world. ...

1. Redirect your energies inward—Stress is a major problem in modern life. Technological advances have increased the pressure to keep busy, even during leisure hours. We talk on the telephone while we drive, watch television while we read, conduct business while we listen to the radio. ... Given our current rushed pace, we have little time to relax and cultivate relationships with our spouses, children, friends and nature. ...

When you constantly direct your attention and energies outward, it's easy to lose the sense of inner wonder, calmness, balance and beauty where true happiness, joy and peace originate. By slowing down and redirecting your energies inward, not only will you train your brain to relax, you will begin to reestablish the wholesome sense of self-worth necessary to positively change your life. ...

2. Get moving! That's right—exercise is one of the best ways to reduce stress in your life: it relaxes muscles and eases tension. Want proof? A study ... shows that patients who took a vigorous walk and raised their heart rates to more than 100 beats per minute reduced the tension in their bodies by 20 percent. ... So go for a walk, hit the gym and do some weight-bearing exercises, or give yoga a try. ...

3. Meditate and breathe deeply. Really, it's that simple. ... Simply find a special, quiet space in your home. Spend at least 15 minutes here first thing in the morning and before going to bed. Sit and close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply, focusing on the sound and rhythm of your breathing. Mentally visualize peace and calmness. Your day will start and end on a stress-free note.

4. Eat a stress-relieving diet. Can what you eat really help relieve stress? You bet! Take stress off your digestive system by eating at least seven servings of fresh fruits and vegetables, which are high in water content and, therefore, easily digestible. Especially beneficial are antioxidant-rich leafy greens, such as romaine lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, kale and collards. Also, to benefit from an array of antioxidants, choose an array of colors when it comes to your fruits and vegetables. ...

5. Keep your body hydrated. Our bodies are 70% water. Our cells are 70% water, and our planet Earth is 70% water. That's no coincidence. Each day we need to drink at least eight glasses of water. At a cellular level, dehydration makes us as droopy as a neglected violet. ... Drinking "liquids" won't do. Although herbal tea, freshly extracted vegetable juice and diluted fruit juice can count in the water tally, coffee, tea, colas and alcoholic beverages actually dehydrate the body. ...

We need to maintain proper fluid balance for brain and kidney function to rid the body of waste material and toxins and to maintain radiant health. ...

6. Catch plenty of Zzzs. Lack of sleep undermines your body's ability to deal with stress. That's why it's important to get eight hours of rest per night. One way to tell if you're getting enough shuteye is to see if you wake at a regular time without an alarm. If you require a buzzer to get out of bed in the morning, you're not getting enough sleep.

7. Laugh a lot. Worried about something? Maybe you're stressed out about your relationship with a loved one, the monthly bills that are stacking up, or the poor grades your son or daughter is suddenly bringing home from school. Whatever it is, one way to mollify this stress is to make sure your life is filled with laughter.

According to researchers, laughter releases endorphins into the body that act as natural stress beaters. In fact, a good belly laugh gives your heart muscles a good workout, improves circulation, fills your lungs with oxygen-rich air, clears your respiratory passages, stimulates alertness hormones, helps relieve pain, and counteracts fear, anger and depression, all of which are linked to illness and stress. ...

8. Be thankful—and reap the health benefits. Each and every day, take a moment and be grateful for all you have in life. Gratitude, after all, is a great stress-buster. What you think about consistently brings more of the same into your life. So focusing on the positive, even during difficult times, is the best way to reduce and alleviate stress and transform your life.

Reprinted with permission from: <http://www.unity.org/resources/articles/more-joy-less-stress-eight-easy-steps>

Spotlight on Service

By John Daubney

Paul Barnard

We are blessed to have within our Unity family, certain people who, over time, shine a light for us all that we may see the way. They are leaders by virtue of their unquenchable desire to learn and grow and serve. They provide us with inspiration and a desire to emulate them in ways large and small. Such a one is Paul Barnard, and we at Unity are blessed to have him among us.

