

The USHer

Your guide to the heart of the Unitarian Society of Hartford



“The hard soil and four months of snow make the inhabitants of the northern temperate zone wiser and abler than those who enjoy the fixed smile of the tropics.”

~Ralph Waldo Emerson

Our More-Than-Sunday Church

The Unitarian Society of Hartford’s Sunday services are designed to satisfy a wide range of spiritual beliefs while uplifting us with inspiring music and strong visual elements. People are drawn to lively services, a personable minister, and a warmly welcoming liberal community.

In addition to our Sunday morning services, there are a number of non-Sunday groups that gather regularly in the spirit of worship and this issue highlights a few. One of the oldest of these groups is the congregation at Seabury, a continuing care senior retirement community in nearby Bloomfield. Twenty Hartford Unitarian Universalists call Seabury home, a small percent of the resident population but with an out-sized influence on the community.



The group meets regularly with Rev. Bob Janis to light a chalice, check in, and muse about topics inspired by a reading or leading questions. These meetings, started by Rev. “BJ” Jamestone almost 20 years ago, are a deeply meaningful form of small-group ministry.

Seabury’s history goes back 150 years. In 1875, when philanthropist Elizabeth Colt, widow of Samuel Colt, died, she left *Armsmead*, their grand Italianate mansion in Hartford’s south end, to be a home for the widows of Episcopal clergy. This original Church Home of Hartford expanded, evolving to eventually become an interfaith continuing care community now located in Bloomfield on the former A.C. Peterson dairy farm. Named for Bishop Samuel Seabury, a prominent loyalist during the American Revolution, the Bloomfield campus opened in 1992.

Although still managed by an Episcopal corporation, Hartford UUs have had a strong influence on the culture of Seabury. Sid and Betty Garvais, who were pillars of USH, were among the first residents of Seabury and their enthusiasm attracted other members. Betty immediately saw leadership opportunities in her new home. She started the *Encore* thrift shop whose proceeds, about \$17,000 annually, fund all resident-initiated activities and committees. According to Marye Gail Harrison, “The idea for empowering residents to organize their own activities and have a decisive voice in the operation of the community goes back to Betty.” UU Joan Sereda convinced Seabury’s CEO to put a koi pond in the courtyard, and another UU, John Passalacqua, had an aeration pump installed to make sure the fish stay safe every winter. Hartford UUs continue to this day to bring a wide range of talents and skills to Seabury.

For many years, Ed Savage ran a semester-long foreign affairs discussion group at USH called *Great Decisions*. Ed took over a similar group at Seabury. When Covid shifted the group online, Ed saw an opportunity to expand and now the Bloomfield Public Library opens the group to a far-flung audience.



Harriet Gardner, a former Home Economics teacher, loves to cook and sew. She and her husband, Phil, have a two-bedroom apartment and Harriet has her sewing studio in the second bedroom. She has sold over 200 unique fabric purses, many custom-made, in a Seabury shop that features residents’ artistic works. She donates the proceeds to the Seabury Charitable Foundation. See samples of Harriet’s purses below.



In addition to making our mark on Seabury, USH congregants report they are also on the receiving end of the community's many benefits. Ed and Edith Savage found a welcome place in the Seabury Chorus. Kayla Costenoble and Ginny Allen expressed that Seabury is instrumental in their health. Kayla says that "well-trained, sympathetic physical therapists work their magic." Ginny looks forward to an active trip to Egypt enabled by that same magic. Phil Gardner appreciates that he gets excellent therapy on site because he doesn't drive now. All enjoy the food and the option to cook favorite or unusual dishes in their own apartments.

Members who are unable to make it to our Meeting House for Sunday services watch online and participate in Rev. Bob's pastoral visits, keeping the spiritual connections strong between USH and Seabury.



The glow of candlelight illuminates the sanctuary during Candlelight Concerts.

The Magdalene Circle

Despite centuries of reform movements, most contemporary societies are still patriarchal in practice. The term *patriarchy* refers to social systems in which power is primarily held by men.



