



Horizons Journal

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix
December 2016



A Community of Prayer & Practice

Reverend Susan Frederick-Gray

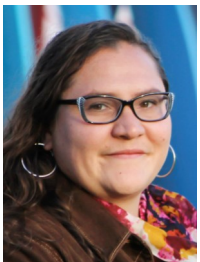
As the UUCP Worship Associates gathered to brainstorm for our theme this month of “Prayer and Practice,” one asked, “Is prayer is a four-letter word in Unitarian Universalism?” I am not sure I would go that far, but it is true that we have varied views on the efficacy, meaning and value of prayer. And for some people it is absolutely true that the word itself triggers painful memories from difficult religious upbringings.

As we kept talking though, several people shared their own stories of prayer and practice and what it means to them. People shared how in opening to the silence of prayer, they heard a still, small voice of comfort and strength. Others talked about mindfulness and compassion that has grown deeper through a regular meditation practice.

Others reflected on how even if they don’t pray, that some of the prayers they learned by heart in childhood—like the 23rd Psalm and the Lord’s Prayer—still have meaning, perhaps especially because of the familiarity of the words.

About 12 years ago, I learned about a contemplative practice developed by two Unitarian Universalist ministers called “Living By Heart.” For several years, we’ve had an ongoing group following this practice, which is based on learning poetry or wisdom words by heart. By reciting and memorizing poems meaningful to us, they come to be a deeper part of our ways of looking at the world. One poem I have memorized is all about greeting the day with joy and gladness. It’s called “Why I Wake Early” by Mary Oliver. It’s so easy to begin our day feeling rushed or stressed, tired or afraid, gloomy or alone

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The Freedom to Pray

Katie Resendiz

As UUs, how we worship, how we pray, and how we tend to our spiritual beliefs can be as varied as our beliefs themselves. For a child, developing a personal prayer practice can be confusing. Prayer is modeled as a holy act on TV, in books, by family members and school friends. But within our congregation, we don’t always articulate if, how, and why we pray. For a child, that lack of discussion or transparency can easily be interpreted as an admonishment against prayer.

During Sunday School classes and in conversation with the children of our congregation, the members of the Children’s Ministry Committee make a point of mentioning our spiritual practices. We may say things like “When I pray at bedtime...”

or “While meditating this morning, I...” Our Sunday school teachers will tell you that two things happen after such a disclosure. First, the child immediately asks, sometimes timidly, “You pray?” Second, the child looks relieved. The affirmation that Yes, UUs pray, gives kids a huge freedom to explore prayer as a tool in their spiritual practice.

The Children’s Ministry Committee has found that many, many of the children in our congregation pray. For some it’s a family practice, words learned and recited, times and expectations set. But for most, it’s more furtive and unsure. Do we fold hands? Do we start with “Holy Father”? Do we end with “Amen”? Are humanists allowed to pray? What does “Service is Our Prayer” mean? Do I keep my prayer a secret?

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Everyday Spiritual Practice

Caitlyn Gaspar

Member, Board of Trustees

My dad values commitment. When I was growing up, he'd often come home from work late in the evening long after my mom and I finished our dinner. But every night, my dad always made time to read to me. When I was very small he read me books like *Good Night Moon*. As I got older he read me the *Chronicles of Narnia*, Shakespearean plays, and passages from the bible.

Sharing these stories was sacred. Nothing got in the way of reading time. I could wonder about the world and ask questions. Sometimes I'd ponder things that were silly and other times I'd ask big questions about God. No matter what, each night I knew I was safe and loved. It made closing my eyes to go to sleep a little easier. Though I didn't know it at the time, my dad's nighttime reading ritual was a shared spiritual practice.

When I moved in with boyfriend Mark (who is my now husband), he wanted to start saying grace before each meal we ate together. At first, I was a tad apprehensive. I had not done a lot of praying and was a little unsure of using the word God. But I decided in order to be an open-minded UU I should at least give it a try.

It turns out I'm really good at saying grace and enjoy it. We don't have a particular grace we say before each meal. We just speak what we're moved to say. Sometimes I share a poem or words from the heart. On hard days we might ask the universe for extra love and guidance. On days we find abundance we pray for ways to share it with the world.

