

The Forum



A Southwest Unitarian Universalist Publication

www.swuu.org

January 1, 2022

Sunday Services

10:30 AM

6320 Royalton Road, North Royalton
Limited In-Person and On Zoom!



January 2

Fire Communion

All are welcome to celebrate the first Worship Service of the New Year! This Sunday morning we will be holding our annual Fire Communion, where we will be wishing a fond farewell to 2021 and joyfully setting our intentions for 2022. Join us to share in embracing the New Year!

-Led by Rev. Megan Mathieson

Worship Associate: Rae Brewer

Focus Collection: Greater Cleveland Habitat for Humanity

January 9

Saved From Perfection

According to UU Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen, because as humans we are inherently imperfect, the good news is that we are "saved from perfection." This morning we celebrate our imperfection and set intentions around imperfect love, imperfect communication, and building our imperfect community.

-Led by Rev. Megan Mathieson

Worship Associate: Mike Gold

January 16

I See New Things

Please visit our website later in the month for details of this service.

Please Participate in Our State of the Church Congregational Meeting After the Service

-Led by Rev. Gwen Thomas

Worship Associate: Ken Ellis

January 23

TBA

Please visit our website later in the month for details of this service.

-Led by Rev. Samuel Prince

Worship Associate: Adrienne Ellis

January 30

Joy & Justice

As we approach Black History Month, we explore the ways that Joy is inherent in and inextricable from the work of social justice.

-Led by Rev. Megan Mathieson

Worship Associate: Dan Paxson

The Forum

Message from your Minister

Living With Intention

My dear SWUU family,

Happy New Year! As we turn toward 2022 with hope and a handful of trepidation, we enter into a time of setting intentions. The last few years have emotionally wrung us out and left many of us too exhausted to set New Year's resolutions. However, intentions are softer and kinder. Resolutions can feel judgmental, bringing to mind stepping on a scale or feeling guilt and shame, while intentions are bound up with hope and joy. You cannot fail an intention.

Let's start this year with intentions around compassion and care, toward ourselves first, and then letting that compassion radiate out from our hearts into the community around us.

If you are feeling uninspired on the subject of intention-setting, Jack Kornfield offers these wise words for New Year's Day:

“Renewal is happening. Take quiet time to listen to your heart, to meditate and to rest amidst the great turnings. Feel the renewal of spring that can be born in you. Align yourself with goodness. Let yourself blossom like a lotus or whatever unique flower you are, shining in the world, spreading your seeds of love amidst it all.”

I love that he assumes that you already are a unique flower. It is not a question, it is a statement: “Let yourself blossom like a lotus or whatever unique flower you are.” You are a flower; you are a creature of unique joy and beauty. Your blossoming sends seeds of love to all of us. We all benefit from your blossoming.

So in 2022, let's set the intention to blossom! And as always, please do not hesitate to email me at minister@swuu.org, even just to say hello!

With so much love,
Rev. Meg

The Forum

Focus Collection for January: Greater Cleveland Habitat for Humanity by Nancy Peltola, Social Justice Committee

The January Focus Collection will once again benefit Greater Cleveland Habitat for Humanity. Habitat is a non-profit organization that builds and renovates homes in partnership with qualified families who invest hundreds of sweat equity hours before they move into their homes. The goal is to create hope by building homes, strengthening neighborhoods, and rejuvenating communities. This is consistent with several UU Principles involving dignity, compassion, and justice for all.

COVID-19 impacted the work done by Habitat over the past two years, but even so, the families and workers showed their resiliency with the goal of completing 23 homes by the end of 2021. Statistics show that crime has declined significantly in Habitat's focus neighborhoods because home ownership changes neighborhoods. These accomplishments result from a partnership of volunteers, employees, families, and private/public donors. Re-Store donors and shoppers also help transform communities. To learn more, please visit www.clevelandhabitat.org. Checks can be made out to SWUU and mailed directly to the church with Habitat written on the memo line. Or donate via Vanco. One check will then be presented to Habitat of Greater Cleveland. Your generosity and kindness allows families to have a safe place to shelter, to teach their children, and to build stronger futures. Thank you!

