

BELL STREET COLUMNS

NEWSLETTER FOR THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF BELL STREET CHAPEL



WORSHIP SERVICE SCHEDULE

SERVICES BEGIN AT 10 AM

TODDLER CARE AND SUNDAY SCHOOL AVAILABLE

5 | DECEMBER

STAYING PUT: LIVING DEEPLY WHERE YOU ARE

Rev. Mary Margaret Earl

Walt Whitman sang of the open road, Jack Kerouac romanticized likewise. How can we live large, live courageously, live wide awake while standing in one place?

12 | DECEMBER

MANY PATHS, ONE HOPE

Rev. José Ballester

What is it that keeps a Unitarian Universalist congregation together when there is not a central creed?

19 | DECEMBER

HOLIDAYS AND HOLY DAYS

Rev. José Ballester

This is the time of the year with perhaps the greatest confluence of celebrations.

24 | DECEMBER

7 P.M.

AND SO THEY COME

Rev. José Ballester

Our Christmas Eve Candlelight Service with traditional carols and stories.

26 | DECEMBER

STUFF

Audrey Greene

Did you get a lot of stuff for the holidays? Was it good stuff? Did you return stuff? Do you have all the stuff you need? Along with George Carlin and Buddha, let's talk about stuff.

MINISTERIAL SEARCH

The ministerial search committee has been busy completing the Congregational Record and this has been sent out for potential candidates to peruse. We are now setting out to put together a Congregational Packet in the form of a website accessible only to potential ministerial candidates. This is, simply put, information about every aspect of Bell Street we can muster – Rhode Island, Providence and Bell Street history; financials; committee descriptions; goings on; congregational demographics and characteristics, etc. Somehow we are to adequately describe this congregation so dear to so many, and convey a sense of its quirkiness as well. So far, at times, this is daunting but it has been a lot of fun as well.



We hope to tackle this in a number of ways: through written information, but also through trying to capture the essence of Bell Street Chapel orally as well as visually. We plan on including interviews with a few folks to serve as background to the written information on the website, as well as music from our wonderful choir. And, of course, we intend to include many photos throughout the packet. This is where you come in: if you have photos of Bell Street Chapel, its members, events, etc. that you are willing to share, **please** email/give/send them to Carol Wiseman (email: 3wisemans@gmail.com). Also, if you did not do so already after service on Nov. 7 during coffee hour, and would like to write a couple of sentences about what Bell Street means to you and/or why it is so special, you may email that to me at wendysch@verizon.net. We want as many voices heard as possible--**you** are the essence of Bell Street. Your contribution is truly appreciated!

*On behalf of the Ministerial Search Committee,
Wendy Schwartz*

Holiday Party
Dec. 4, 6 p.m.

The annual Bell Street Chapel Holiday Potluck Party (again? so soon?) will be held on Saturday, Dec. 4, at 6 p.m. at the home of Carol Crowley (see or e-mail Carol at ccrowley8@cox.net) for directions). The holiday party is a wonderful community-building event with good food, the singing of holiday songs, and just being together outside of church. The more the merrier. Partners, family, friends, and, of course, children are invited.

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MINISTERS

REV. JOSÉ BALLESTER
INTERIM MINISTER

*Rev. Ballester's office hours are by appointment.
 To schedule an appointment contact him at
 joseballester@mac.com or (781) 264-3511*

REV. MARY MARGARET EARL
COMMUNITY MINISTER

REV. BEN HALL
COMMUNITY MINISTER

CHURCH STAFF

HEIDI GILKENSON, OFFICE MANAGER
*Office Hours:
 Monday, Friday – 7 a.m. to 11
 Tuesday and Thursday – by appointment only*

IRINA TCHANTCEVA, MUSIC DIRECTOR
NED FOSTER, SEXTON
IRENE ZABEK, CHILDCARE MANAGER

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WORSHIP, RAY PERREAULT

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COPY EDITOR, ELLEN SMITH
ORIGINAL DESIGN BY TERRY BARBOUNIS

ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION RETURNS

Begin the New Year with other Bell Streeters, learning, sharing and enriching your faith journey. In January 2011 we will begin a new Tapestry of Faith Program for adults in our congregation. These programs have been designed by the Unitarian Universalist Association to offer participants the space, time and community to explore their Unitarian Universalist spirituality. While there are lots of wonderful choices for programs I have narrowed down our choices to either "Spirit of Life" or "Spirit in Practice."