In this winter holiday season, Mark and I have a simple tradition we started that same year we began saying grace. We each wrote down 12 quotes that were meaningful on small slips of paper and put them in a jar. Each night of advent we pull out one of these quotes. One of us will read it aloud. We'll discuss why it is meaningful and then we hang the quote on our tree. Sometimes holiday festivities get in the way and we'll forget to pull one. We don't beat ourselves up if we forget. This is a spiritual

practice, not spiritual perfection.

Outside of my home, UUCP is the main place I find prayer. At each board meeting we start with a chalice lighting, an opening reading, a moment of silent reflection, and a check-in question. We take turns choosing a reading and check-in question. In sharing these readings, check-ins, and silence, we actively make space as a board for our spirits. While our work is constantly thinking towards the horizon, these common UU practices help ground me in the present. A reading helps center me after a long and busy work day. During the moment of silence some of us may pray, some may meditate, and others may reflect. Whatever we're doing in our minds, I value the collective space to be quiet together and slow down our lives a bit.

The check-in is my favorite part of our spiritual practice. It is enriching to hear what each person has to say about an important question. Some may have a story to share and others have a focused answer. At a meeting this fall Jim Allen, our treasurer, helped us think big by asking us to share what problem we would solve if we were gifted a large sum of money. Katie Quinn, one of our youth representatives, asked why the UUCP community is important in our lives. The last time I supplied a check-in question it was about the last book each member read. Whatever the question is, it reminds me that we are a community of spiritual seekers. I appreciate the diversity of questions and connections they forge between us.

With the long nights and short days, December is a prime month for prayer and practice. Yet I know the cultural hustle of holidays can make this season difficult for many. I hope our events and services at UUCP help you feel connected during this time. As board members we serve the congregation and are eager to connect with you. Join us on December 11th for a board chat in Annex D between services, or come to our next board meeting. I hope to connect with you soon! □



Justice Ministry December Opportunities

— PRAYER & PRACTICE —

If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.

Meister Eckhart

When you are discontent, you always want more, more, more. Your desire can never be satisfied. But when you practice contentment, you can say to yourself, "Oh, yes—I already have everything that I really need."

Dalai Lama

Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one's weakness. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart.

Mahatma Gandhi

Refugee Assistance Christmas Help

The Refugee Assistance Program will display a Christmas tree full of gift tags for Eritrean refugees. Just take a tag and return it with the gift. Tirhas, 43, and her 11 year old son Even are on our list as are Tesfalem and Meharena, Eritrean men with disabilities.

Maryland School Families Need Games

Maryland School plans family events during the year to help families learn more about how to interact in a variety of ways, focusing on activities that are both educational and fun, modeling and giving family members experience in how it can happen. To encourage families to continue together time, they would like to be able to send home a game with each family that attends—a board game or activities like ring toss or jailai, or a piece of sports equipment such as soccer, football or basketball. Many of these families simply do not have money to buy such items, so we would appreciate your help. Please bring your contribution to the back table any Sunday in December.

Arizona Tax Credit Donations

Looking for a school that could really benefit from your tax credit donation in order to provide enrichment activities? Maryland School receives only a small number and would very much appreciate your help. Pick up a form at the back table or use this link to print out a form which has the school address:

<http://www.wesdschools.org/cms/lib07/AZ01901172/Centricity/Domain/42/taxform.pdf>



Are Thoughts & Prayers Really Needed?

Emrys Staton

Director of Pastoral Care & Justice Ministries

During our Dia de los Muertos service at the end of October, I was reflecting how incredibly violent and deadly this past year has been. A constant stream of violence of mass shootings, police killings, repression at protests and other news is consistently being brought to us on social media and the 24-hour news machine. We hardly get to grieve and mourn one event before another is brought to our attention.

As we are now aware of more violence, both in frequency and visibility, it puts pressure on everyone to come offer appropriate responses. One of the most common responses I see and hear is either how the impacted community is “in my thoughts and prayers,” or “we send our prayers to...”

While sending prayers may be an appropriate or genuine sentiment in personal or familial situations, it has become a palliative trope for politicians and leaders looking to give a timely response to tragic situations. But in the last couple years, I’ve seen major pushback, especially on social media, to the phrases referring to sending or holding people in our prayers.

Especially when it comes to the well-established patterns of systemic violence—police killings and mass shootings with automatic weapons—people are venting frustrations at leaders only offering prayers. “We don’t want your prayers, we want justice and accountability!” is the response that I’ve been seeing after the “we send our prayers” sentiments flood social media and the news.

