

Newsletter

January 2024

Sunday Service at
10:30am, in person and
online

Zoom Sunday Service Link:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89122019151>

Meeting ID: 891 2201 9151

Board and Staff

President, Social Responsibility,
Social Media

[Alexander Herrmann](#)

Treasurer, Personnel

[Carol Moak](#)

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[Francine Germaine](#)

Social Hour

[Ben Foley](#)

Building & Grounds

[Chris Hicks \(Acting\)](#)

Membership, Building Use,
Canvass

[Bob Shepherd](#)

Religious Education

[Melissa Quirk Cairns](#)

Sunday Services, Fundraising,
Nominating

[Sheila McKenna](#)

Artswalk

[Kim Rivers](#)

Sharing & Caring, Newsletter

[Katherine Hoak](#)

At-Large

[Peggy Taylor](#)

Caretaker

[Dante Hicks](#)

Pianist

[Karèn Tchougourian](#)

Unitarian Universalist Church of Pittsfield



January Sunday Services

January 7 - Rev. Rich Hayes

January 14- Alexander Herrmann "The First UU Principle"

January 21 - Circle Sunday led by Tyne Allshouse "What are you looking forward to in 2024?"

January 28- Peggy Taylor

We are looking for the following personnel. Please contact us at office@uupittsfield.org if you are interested:

Administrator (paid position, 30 hours/month)

Building & Grounds Chair

Building & Grounds Committee members

Building Use Committee members

Ding Dong Merrily

I'm not a Christian, but I do celebrate Christmas. There's a few reasons for this: I have to take the holiday off work anyway; I like giving and getting presents; I like the fancy decorations; and I like the excuse to bake. And, given that the holiday is really based heavily on pagan traditions (the Zoroastrian god Mithras has his feast day on December 25, after all), it all works out.

This year, I decided not to go as crazy with the food as I usually do. I'd promised my mom that I would deliver sandwiches and dessert to her and my nephew (her caretaker), so I baked a couple loaves of my Dilly Bread, and we got a couple of rotisserie chickens, and that was the sandwiches. Then, for dessert, I made an apple galette, and then I baked something new: a wine pie.

This pie was something that I'd first heard of because a joke was going around on social media where people would pour an entire bottle of red wine in a pie shell, throw in a few tablespoons of flour, and pretend that this could be baked. Obviously that's not real, but I had a hunch it was based on a real recipe, and I eventually found it. You do use a whole bottle of wine, but you cook it with cornstarch and sugar, and then mix in chocolate and butter, and it thickens into essentially a sort of chocolate wine pudding that's very rich and delicious. The alcohol doesn't all cook off, so if you don't drink, you'll want to use nonalcoholic wine for this, but anyway, it's great, if a little goopy.

After dinner was over, we settled in with the pets and watched that most ultimate of Christmas movies: Die Hard. It was all fun. But what was really amazing was what happened the day before: the Carol Sing at our church.

I'd done my best to promote the event on social media, but I wasn't sure what to expect, because this is the first time since we've joined that the church has had the caroling. What happened was amazing: the Sanctuary was packed. We had to bring in extra chairs so that everyone could have a seat. The carols were all traditional, which is good, because we didn't have anywhere near enough song books. At the end, we did the UU's own unique version of The Twelve Days of Christmas, with people singing the line that went with their birth month. Everyone was laughing when it was done, and then the group broke up for refreshments. A bunch of us headed over to Melissa's house for her annual Christmas Eve party, which was a perfect end to the evening.

And so that was Christmas. Now I'm looking forward to the New Year and all the plans that we're formulating to revitalize our church, starting with an interview with the Eagle about our church, the building, and its needs. I'm very excited and I hope you are too. Let's all have a fantastic 2024!

HARLEM

What happens to a
Dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin
In the sun?
Or fester
Like a sore--
And the run
Does it stink like
Rotten meat?
Or crust and
Sugar over--
Like a syrupy
Sweet?
Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load,
Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes
*"Montage of a Dream
Deferred"*