"Spirit of Life" focuses on a different aspect of spiritual life, framed by the lyrics of Carolyn McDade's song, "Spirit of Life"-as in please turn to #123 in your hymnal.

"Spirit in Practice" was created to help Unitarian Universalists develop regular disciplines or practices of the spirit - practices that help us connect with the sacred ground of our beings, however we understand it.

Is there something in either program that speaks to you? You can find out more by accessing the Tapestry of Faith section of UUA.org. The program we choose will likely be run on a weeknight for about 6 to 8 weeks and will meet in the Parish House. I look forward to your feedback and questions about these programs. Please contact me via my email-pegboyle@hotmail.com.

*In Spirit,
 Peg Boyle*

BOOK CLUB: DEATH AND LOSS WEDNESDAY, DEC. 15, 6:30 P.M.

Death and loss, that of loved ones and ultimately that of ourselves, are part of the human experience. As in other painful situations, there is much to be gained from the wisdom and insight of others who have suffered loss and thought deeply about it. Many brilliant, articulate authors through the centuries have shared the details of their experiences in poetry, novels, memoirs and other works of nonfiction.

All are invited to attend Bell Street Chapel's Book Club. It is NOT necessary to make a commitment to come every time. You can pick and choose the books you would like to read and discuss. Participants find that, far from being depressing, reading these wonderful works teaches us a lot about how we want to live – mindfully, joyfully, and involved.

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, Dec. 15, at 6:30 p.m. in the Parish House. We will discuss the modern novel "A Reckoning" by May Sarton. It chronicles the last year in the life of a terminally ill woman who is determined to live and die as she chooses. For more information, please call or e-mail Carol Crowley at ccrowley8@cox.net.

CONGREGATIONAL AFFAIRS



ON THE ROAD TO PROVIDENCE: EXPECTATIONS

It is that time of year. The Halloween candy is all gone; the Thanksgiving leftovers are still here; the decorations are all up in the stores; the radio stations have begun to play holiday music while the television stations are cranking up the seasonal reruns. That can only mean one thing: Unitarian Universalist congregations are searching for their next pastors. Soon they will be making their wish lists, exchanging packets with ministerial candidates, checking references to see who's naughty or nice, all in the search for the "perfect minister." According to ministerial lore:

"The perfect minister is a young energetic person, but with a maturity beyond his years. Her sermons are thoroughly researched, intellectually satisfying, down to earth and in touch with her congregants' feelings. He condemns injustice but never hurts anyone's feelings. Writes sermons all day long and takes care of maintenance chores on her lunch break. He makes \$100 a week, wears good clothes, maintains an extensive library, is single with a nice family, drives a good car and tithes 10 percent to the church. And Habitat for Humanity.

He is 26 years old and draws on 30 years of ministerial experience with glowing recommendations. She is a humanistic theist, with Buddhist and pagan influences most of the week, reverting to Christian and Hindu practices on weekends. On his day off, he meets with every committee and publishes the newsletter. Always taking a stand, but never confrontational, she has a burning desire to work with the teenagers and spends all her time with the older folks. He smiles all the time with a straight face because his sense of humor keeps him seriously dedicated to church work. She makes 15 pastoral calls a day—after hospital visits—spends all of her time in denominational work, meets daily with the interfaith ministers group and is never out of the office."