In an increasingly secular world, the idea of offering prayer as a means to fix social problems, offer solace, make change, or bring about justice and accountability is rapidly losing meaning for many. In fact, politicians who have personally inhibited gun control or police accountability offering prayers to victims of systemic violence and their families functions as a double-insult. I understand the growing frustration with seemingly empty and hypocritical words.

I also feel that sense of being at a loss for what to say when confronted with another instance of predictable violence. I’ve been tempted to say similar things—holding someone in my heart, keeping you in my thoughts, sending love—just because it seems like it is better than saying nothing at all. My hope is to back up my compassionate thoughts or intentions with some form of action, although given the sheer scale of violence, I can hardly promise my own actions to transform all but a few of these situations.

So how do we appropriately mourn and grieve while also showing sympathy and solidarity? Is taking a moment to offer a prayer or some other form of focused thought a reasonable or effective thing to do? I’d be curious to hear what you do or say. Or to know how you feel when you hear someone say they are offering their prayers and thoughts. Does it come across as more meaningful and genuine when the person offering the prayers and thoughts is also involved in movements for social change and justice?

Personally, I’m weary of these overused sentiments. I don’t feel consoled when I hear or read them, and given the prevalence of the phrases, I just feel like it’s a more of an auto-reply to tragedy that ensures each leader or dignitary has a soundbite on record. Plus, I think there’s a huge difference between actually praying for or thinking of someone and just saying that your prayers and thoughts are with someone.

As Unitarian Universalists, I know we are moved to respond to any act of violence, especially if we are active on social media. I want to continue finding ways to offer our authentic solidarity and goodwill to those who are grieving, while also demonstrating commitment to movements for justice that would actually make the world a less violent place. I’ll keep thinking and praying about that. □



UUCP Live Auction

Sunday, December 4th

11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

UUCP Sanctuary

Volunteer - Donate - Connect!

<http://www.phoenixuu.org/events/2016-auction/>

Prayer is an **act of love**;
words are not needed. Teresa of Avila

Circle of Trees

Wednesdays January 11 – March 1, 6:00-7:30 PM

Facilitator: Heidi Parmenter



This multigenerational program nurtures deep connections with trees, nature and all of life's creatures. Using trees as an entry point to understand and connect with life on earth, it invites participants to understand how trees are literally "providers of life," identify trees, explore nature using spiritual methods to foster deep connections and reinforce our 7th principle of interdependence. This course is for everyone over the age of 8, including children, single and older adults and families. Register online at www.phoenixuu.org/afd or by calling the UUCP office. For more information: heidiparmenter@phoenixuu.org.



Branches & Roots: Deepening Our Practice

Benjie Messer

Music Director

In the spirit of Prayer & Practice our choir is presenting two beautiful pieces of music on Sunday, December 4: the first is a prayer, and the second is a practice.

“O Frondens Virga” by Hildegard of Bingen is our song of Prayer. Hildegard lived in medieval Germany. She was a Christian mystic who ran a Benedictine abbey of nuns. Hildegard was an inspired genius who wrote science, poetry, theology, and philosophy as well as music. She even created her own secret language, complete with its own alphabet, solely for mystical purposes. Hildegard was one of the first saints canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. The soaring, inspired melodies in her music make it some of the most beautiful medieval chant.

Our choir has never, to my knowledge, sung medieval chant in its original form, and I’ve never directed it either, so rehearsing it has been exciting. “O frondens virga” means “O blooming branch,” and at first glance the Latin text is an environmental prayer. It thanks the blooming branch for standing upright and rejoicing in the dawn, and asks it to “free us from evil habits” (*a mala consuetudine liberare*) and lift us up. But *virga* is a pun on the Latin *virgo*—meaning “virgin”—and Hildegard is drawing a connection between the natural world and her vision of the Virgin Mary, a vision of nobility, joy and hope. As we confront our environmental crisis, which is largely caused by our own “evil habits,” I think this prayer can ring true to us. We can marvel at the beauty and nobility of the world, and whether we see a higher power reflected in it or not, we can pray that its example lifts us up.