“Unity came into my life about 30 years ago. It came at a time when I was lost and felt desperate. My marriage of 35 years had suddenly ended. Our children, by then, were independent, happily well established, and building their own lives and families. But, I was lost. So I immersed myself in my professional counseling career but with a heavy heart. With some desperation I attended New Age workshops at Omega Institute and elsewhere to lift my spirits. Out of the many contacts I made, one friend suggested Unity as a spiritual haven. At that time Unity of Albany consisted of a small group meeting in a private home (the home of Peggy White) on the corner of Manning Blvd. and Western Ave. Among those attending was Audrey Madison who attends Unity to this day. The fellowship and spiritual principles made me feel right at home. It became a larger family for me, and has continued to be a stable presence ever since

“Later Unity moved to the Women’s building on Madison Avenue where we rented a large hall on the second floor. I volunteered to be on the bookstore committee. I love books. They are like old friends who want to share their ideas and life experiences with me. At this time we stored our books in boxes behind a screen in the corner of the hall. This meant that we had to unpack the books, arrange them on tables for the congregants, and then repack them in the boxes at the end of each service.

“Over the years changes came. Since we were an enthusiastic group we worked together to build the church of our dreams and eventually we purchased our own church building. As I was drawn to deepening relationships, I accepted the chairmanship of the prayer circle. This led to closeness with members we prayed for, and a close bond with members of the prayer circle itself.

“The Course in Miracles has also been very important to me. About 15 years ago Nancy Remick and I began co-facilitating a Course in Miracles study group on Sunday evenings which continues to this day. At the present time Sandesh Naik, Patricia Hunt-Perry and I lead a monthly gathering to discuss the book, A Year to Live, which fo-



cuses on living our present life to the fullest.

“From all of this I realize that receiving and giving is the same thing. Both represent the flow of life. Our joy comes from noticing and then being open to receive validation and gifts coming to us as well as the joy we feel in extending our love and accep-

tance of others. I’ve offered counseling services to the We Care Committee to provide free counseling to those of us in need. It is a way of flowing back all that I have received.

“When I reflect on the past and what it means to me, a certain pattern seems to make sense. To me, life moves in stages, each with its own challenges and delights. But, certainly, each is different. Life can be compared to a mountain stream. First it trickles and happily bounces over the rocks. Then it joins with large streams through turbulent rapids. Finally it opens to a wider basin where it flows slower and deeper on its way to the ocean.

“I feel my life has definitely followed that pattern. At present I move slower but also much deeper. There are more things to see, appreciate, and reflect on. Now I can take the time to savor the warmth and comfort of all of us belonging to each other; enjoying each moment as it comes and then freely goes. All the while I know that we are always being taken care of. It’s just sort of appreciating everything before the next adventure presents itself.

Board of Trustees

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The Next Newsletter —

Articles for the February/March edition of the newsletter can be submitted to Denise Klein at katzr3@nycap.rr.com by Sunday, January 15th. Your news articles, spiritual thoughts, poetry, photos, humor or suggestions are always welcomed.



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Our Spiritual Home

A place to worship, grow spiritually, feel loved and accepted — is no small matter. In our spiritual family, we know there are many paths that lead to God. We believe that Spirit led you here. Our desire is to share Christ's love with genuine heartfelt warmth. We are a gathering of all kinds of people with various backgrounds, life-styles, and life-stories. Growing together we worship, we serve, we laugh, we cry, we learn, and we reach out to our world with life-transforming truth. We aspire to live as Christ and be receptive to Spirit as it calls us to Life. Our name says it all; we are a Unity of believers celebrating and participating in inclusive worship. If you've been praying, searching and hoping for a place to belong, we say again — *Welcome Home!*

Sunday Worship Service
December 25th 11:00 AM only

Sunday Worship Service
January 1st 11:00 AM only

Non-Holiday Worship Schedule

Two services every Sunday at
9:00 AM & 11 AM.

Childcare is available at 11 a.m.

Wednesday night prayer at 6:30 p.m.