December is the Season of Generosity and Giving by Lydia Avery, Treasurer

Traditionally, many people make an end of year donation to their favorite charities or nonprofits as part of their holiday gift giving. I'm hoping you'll choose to include SWUU where your donation could help us meet a challenge. We received an anonymous Holiday Gift Challenge from one of our members who will match gifts up to \$1,000. We have already received over \$750.00 toward this challenge. Maybe you could be the one to put us over the top!

To be part of this challenge, please choose "Holiday Gift" on Vanco or write it on your check. What a very generous offer! You may donate via [Vanco](#), or by sending a check to the church (6320 Royalton Road, North Royalton, Ohio 44133).

Thank you to everyone who supports SWUU! I'll be sure to keep you posted on the results! As always, I appreciate your generosity!

Join Us for Some Intergenerational Frosty Fellowship! by Carolyn Stevens, Director of Religious Exploration

Come one, come all for some snowperson building at church on January 22 at 2 p.m. We will meet on church grounds and brave the cold for some frosty fellowship. Snow or no snow, we will construct some new friends. This is open to EVERYONE, so come play! Any questions, please contact me.

The Forum



Would you like to submit something to The Forum?

- ◆ Write as if the reader is new to SWUU
- ◆ Include first and last names, and area codes
- ◆ Include a contact person, phone number, and email if possible
- ◆ Include the city in which the event is located
- ◆ Avoid or explain insider terms and abbreviations
- ◆ Explain Who, What, Where, and When (How and Why are often helpful as well.)
- ◆ Encourage volunteering and participation gently.

Submission guidelines apply to articles and Order of Service announcements. Order of Service announcements may be sent to office@swuu.org by Thursday morning of each week.

Articles are edited minimally, only to ensure that these guidelines are met.

The Forum is published on the 1st day of each month
Submissions should be sent to forum@swuu.org by the dates listed in the calendar of each issue.

The Board of Trustees meets once per month. Check the calendar on our website for the specific date. Everyone is welcome to attend. Minutes from the meetings will be available for members upon request to the Board Secretary.

SWUU on the Web

For general information about SWUU, services, sermons, committees and the most up-to-date calendar of events, visit our website at:

www.swuu.org

Get Connected!

If you would like to receive The Forum via email, or if you would like to join a newsgroup focused on issues of importance to SWUU, or if you would like to receive our weekly newsblast, e-mail connect@swuu.org and tell us which you want.

Sermons

If you would like to receive sermons via email or by mail, contact office@swuu.org

Board Minutes

If you would like to receive the Board Minutes via email, contact office@swuu.org, and put "Board Minutes" in the subject line

Editorial Team

Dan Paxson
Susan Paxson

The Forum

January Congregational Meeting

by Dodi Lettus, Board President

At our December 14 SWUU Board meeting, we voted to hold a **Congregational meeting on Sunday, January 16, directly after the Worship Service.**

We will have a short business meeting to update the Congregation about Board activities, but the bulk of the meeting will be devoted to talk about the Eighth Principle by members of the Anti-Racism Task Force. We hope to have breakout sessions for discussion to see what questions still remain on this subject. We would like to see the question of adopting the Eighth Principle be put up for a vote at our Annual Congregational meeting in June.

At this time we are not sure if the meeting will be in-person, on Zoom, or a hybrid meeting. There may be technical issues that must be worked out with the ZUUM team, and of course we need to see what is going on with Covid in January.

As I am sure you are aware, many experts are predicting a surge in Covid cases this winter, however it is hoped that the available vaccines plus booster will provide significant protection against the new Omicron variant. I would strongly encourage everyone to consider getting a booster vaccine at your earliest opportunity if you have not already done so.