Our song of Practice is a new choral piece, still unpublished, called “Returning to the Root (Guigen),” which combines singing with the martial art Tai Chi and the health system Qigong (Wushu). Both are Chinese practices that involve meditation, movement, posture and breathing, and both are tied to the philosophy of yin and yang that appears in

Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The piece begins and ends with a musical setting of a Qigong breathing and movement technique called the Six Healing Sounds, and sandwiched between is a beautiful setting of the first stanza of the 16th poem from the Tao Te Ching, which translates as, “Empty your mind of all thoughts. Let your heart be at peace. Watch the turmoil of beings, but contemplate their return.”

I sang “Returning to the Root” in its first performance last summer at the Unitarian Universalist Musicians Network’s annual conference. Our choir was directed by Dr. Adam Con, a teacher of both choral conducting and Tai Chi, who commissioned it from one of his students. Singing it was an incredible experience. The meditative movements and breathing that it calls for heightened my awareness, until both sound and silence felt almost hyper-real. Rehearsing it with our choir has had a similar effect, and I’m excited to share it with the congregation.

Praying can be a practice—it certainly was for the Benedictine nuns that Hildegard wrote for—and practicing can be a prayer, as I’m sure anyone in the choir would tell you after our recent Tai Chi-inspired rehearsals. I hope you get the chance to hear these pieces on December 4, and that they help deepen your own experience of prayer and practice this month. □

Prayer cannot bring
water to a parched field, nor
mend a broken bridge, nor
rebuild a ruined city, but
prayer can water an arid soul,
mend a broken heart and
rebuild a weakened will.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel



Benefit UUCP with Charitable Rollover

Heidi Parmenter

Business Administrator

Dear UUCP Seniors,
I have exciting news to report! The IRA Charitable Rollover is now permanent, which means you can take advantage of this amazing gift opportunity to benefit yourself and UUCP year round!

Individuals over the age of 70.5 are required to make an annual minimum distribution from their traditional IRA accounts. You'll receive an incredible tax break, though, by making a tax-free charitable IRA distribution (also called an IRA charitable rollover) to UUCP. To qualify, you must:

- Be age 70.5 or older at the time the IRA distribution is made to UUCP.
- Make the distribution before December 31, 2016 to qualify for this year.
- Make the distribution directly from the IRA custodian to UUCP. You do this by contacting your IRA custodian and directing them to distribute a specified amount directly to UUCP.

Every night before I go to sleep
I say out loud three things that I am
grateful for, all the significant,
insignificant, extraordinary, ordinary
stuff of my life.

It is a small practice and humble,
and yet, I find I sleep better
holding what lightens and softens my life
ever so briefly at the end of the day.

Carrie Newcomer

Provide your IRA custodian with the following information so they can send a check to UUCP:

- Legal Name: Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix
- Federal Tax ID: 86-0188971
- Address: 4027 East Lincoln Drive, Paradise Valley, AZ 85253

Ask the custodian to put your name in the "memo" line of the check or include a letter stating your name and address. That way we'll know it's from you and can provide you with a charitable tax receipt for your records.

Thank you for considering this special gift that will help UUCP continue to be a "Spiritual Community for Our Time." □

Memorial Garden

*friends whose ashes were interred
in our Memorial Garden
this month in past years
are still remembered*

Jane Louise Baker
Jo Ann Davy
Agnes Hetebrueg Ericson
Mary Louise Grobe
Steven Knight
Robert Sclater
Ann Sclater
Anita Farese Silverthorn
Archie Huffman Walker
Margreta Jakobsen Woods

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at the prospect of what is ahead. What happens when we greet the first moments of the day with dread or worry?

This happens to all of us sometimes, but it is also possible to get into habits of mind that are negative. I have found that once I wake up, if I can take a few moments, often even longer, to greet the day with an intention of gratitude, that I can change that habit of mind and start the day on a stronger foot. By memorizing this poem by heart, it comes to me at times of difficulty and reminds me of the gift of the sun and the earth, reminding me that even in the midst of grief or challenges I am not sure I can bear, that there is still beauty in this life and much for which to be grateful. This contemplative practice—or any one that helps us take a moment to be attentive to nature, to focus on compassion or gratitude—will not change the circumstances of our lives, but it can bring about a change within us and how we approach our circumstances.