This list has existed for years, with the only change being the addition: she/he reads every 40-page article received on e-mail on 10 topics by different people. It is not that we are pessimistic, we are realistic. Given all the expectations and all the demands of modern ministry what is the best the Religious Society of Bell Street Chapel can expect in its ministerial search? Your next pastor will be a person who truly wants to be with you because they like the congregation and not because of location. They will work hard and be rather pensive at first, as they and the congregation learn to be together. They will deliver at least two or four fantastic sermons; two to three awful sermons and the rest of their sermons will be safe and non-controversial. They will exceed all expectations in one aspect to the great pride of the congregational leadership and they will fail spectacularly in a crucial situation at the most inopportune time.

In other words the Search Committee will find and the congregation will call a minister who is human with many gifts and some faults. And he or she will accept the call from a congregation with many gifts and some faults. When you and your next pastor do something worthy of celebration, no matter how small, celebrate. When you and/or your next pastor make a mistake that turns into a spectacular failure, forgive each other.

Now has the U.S. Postal Service stopped delivering letters? Or is it that all the ads, circulars and catalogs bulging my mailbox have kidnapped my letters and are holding them for ransom? Happy Holidays.

*~Rev. José Ballester
Interim Minister*

CONGREGATIONAL AFFAIRS

PSJ NEWS

The mission of the Peace and Social Justice Committee is to create opportunities for members and friends of the congregation to practice our Unitarian Universalist principles through activities that promote peace and understanding, as well as social, economic, and environmental justice in our community and the world.

The PSJ Committee will be organizing two holiday events. This year our efforts will focus on adolescents and youth, who often are forgotten when generous citizens buy gifts for needy children. There will be a cookie exchange for Youth Pride and a collection of gifts for the teenagers in the care of Department of Children Youth and Families. The adolescents in the care of DCYF are often difficult to place in foster homes and subsequently have unstable lives with insufficient love and respect for their successful development. Stay tuned to see how you can help.

And, of course, we will be making lunches for the clients of Crossroads Rhode Island on Sunday, Dec. 5, after the service. We are very grateful to A.T. Siravo Wholesale Produce for agreeing to donate a case (at least 100 pieces) of fruit each month for inclusion in the lunches. Being able to include fruit helps us make the lunches more nutritious. And thanks also to PSJ member Mike Durette for volunteering to pick up the fruit each month. We count on YOU to donate the juice boxes, cookies, BIG cans of tuna, lunch bags, and plastic sandwich bags. If you pick up one item each time you shop, it will help us so much! We only have a limited budget for purchasing these items, so we really need your donations. Bring them to

church any time and leave them in the kitchen.

As we enter into another long, cold, and dark winter, the PSJ Committee will seek ways to cooperate with other nonprofit organizations lobbying to prevent utility shut-offs and to forgive utility bill debts of our citizens struggling at or near the poverty level.

Books Through Bars, our prison literacy program, is thriving, thanks to the tireless efforts of our director, Carol Wiseman, and devoted volunteers, Ray Grenier, Sid Rodrigues and Clara Hardy. We have a few new regular volunteers and many others who come occasionally. Our program will be featured in an article about nonprofits in our state in Rhode Island Monthly magazine. Hopefully, this publicity will garner more volunteers and donations. Please consider helping us out on Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m. in the Parish House. This is a very rewarding volunteer activity, as the prisoners often write back to us and send us their art and poetry. We really feel that we are making a difference in someone's life.

The PSJ Committee would love some new members. Contact Carol Crowley (ccrowley8@cox.net) or come to one of our meetings if you want to know more about the important work we do.

*~Carol Crowley
PSJ Chairperson*

SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION

As many of us are aware, there has been a recent increase in suicides by young gay men across the country. On Oct. 17 a candlelight vigil was held at the Rhode Island State House. I was proud to speak at this vigil on behalf of Bell Street Chapel. Below are my remarks.

My name is Richard Corso. I am a gay man and a member of Bell Street Chapel in Providence. As a Unitarian Universalist congregation, Bell Street Chapel affirms and promotes the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We believe that every person—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or straight—is valuable and has a place in this world. We believe that bullying and harassment of anyone is morally wrong. It is a tragedy that LGBT individuals continue to live in a society where so many feel alone and worthless, and see no alternative but to take their own lives.