Please watch our SWUU email blasts for more information.

The Small Things Matter

by Eleanor Davis

My mother was always my best friend, my biggest supporter, and the pillar that helped me through the toughest parts of life. She was caring, wise, resilient, genuine, and family meant the world to her. I treasure the years I had with her greatly.

On January 19th, 2021, my mother, Sara Davis, passed away after a hard fought battle against COVID-19. While her sudden death was unquestionably a tragedy, the care, acts of kindness, and generosity my father and I were shown has not only mitigated the pain in our journey with grief; it has also enhanced my beliefs and views on the kindness of humanity. Small acts of kindness do matter; each one is a drop in the bucket.

I sparingly use the word tragedy, as it is a word that carries an immense weight, however it is the only word I can use to describe both the worldwide pandemic that COVID-19 brought and the end to my mother's life. My family followed protocols and took all precautions we could. From masks, to having my father undress his work clothes in the garage, to canceling all visits with family; we took it very seriously.

Continued on page 6

The Forum

Continued from page 5

Unfortunately, against all odds, my mother contracted COVID-19 on the 6th of December, 2020. Before she even began having symptoms, the likelihood is that both my father and I had caught it from her. Just two days after her first symptoms arose, my father also fell ill. Then, after three more days, I did as well. It started out with a cough, fever, and aches. Shortly after, chills, nausea, and loss of taste arose. As the week carried on, she began to feel worse and worse. On the 14th, her pulse oximeter reading dipped below 90% and we drove her to the hospital in the dark of night. This would be the last time I ever saw her in person while she was conscious. I will never forget the hug we shared that night. By this time we had already received a couple of heartwarming gifts and cards from our loved ones. It started with homemade matzo ball soup from my father's coworker, a simple, yet healing gift. I can only wish that we were able to taste it, but it was highly appreciated nonetheless. I also worried about how I would be able to pick up my medication from the pharmacy, as I was quarantining. However, only minutes after sending out a request to our church community, I had received multiple offers to pick-up and deliver them.

Once word spread of my mother's hospitalization, my uncle, father, and I took it upon ourselves to create a blog to update people on my mother's condition, as there were so many people asking for updates that we couldn't keep up. We continued to update the blog with daily reports and under every post, there were caring comments. I hadn't expected for the blog to be spread to and shared with so many people. This is also when cards started to appear in our mailbox at a higher rate. We strung them up in the kitchen window with our usual holiday themed card hanger, it brightened up the room nicely and brought a smile to my face whenever I walked into the room. We also started to receive some more homemade meals here and there, as people expected my father and I to be quite exhausted and less competent without my mother there. I admittedly can't deny their assumptions.

All the contact I had with my mother was by video call and text, and looking back, I'm grateful that technology is advanced enough that it allowed me to do so, as protocols prevented any in-person visiting. She had been on an oxygen mask for the first week at the hospital and it had seemed to help a great amount at first. However, by the 22nd of December, while her condition was seemingly stable, she was having to work harder and harder to breathe. So, at 6pm that evening, she was put on a ventilator with deep sedation. Her last text message to the group chat consisting of myself, my father, and her siblings being "See you next year <3."

As the snow ramped up, so did the generosity. One particularly cold week, the first week of the new year, I bundled myself up to shovel the driveway before my father got home from work. The two of us had finally been declared COVID-19 free for long enough to end quarantine, so he had returned to work to have a bit of normalcy in life and help take his mind off things. I raised the garage door to find a curious scene. A completely clear driveway. I immediately knew it couldn't have been my father who shoveled it as he left for work in the dark hours before the sun rose. Upon closer inspection, there were shovel marks and a single set of boot prints. Someone had anonymously, shoveled our driveway completely by hand, by themselves. I was blown away. They did a far better job than I could have, as I was still fatigued from the events going on. We never did find out who this act of kindness was from. My father and I decided to name them the "Anonymous Angel."