Peace and Joy,
Alexander

Year End Reflections

Christmas Eve and the Carol Sing: It was glorious. Good King Wenceslas himself would have been looking out at our ice towers of luminaria on our path to the front door of our church. Had the Good King been there a moment earlier, he would have peeked into the kitchen where Peggy Taylor, Sheila and Dante tore open the 20 stacked ice carton boxes of hemlock and berried bases, affixing a tiny tea light atop. it was harder than you might imagine. (Jason and Lilith had brought the greenery from their garden and helped fill the containers a week earlier.) It was a learning experience. Peggy and Sheila had "aha!" moments at the weight of those ice towers, and the dynamics of the light placement, and how freezing cold those ice towers were! And they had to get outside, so Dante loaded up trays of the heavy ice forms and set them up along the front church path. Peggy's fingers were freezing, but she carried on, Eyebrow Raised to discard any of the ice bases that "didn't have enough red berries!" (Not festive enough!) Ben was brewing coffee and setting out huge platters of cookies and donuts for the visitors. Our tree in the sanctuary was quite beautiful with new bulbs, and was bright with light, and our classic candelabra was lit. Karèn, in formal black concert attire, sat at the grand piano -and the people came. And came. A bag of silly hats was opened and shared. More people came. Bob handed out the jingle bells, while guests discovered songbooks and a candy cane on each seat. The room filled. More people came. Little girls wore velvet dresses. Karèn warmed the audience with his heartfelt piano music. Melissa, Impresario, embodying her Firm-Voice-of-the-Third-Grade-Teacher, announced the format and read the riot act to the awaiting crowd, explaining how we would proceed, and how she got silence in the classroom. We all snapped to attention. The audience was well behaved, and learned about the final Twelve Days of Christmas to be sung by birthday with unique gestures and standing delivery. The singing began, with Sheila and Melissa on microphone, with visits from Annika and Sadie in red velvet dresses, joining in the Carol Sing. Adults who had snapped up the jingle bells, reluctantly gave the bells to nearby children. It was wonderful. People laughed, sang, and got silly with the 12 days of Christmas. More people kept coming, and more chairs were added. It was a very happy, warm success, and a perfect beginning to the holiday. People thanked us as they went out into the early Christmas evening, warmed by the shared singing and laughter.

Year's reflections: Puppies and Paint. Carol Moak created a most unusual and very delightful event, with pooches, adoring pooch parents, kids and the rest of us, for her Puppy Picasso Painting Party. If you have ever loved a dog, you understand there is no

America is not like a blanket, one piece of unbroken cloth—the same texture, the same size. It is more like a quilt—many patches, many pieces, many colors, many sizes, all woven and held together by a common thread. The White, the Hispanic, the Black, the Arab, the Jew, the woman, the Native American, the small farmer, the businessperson, the environmentalist, the peace activist, the young, the old, the lesbian, the gay, and the disabled make up the American Quilt.

*The American Quilt,
Rev. Jesse L. Jackson*

rhyme or reason to believing the possibility that they could be a potential Abstract Artist. Not Carol, (who is admittedly, a Cat Person.) Carol brilliantly created an event with happy volunteers, where dogs were given two blank canvases, (their people-parents chose the squishy paint colors) covered the canvas and paint with thick clear plastic, then gave the dog a choice between Peanut Butter or Cheez Whiz, which was applied atop. Set on the floor, the art experience began: the dog set to removing the peanut butter treat, stepping onto the canvas, and - incidentally- moving the paint beneath into wondrous new patterns. Voila!! Picasso would have gasped! A new Art Medium was created! Parents got one canvas, the other became part of our art exhibit for Artswalk. It should be noted that Dante and Carol had covered the entire floor of the Fellowship Hall with a gigantic blue tarp. No mishaps occurred. Among the volunteers that day were Annika and Ana, who got extra hugs from a Cockapoo named Stella. A coon hound named Gilligan sighed with forbearance, not able to roll his eyes, but we could clearly understand that he was humoring us.

Bobby Sweet: Huge Thanks to Katherine, the people of Becket and that Adorable Charmer, Bobbie Sweet! Our fall fundraiser, created by Katherine Hoak, was the performance by beloved minstrel, Bobby Sweet. A talented and sympatico performer, he filled the hall with happy listeners, and was gracious, warm and charming. And he could sing, too! It was a very successful event, and brought many strangers, and it seems the entire town of Becket, to our church home. We had a festive time with beverages and treats for purchase for the audience. Thanks to the fundraising committee for their efforts with licenses, refreshments, and advertising. A resounding success.

Services: We are grateful to have the wisdom and reflection of Reverend Rich Hayes on our monthly schedule. Through the creative idea of Tyne Allshouse, we have a new tradition: the Circle Sunday - where very moving, open sharing occurs. Simon Cole has brought his tender and moving stories and ideas through the gift of his sharing. New members, Amanda and Peggy have rocked our socks with their offerings of ritual and insight. Thank you, all. Our summer meetings were smaller but unique. And we were together.

We are singing again. Not necessarily on key, or reading all of the words, but giving it a good stab. Karen has always brought a profound spirituality and joy with his piano, humor and insight, and now we get to raise our voices repeating the songs of old memory, and ringing the rafters with our voices.