Bell Street Chapel has been a Welcoming Congregation since 2004, and we are proud to publicly and successfully welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people into our congregation. We believe that it is our religious duty, as people of faith, to join in the fight to end the oppression of LGBT people. No one should have to endure the pain caused by hatred, bullying and harassment that LGBT people endure on a regular basis. Some religious groups preach hatred and condemnation. I am here to tell you that there are people of faith who welcome, value and support LGBT people, and who love us just as we are. Let us take a moment to honor those who have suffered and taken their own lives because of homophobia. And then, let us all work together to make the world a better place by ending homophobia and harassment of LGBT individuals.

~Richard Corso

CONGREGATIONAL AFFAIRS



FROM THE BOARD

Here at Bell Street, where we regularly set – and accomplish – goals that belie the small size of our congregation, sometimes the little things fall to the wayside. Sometimes that's actually good, because getting hung up on little stuff that doesn't matter can weigh a small group down and be an impediment to accomplishing the things that do. Other times it's bad. But many times, it's something in between – maybe not a top priority in the short term, but after a long time, it adds up.

Our Parish House seems to have settled into that last category. Several years ago (four? I can't remember anymore.) our church was in a dire financial state and we were forced to start doing our own housekeeping. For a while, people rallied to help out because it was a way to get the church back on its feet. But nobody comes to church to clean the toilets, and after several years with no end in sight, interest naturally faded among our congregation to the point where we have been lucky to get the basics done in the chapel, and have pretty much never had enough people to send someone over to the Parish House to clean there.

This is no one's fault; we're a small group that does a lot, and there's only so much energy to go around. But it's getting to that critical stage where the dust bunnies are advanced enough to organize, and they might take ownership of the building via adverse possession laws.

The day this newsletter is distributed, Nov. 28, the board will sponsor an afternoon of sprucing up at the Parish House after coffee hour. This event will include ordinary cleaning and decluttering, and most likely some painting for those who are interested in it.

Some work has already been done: Kate Gillis did some cleaning recently, and aging, peeling wallpaper has already been removed from the

BOARD BITS

At the Nov. 9 meeting: The Board is looking at the staff and committee structures of other small churches for ideas about how we can make the best use of our limited human resources here at Bell Street. We're just looking at this point, but we're wondering if having fewer committees might be more effective, and also interested in finding out whether other churches have different staff structures that are a better use of resources.

The Board is concerned about the dirty and tired look of the Parish House. Kate Gillis did some cleaning there recently, but there is no regular plan for keeping it clean. We are particularly concerned because it will be uninviting to ministerial candidates who will soon be visiting, but we are also concerned about the message it sends to everyone who uses the building. Peg Boyle has some paint she would like to donate for use in the committee room, and has scheduled some time to peel the wallpaper off and ready that room for painting. Meredyth Waterman will organize a day for cleaning, organizing and painting there on Nov. 28, after service.

Now that we have some money coming in from parking lot rentals again, we would like to consider reinstating some cleaning services. It might be infrequent – like quarterly – but it would be an improvement.

The Board also voted to officially allocate \$5,000 from the handicapped access fund to install the stairlift to Eddy Hall to at least make coffee hour accessible in the near future. While the type of lift possible for the sanctuary is still up in the air, we feel there's no reason to wait to make Eddy Hall accessible.

conference room and the hallway. We hope to have the newly bare walls ready for a fresh coat of paint on that day. If enough people pitch in, we should be able to make a huge difference in the cleanliness and appearance of a building that gets a lot of use by us, our staff, and some of the partner organizations we support. Please stay and help if you can. If you have questions or would like to sign up, please contact me at MeredythW@aol.com or (401) 451-2322.