On the 5th of January, my mother appeared well enough to be extubated. She had to work hard to breathe, but my father and I were able to video call with her the evening of the 6th. I may sound like a broken record at this point, saying how I will never forget many things, however, this call specifically has been burned into my memory. I can easily picture her, laying on the bed with a nurse holding up the phone for her, breathing mask. I have never sobbed so instantly before in my life. The three of us spent what felt like both an eternity and yet a single moment, just crying while saying we loved each other. This is among my most treasured memories. She kept her promise. We did see her "next year". Unfortunately less than 12 hours after our beautiful video call, she had to be put back on the ventilator and we wouldn't have the chance to talk to her again.

Continued on page 7

The Forum

Continued from page 6

By this time, my father and I had stopped going to the grocery store completely. We had so many groceries delivered and homemade food given to us, that we had to start freezing it, as it was more than we could hope to eat. I even ended up sending packages filled with gifted cookies to my closest friends at college, hoping to share a bit of the love since I couldn't eat them all myself. Bags filled with groceries, casseroles, soups, cookies, chocolates, pasta, breakfast bakes, gift cards for restaurants, and flowers; these are just a few of the gifts we received during our time of pain. We even received gifts via local cake delivery from my father's friends and relatives in the United Kingdom. The card hanger had become a wall of cards. I began sticking them to the wall; it became somewhat of a mural, framing the windowsill.

On the 15th of January, my uncle, his husband, and my aunt drove down from Boston, to join my father and me in Cleveland. My mother's condition was deteriorating and she was now stuck on a paralytic, with every attempt to wean her off ending in failure. We knew this was the end. Though she was COVID-19 free, her lungs were too fibrosed and recovery wasn't possible. She was now allowed a single visitor, as she was now in critical condition and COVID-19 free. My father and I went back and forth saying each other should visit her, despite us both desperately wanting to see her. The medical team kindly allowed us both to visit, saying that my father could visit without being registered as a visitor because he was considered clinic staff. We both knew that wasn't quite in line with the rules, but were unbelievably grateful. It would have been devastating if only one of us could visit her. We spent hours each day just sitting by her, taking in her presence and talking with the medical team. One day, as we were leaving the unit she was on, a grief chaplain walked by us in the hall. She immediately stopped walking and looked at my disheveled, tear-stained face. She then took us to a private sitting area and talked with us, without a second thought for what she may have been heading to do. Another small act, that meant so much to me.

On the 19th of January, my father and I decided that it was time. All efforts to take her off of the paralytic were unsuccessful and we knew well she would not want to be artificially kept alive with a minuscule chance of slight recovery. For the compassionate extubation, she was allowed four visitors. My uncle's husband was originally going to stay outside, but the medical team were very kind and let him be with us, despite the rules. Another thing we are thankful for. The chaplain we had previously met in the hallway also visited us in the hour before extubation, completely unprompted. It was easy to tell she cared a lot. The six of us, all sat together, holding hands and sharing treasured memories for about two hours. Then, the medical team extubated my mother and we waited, sat next to her the whole time. Love was thick in the room. The following hour, at 5:15pm on January 19th, she passed away peacefully, surrounded by her closest family. The people that meant the world to her. We later were informed by a beloved relative, that this all took place at the same time as the COVID-19 memorial ceremony in Washington D.C.; where lights were placed in the Reflection Pool at the Lincoln Memorial.

After we announced my mother's passing, the card wall expanded greatly. With over a hundred cards now hung up on the wall, the mural had spread beyond the kitchen walls, dipping into the rooms on either side. I felt a deep sense of love and community. We still have every single card carefully stored today. The blog post from that night had over 60 comments. Some from her high school teachers, some from friends she had not spoken to in decades, some from distant family she had only met once. This blog and journey brought back many unexpected people into our lives. Notices of donations given in memoriam started to pour in as well. The majority were to the Cleveland Metroparks and the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society; two organizations that she resonated with and believed in greatly.