New people, new joy. It is our greatest gift to open our doors and our hearts to visitors, and we are blessed with the brave souls who venture forth to see if we are the right church home for their hearts and spirit. Welcome all. Our doors and hearts are open.

The Moving Finger
writes; and, having
writ,

Moves on; nor all your
Piety nor Wit

Shall lure it back to
cancel half a Line,

Nor all your Tears wash
out a word of it.

*The Rubaiyat of Omar
Khayyam*

In this painful year of war, discord, disease and climate change, let us remember what we believe, and how our faith is based in love, respect, and human dignity. May the New Year bring peace, health, and meaningful work for our hearts and bodies. There is so much talent here, in kindness, creativity and action. That is our Christmas miracle.

Special Gratitude and Appreciation To Those Who Make it Happen: Thank you. Heartfelt appreciation to our leadership, to people who work behind the scenes brewing coffee, creating ideas, getting through planning meetings, working invisibly on doing the work of keeping us afloat. Creating financial spreadsheets to scare the bravest of us. To the quiet behind-the-scenes committees, Building and Grounds - burning the midnight oil, caring for this old house, our church home, preserving the warmth, sealing the windows, to our Canvas and Collector and Treasurer who meticulously watch every penny and record it, to our President and Committee members, working at computers, getting out our social media, updating our web page, soliciting for our financial survival, for the caring and sharing work done by Katherine, by the quiet competence of our Scribe, our Scuba Queen, Amanda. To Bob Shepherd who is, if not actually marble, a pillar and post of our church. He is both musical and electronically blessed. Leading isn't easy. Thank you Alexander!!! We are a congregation of very, very smart unique people. We are a family, and like a family have 11 different opinions for every ten people. But we are also smart enough to know we are accepted as we are, in love. One of our most brilliant voices is a quiet one: Francine. Her wisdom is of the sages. She rarely speaks, but when she does, Listen! Each word is a pearl of wisdom. To our Caretaker, Dante, thank you. I rely on you and your quiet strength and wisdom for so many things. and they get done. Yowza to that.

Respectfully submitted, with such appreciation,
Sheila McKenna

Around The House

Winter still seems to be holding its breath, but if you've ever heard scratching from your ceilings, you know the wildlife isn't quite as willing to wait. Getting your not-so-friendly neighborhood raccoon or family of squirrels out of your attic is beyond the scope of this note (and, frankly, beyond the average homeowner - call a pro! Raccoon bites and rabies shots are no fun), so I figured instead this would be a great time to go over some tips to keep the critters from invading in the first place.

We thank you for your support! Please use this QR code to donate to our church or mail a check to: Unitarian Universalist Church of Pittsfield, 175 Wendell Ave., Pittsfield MA 01201



- Make sure that the area around your home, about 3-6 feet, is as clear of long grass, weeds, and brush as you can get it. You're not looking for bare ground, you just want to make sure there's not a lot of cover there to encourage wildlife to hang around looking for a way in.

- If you have tree branches either overhanging your roof or close to it, consider calling an arborist - they will be able to tell you if the limb is likely to give wildlife access to your home, and if it's likely the limb could fall in a way that damages your roof. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of etc etc.

- Stapling up metal mesh or hardware cloth (available at any hardware store) over vents and other gaps in the outside walls of your home can also help prevent wildlife intrusion. Don't drive yourself too crazy with this - mice and voles can enter gaps of as small as a quarter inch, so you're not going to completely win this battle - but if you can make your home sufficiently difficult or annoying to invade, most critters will give up in favor of an easier place to sneak into.

- Small gaps where it's difficult to cover with mesh can also be filled with pest-blocking spray foam, but there's some things to keep in mind with it. Make sure it says 'pest blocking' on the label, otherwise it won't even slow the critters down. Pest-blocking foam contains ingredients like metal shavings or chemical repellents that make the foam either difficult or disgusting to chew through. The expanding foam can damage things as it expands, so be aware of the space you're filling and consider using low-expansion pest-blocking foam. Some gaps need to be there in order for air to flow properly and prevent moisture buildup, so if you're not sure, ask your handyperson for information or help.

- If you have a brush pile, make sure it's as far from your house as you can reasonably get it, ideally without any long grass, weeds, or other cover connecting the two. Brush piles attract small animals, and they treat weeds and other cover like freeways - make sure they can't take the next exit into your basement!

- Enlist the aid of your pets! Walking a dog around the perimeter of your house and encouraging it to do its business will leave scent markers that small animals will stay away from.

Stay warm!

Chris Hicks, Building & Grounds Chair (Acting)