It is particularly important that we give our Parish House some attention now, because soon ministerial candidates will be dropping by (unannounced!) to check us out. It won't be very inviting if they are greeted with dust and obvious neglect when they walk into the building where they'd be working. We should also consider that the Parish House is home to our current staff.

But even more importantly, we should do this for ourselves. Most of our committees meet in the Parish House, and we all deserve a better environment there. All church work is sacred work, and deserves a sacred space.

The Board is now discussing the possibility of hiring a cleaning service for at least some periodic cleaning, due to new income from parking lot rentals, but it remains likely that we will still need to do some cleaning – both in the chapel and the Parish House – ourselves, and, of course, all who use the buildings should be careful to clean up after ourselves. Our church buildings are our home, and we should strive to keep them as clean, comfortable and cozy as possible, for our own sake as well as all the others who use them.

*~Meredyth Waterman
Past President*

CONGREGATIONAL AFFAIRS

AMONG US

In this column we celebrate milestones and other life events, request healing thoughts for those in need, and remember departed loved ones. If you or anyone you know is in need of assistance or support, please notify one of the Membership and Caring Committee co-chairpersons, Meredyth Waterman at MeredythW@aol.com or (401) 451- 2322 and Chad Welch at chadwelch@verizon.net. Please contact Ellen Lenox Smith at ellen.smith2@gmail.com if you have any news to include in Among Us.

Our treasurer Jim Gillis is now out of the hospital and the rehabilitation center and is home recovering after his heart surgery. He's working on getting his strength back, and he's his usual cheery self! He will have several more weeks of recovery before he's able to drive again. Best wishes for a relaxing and refreshing recovery to him!

A fond farewell goes out to Evan Wilson, who has moved to Boston for an exciting new job. Evan came to us when he moved to Providence a couple of years ago and has been both a friendly presence on Sunday mornings and an enthusiastic member of our Peace and Social Justice Committee. One of the few among us who was lucky enough to be raised as a Unitarian Universalist, he fortunately has a U.U. congregation near his new home. We wish him success in his new home, position and congregation. We'll miss you, Evan!

A memorial service was held at Bell Street Chapel Nov. 14 for former BSC member David Greenside, who passed away in October. The service was attended by about 100 people who came from as far away as England and was a beautiful and moving tribute to a beloved man who profoundly affected many lives.

A very happy birthday to David Gleicher, whose big day is celebrated Dec. 13, and to Aaron Campanile-Boyle, who celebrates on Dec. 30. The son of our dear Peg Boyle, Aaron now attends First Unitarian, but her nonetheless came and helped us strip wallpaper out of the Parish House last month. Thanks, Aaron!

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

The deadline for the next issue of *Bells Street Chapel Columns* is Dec. 12 at 8 p.m. Please submit your articles as a regular Word attachment (.doc, not .docx or anything else, please.) to Meredyth Waterman at MeredythW@aol.com. Our newsletter is one of the most effective means of communicating with our members and friends, so don't miss out on this opportunity. And remember — it's not just for announcing events. If you have information like what your committee is working on, or other church-related information of interest that you'd like to share with the Bell Street community, please send it in.

~Meredyth Waterman
Editor

GUEST AT YOUR TABLE

Each year at this time, friends and families in our congregation participate in Guest at Your Table — a Unitarian Universalist tradition.

By bringing home a beautiful Guest at Your Table box, families and individuals learn about how the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee puts our shared principles into action in the United States and around the world. Through a potent combination of advocacy, education, and partnerships with grassroots organizations, U.U.S.C. promotes [economic rights](#), advances [environmental justice](#), defends [civil liberties](#), and preserves the rights of people in times of [humanitarian crisis](#).

In each household, the Guest at Your Table box is placed in a prominent spot, often at the family meal table. When family and friends gather to enjoy their blessings, they can reflect on the contributions of their "guests" to the movement for universal human rights — and share generously.

Sharing our blessings through Guest at Your Table ensures that U.U.S.C.'s human-rights work continues. Please consider making a contribution that meets membership levels. Since U.U.S.C. is an independent organization that receives no funding from the Unitarian Universalist Association or the U.S. government, U.U.S.C. members are vitally important.