Continued on page 8

The Forum

Continued from page 7

Eleven days later, her memorial took place. It was an incredible experience that I will not soon forget. The evening before the event, I stayed up late into the night, trying to piece together words that could fully encapsulate my scattered feelings. Debating over and over, trying to piece together what it was that I truly wanted to say; not just for the loving community, but also for myself and my mother.

Come the morning of the memorial, I felt like a child who had only partially completed the script for their oral presentation. The nerves were very familiar. Though, as soon as I saw the familiar names and faces flood in the Zoom lobby, I felt a calm wave wash over me. No longer did I feel the nerves from public speaking or conflicted feelings. I was abruptly reminded, these are my family's loved ones. There is no wrong thing to say here. So, I simply spoke what my heart wanted to share.

The number of people who joined far exceeded my expectations, many names I could only even briefly recall. I thanked everyone for taking the time to celebrate my mother's life, it meant everything to me in that moment. I briefly told of my hardships with severe anxiety, depression, and self-worth that stemmed from a multitude of experiences in my teenage years. Not wanting to put emphasis on myself, I told of my mother's unrivaled support for me through the many years I struggled. She was what helped me get back up every time I fell; she was the shoulder I leaned on constantly. Even through the times where she was diagnosed with lymphoma and received chemotherapy treatment, her top priority was always my well being. She was the reason I was able to find strength to continue to get mentally healthy. She was what I consider to be a wonderful parent.

With a deep breath and tears pricking my eyes, I stated "Whenever I was scared of the future or someone would ask her about what my future plans were, she would always respond with something along the lines of "I don't know what her future holds, but I know it's going to be amazing, and I'm excited to witness it." If there was one thing I could say to her now, it would be that I now see what she saw in me all along. After years of self-loathing, I can confidently say that I am proud of the person I have become. I see what she saw. I could say that now that I'm proud of myself, I want to make her proud, but I know very well she always has been. So instead, I want to remember her and never forget all the loving memories and wisdom she blessed me with.

I wanted to share the gift she gave me of unconditional love and support, so that is what I strove to do. I didn't expect to touch the hearts of many people with my words, as I had ended up only saying what I wished to. However I received messages from many people thanking me for my words and the service, as those words had helped with their own grief and inspired them. Yet another reminder to me, that small acts of genuine kindness make immense impacts. I was elated that we were able to give back and show the same kindness for both my mother and the community with a wonderful memorial service.

Each and every instance of kindness I felt during this two and half month experience made a difference. The food gifts, the cards, the blog comments, the chaplain, the medical team, the medication delivery, the Anonymous Angel, the donations given in her name; I am thankful for it all. The overwhelming generosity greatly aided my father and I in this painful time. The overwhelming love and support aided us with our grief process. But, when looked at closer, it is all built together by many people doing single acts. Those small things are part of a greater whole, they may not have a huge impact by themselves, but together the impact is immense. This is the power of kindness, love, and community.

This entire experience has been immensely difficult, after all I lost the person most dear to me; however, I believe I came out of it a better person. I have always believed that showing kindness and care is important, however I had never experienced or seen the effects so directly until now. Every act of kindness is a drop in the bucket. It makes a difference, even if it seems like only the least you can do. I hope to carry out these types of actions in the future to help others, as they helped me.

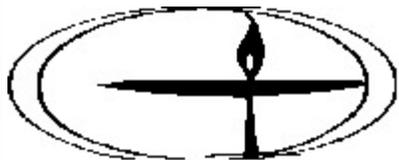
The Forum

Sharing and Caring

Shirley Kowalski is moving to Columbus to be closer to her son and grandson. Even though she was not in church very much, she was a supportive member and we wish her all the best.

** send your joys and sorrows to forum@swuu.org for inclusion in the next issue*

**Southwest Unitarian Universalist Church
6320 Royalton Road
North Royalton, Ohio 44133**



We are happy to mail The Forum to anyone who would like to receive it.