One of the biggest challenges Unitarian Universalists may have when it comes to prayer is understanding it only in the most narrow definition of asking some power beyond us to change our circumstances. This is really the last and most desperate form of prayer (and yes, it is one we may all call on sometimes even if we don't believe prayer works that way). But in truth, spiritual traditions around the world offer much greater depth to the variety of prayer and spiritual practice. Silent contemplation, meditative practice, yoga, listening for the still, small voice, taking time to just bring your awareness to one thing (your child, the beauty of a flower, the smell of the desert after a rain). All of these are forms of prayer when we do them with intention and mindfulness.

I know prayer is not a good word for everyone—which is why I chose "Prayer and Practice," hoping one word might work better than the other. My hope is that as we are invited to share the different ways we as UUs think about, experience, and use spiritual disciplines, we will grow to see prayer and practice as much fuller and deeper and varied than any one definition. In doing

so, may we discover practices that can help us build resiliency, compassion and joy in our daily lives. May this be one of the gifts of this month of December. □

You create a path of
your own by looking within yourself
and listening to your soul, cultivating
your own ways of experiencing the
sacred and then practicing it.

Practicing until you make it a song
that sings you.

Sue Monk Kidd

Continued from "The Freedom..." page 1

Within our faith, we work to live out our spirituality every day and encourage the 4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning. Spiritual practices are a skill and task that you can help teach. If you pray, if you meditate, if you journal, whatever your practice may be—please, talk openly about it in front of children. Let them hear how it makes you feel and why you choose to do it. If you don't pray, talk about that too! As they develop their own spiritual practices, knowing the how, where, and when of yours validates their journey and gives them tools for the task.

This past summer, we did an exercise with our high schoolers about spiritual practice. I loved what one of the kids said and share it here with permission:

"Dear Whatever You Are, I haven't figured out that part out yet, but praying makes me feel better and helps me sort out my business."

To think that we at UUCP are sending kids out in the world that "feel better" and have their "business" sorted feels pretty good. May it be so. □



Unicare News

Please lift up in your thoughts those in our community who share their transitions, sorrows, celebrations and wishes—that they may find strength in your love and friendship. For more information, or to get involved, contact Vicki Myers, our UUCP Unicare Coordinator, at unicare@phoenixuu.org.

Healing Wishes & Transitions

- Welcome back to Larry Reed—it is good to see you recovered and have you back with us!
- Let us keep those supporting Standing Rock, ND in our thoughts.

Celebrations

- Congratulations to Michele Morgan & Sam Kirkland on the birth of their granddaughter, Dion Marie!
- Happy 80th birthday to former UUCP minister Rev. John Burciaga (11/5/16).



The Unitarian Universalist Foundation of Phoenix Board invites everyone to the annual

Chalice Keeper Reception

Sunday, January 8, 2017

3:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Smoot & Charlotte Carl-Mitchell's House
Scottsdale, AZ

This a special annual event where we honor members who have let the Congregation know of their plans to leave a legacy gift and where we welcome those who are interested in learning more about legacy giving. Planned or legacy giving allows us to ensure support for our most cherished values well into the future. By making a future gift to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix through the Unitarian Universalist Foundation of Phoenix, you can keep alive your dreams of expanding love, of compassion, of growing justice in the world.

At the same time, you help keep our chalice burning for future generations, sustaining our free faith of hope, reason, service and love. Legacy gifts help the Congregation to establish funds that allow for long-term programs and projects that often cannot be sustained by annual giving—things like a new lobby, or improvements to the patio. These funds help the Congregation dream big and plan into the future.

Chalice Keepers is the legacy giving society organized by the Foundation. All who have signed a letter of intent to let the Congregation know of their plans to leave a legacy gift are members of the society. Membership allows the Foundation to recognize your generosity, and to provide special events for members.

RSVP to Heidi Parmenter at 602-840-8400 or heidiparmenter@phoenixuu.org . □

December Worship Theme: **Prayer & Practice**

Please note service time and schedule changes in December

December 4: The Gift of Prayer & Practice

One Service Only – 9:30 AM

Followed by the UUCP Annual Auction at 11:00 am!

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

In this season of gift giving, let's take a fresh look at prayer and spiritual practice to uncover the many gifts that are possible with sustaining a regular spiritual practice in one's life.

December 11: Our Brains' Response to Prayer & Meditation

Two Services: 9:30 AM & 11:15 AM

Service Leader: Emrys Staton

A look at some current research on how prayer, meditation, and other spiritual practices impact our minds.