If you would prefer not to bring home a box, you can take a donation envelope or support U.U.S.C. directly online at www.uusc.org. We opened our Guest at Your Table program on Nov. 21 and the boxes can be returned on Christmas Eve or Martin Luther King Sunday. Please convert cash into a check made out to the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

~Kate Gillis

SHARE THE PLATE

The nonprofit organization with which we will share the undesignated cash offering during the month of December is McAuley Ministries, whose mission it is to provide the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, health services, emotional support and guidance to the most vulnerable in our community. The core values of McAuley Ministries are hospitality, compassion, and dignity. We have a very special relationship with this nonprofit organization because our community minister, Rev. Mary Margaret Earl, is the administrator of McAuley House.



DECEMBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

PH=PARISH HOUSE | S=SANTUARY | EH=EDDY HALL | MPL=MEET IN PARKING LOT | OS=OFFSITE | RE=RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ROOM

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2 7 pm Outside group (PH)	3	4 8 am meditation (EH) 6 pm Holiday Party (OS)
5 9 am Choir (S) 10 am Service (S) 11 am coffee hour 11:30 Crossroads lunchmaking 1 pm Books Through Bars	6 6 pm Empire Review (S)	7 7 pm PEAC (EH) 6:30 pm Worship Committee (PH)	8 6 pm Order of Service deadline	9 7 pm Membership (PH)	10 6:30 Movie Night (EH)	11 8 am meditation (EH)
12 9 am Choir (S) 10 am Service (S) 1 pm Books Through Bars	13 6 pm Empire Review (S) 6:30 pm Finance Committee (PH)	14 6:45 pm Governing Board (PH) 7 pm PEAC (S)	15 6 pm Order of Service deadline 6:30 Book Club (PH)	16 7 pm Gay Bingo (OS)	17 7 pm Drumming Circle (EH)	18 8 am meditation (EH)
19 9 am Choir (S) 10 am Service (S) 11 am coffee hour 11:30 Discussion Group (PH)	20 6 pm Empire Review (S)	21 7:15 pm House Committee (PH) 7 pm PEAC (EH)	22 6 pm Order of Service deadline	23	CHRISTMAS EVE 24 7 pm Christmas Eve Service (S)	CHRISTMAS 25
26 9 am newsletter folding (EH) 9 am Choir (S) 10 am Service (S) 1 pm Books t. Bars	27 6 pm Empire Review (S)	28 6 pm Peace & Social Justice (PH) 7 pm PEAC (EH)	29 6 pm Order of Service deadline 7 pm RIIF Best of the Fest (EH)	30	NEW YEAR'S EVE 31	

MOVIE NIGHT

FRIDAY, DEC. 10, 6:30 P.M. EDDY HALL

For the past several years Bell Street Chapel has sponsored a monthly movie night, at which we view and discuss films with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or gender-identity themes. In this way we live out our commitment as a Unitarian Universalist Association Welcoming Congregation; we also have a good time together and share a delicious potluck dinner. Over the past few years we have seen some spectacular films – dramas, comedies, musicals, and documentaries – all mainstream films, many of which have won awards. We show these films on a large screen donated by the Rhode Island International Film Festival, for which Bell Street Chapel is a venue.

The movie for this month, which our licensing agreement prohibits our citing by title, is an award-winning 2005 film about a loving, but conservative, French Canadian family with five sons, one of them a closeted gay. The film chronicles the life journey of the gay character that ultimately enables him to accept himself and his father to love him for whom he truly is. The film also has a holiday theme, as the main character was born on Christmas Day (such symbolism!).

So bring some food or beverage to share and join us at Movie Night!



The Religious Society of Bell Street Chapel

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**“Love is the spirit of our church
and service is its law.**

**This is our great covenant:
To dwell together in peace,
To seek the truth in love,
And to help one another.”**