December 18: Practicing Stillness & the Beauty of Solstice

Two Services: 9:30 AM & 11:15 AM

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Solstice literally means "standing still sun." In this darkest time of year, we will honor the complex emotions that can come with the holidays and invite a meditative service of sharing and silence.

Share the Plate Sunday: This morning's offering will benefit AZ Center for Neighborhood Leadership, <http://azcni.org>.

December 24: Multigenerational Christmas Eve Services

Spend your Christmas Eve with music, community and candlelight at UUCP. Both services will be filled with singing and the lighting of candles. The early service includes a children's play and the later service will include the congregation choir. Everyone is invited to bring cookies to share in fellowship from 6:30-7:30 PM. Child Dedications will be offered at both services. Please contact Rev. Susan if you would like to have your child or children dedicated.

5:30 PM *Family Service – A Non-Traditional telling of the Nativity*

Service Leaders: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, Emrys Staton, Katie Resendiz

6:30-7:30 PM Cookies and Cider Fellowship Hour – *please bring cookies to share*

7:30 PM *The Meaning and Practice of Christmas – A More Traditional service of carols, readings and reflections on the contemporary meaning of Christmas*

Service Leaders: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, Emrys Staton, Benjie Messer

December 25: Christmas Morning Hymn Sing & Community Breakfast

One Service Only – 10:30 AM

Service Leaders: Emrys Staton & Benjie Messer

Service will be followed by a potluck Christmas Brunch. All are welcome; please bring a dish to share.

January 1: Welcoming the New Year

One Service Only – 10:30 AM

Service Leader: Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Through story, song and ritual, we will welcome the New Year, marking the hopes and intentions that we bring for this next year.

Special December Calendar Announcements

Sunday, December 4 – One Service at 9:30 AM followed by Service Auction at 11:00 AM

Saturday, December 24 – Evening Services at 5:30 PM and 7:30 PM

Sunday, December 25 – One Service at 10:30 AM with Christmas Potluck Brunch after service

Sunday, January 1 – One Service at 10:30 AM – a Ritual Welcoming the New Year

UUCP Office closed Saturday, December 24 – Sunday, January 1

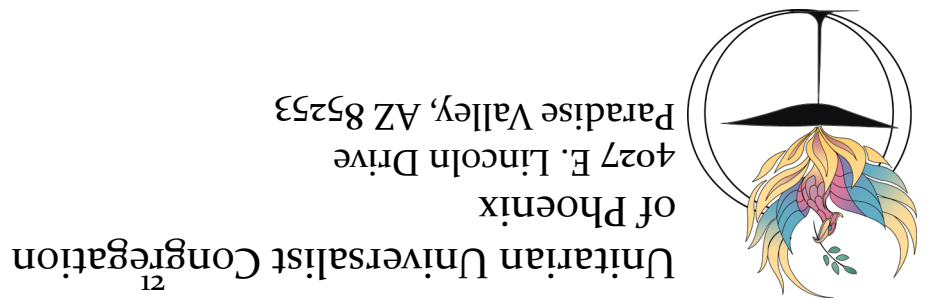
Child Dedications

One of the recent traditions at UUCP is to offer Child Dedications during the Christmas Eve services (5:30 PM and 7:30 PM on December 24th).

At this time of year, when we are aware of the turning of the seasons, we are reminded of the importance of honoring the ceremonies of passage. In Unitarian Universalist congregations, child dedications are an opportunity for parents to bring their young children to be blessed and welcomed into community. It is also a way for the community to offer their blessings and support to the parents and children. The child dedication is not a ritual to remove sin, nor to provide special privilege, but a recognition of the importance of honoring the young lives in our community and their families. It is also a time when parents and the congregation as a whole are asked to dedicate ourselves to the fullest unfolding of the growth of the child and to nurturing a community of peace in which all children may grow.

We use water and a rose for the dedication. Water is a symbol of nature's bounty and our own connection to nature as part of the human family. The rose is a symbol of the unique gift that each child is and our hope that each child will, throughout their lives, unfold and blossom just as the rose.

If you are interested in having your child or children dedicated at one of the Christmas Eve services, or have any questions, please email Rev. Susan at susanfrederickgray@phoenixuu.org or call the office at 480-414-2790 ext 203.



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