Magdalene Circles are a world-wide movement to tip the masculine and feminine into better balance. Open to all genders, the circles focus on the wisdom, archetype and energy of Mary Magdalene, not so much as a literal biblical figure but rather as a symbol of the Divine Feminine. The Circle provides a safe space for participants to develop their intuition, explore empowerment, and experience spiritual growth through guided meditations, rituals, discussions, and often earth-based traditions.

The Magdalene Circle is another More-Than-Sunday spiritual opportunity. Since 2008, USH member Lisa Burch has either participated in or led Magdalene Circles. Lisa established the Circle at USH a few years ago, meeting on the second Saturday of each month in the meditation/yoga room. A retired clinical social worker and psychotherapist, Lisa loves exploring global healing and spiritual practices, particularly mindfulness, sound meditation, vocal toning, labyrinth walking, and the Divine Feminine and she brings these skills to the leadership of the Magdalene Circle.

The meetings are relaxed, conversational and welcoming to newcomers. The activities at meetings are spiritually evocative, encouraging participants to turn inward. A recent Magdalene Circle featured the delightful, spontaneous music of singing bowls and bells accompanied by soft drumming and quiet percussion instruments like rain sticks. Periods of discussion were inspired by a reading or leading question.

The pendant shown here is symbolic of Mary Magdalene, featuring a cross, a heart, and an anchor to honor her journey by boat to France where she is presumed to have lived out her life.



After attending her first Magdalene Circle, congregant Maggie Greene wrote this poem.

Soul Circle

When at first—on the simple pilgrimage—you're struck with sudden joy, you might cry out, "It's found me,"

or, more simply, let it whisper in your soul.

Divinity is such—there is no sex or gender. Tenderness and goodness wait for all to find them.

They are within you always hidden in your soul.

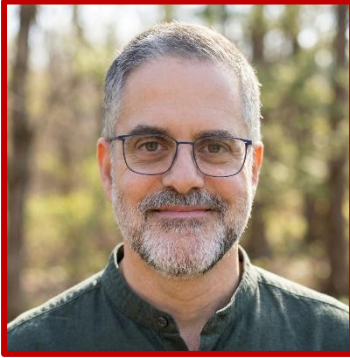
Always, all ways, waiting to be spread by virtue of the light which you emit. Submit. Gifts will return to you.

Accept them graciously. They will restore your soul.

~



SpiritChat



Another More-Than-Sunday spiritual offering is SpiritChat, meeting at USH on alternating Saturday mornings with Rev. Nicholas Bartoli, an ordained interfaith minister.

More than a decade ago Nicholas had an intense spiritual awakening that changed the course of his life. He had been working as a psychotherapist in Colorado but after his awakening, he felt called to be a monk. After ten years in a Massachusetts Episcopal monastery, he re-entered public life in Connecticut. Something of a Renaissance man, Nicholas is credentialed in psychotherapy as well as Spiritual Direction and chaplaincy. He has been a spiritual retreat leader, yoga teacher, and modern dancer; and he's well-versed in Zen, Sufism, Advaita Vedanta and Christianity. With natural warmth and humor, Nicholas helps seekers bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and modern life, offering a path to spirituality that is mystical yet embodied and grounded.

Nicholas is a nondualist. Sourced from the Sanskrit word “advaita” meaning “not-two,” nondualists feel interconnected with everyone and everything all the time. More than a philosophy or an experience, nondualism is a way of being in the world, not something to be turned on and off. Nicholas often says he *abides* in and as nondual awareness. UUism acknowledges this concept as “the interconnected web of all existence” – our seventh Principle.

Rev. Bartoli teaches the benefits of this way of life and guides others toward nonduality in retreats and a variety of other settings. Here at USH, SpiritChat meetings are ninety minutes, starting with twenty minutes of silent meditation. Nicholas then gives a brief reflection, often accompanied by a handout. Meetings conclude with a Question and Answer period.

Some Thoughts from Rev. Bob About First Thursday Vespers

We started Thursday evening Vespers services a couple of years ago. The idea was to have a simple service, with music and words at 6:00 pm on the first Thursday of each month.

While I dearly love the energy and the community of Sunday mornings, it has always intrigued me that so much of a congregation's life revolves around one particular hour a week. And I've always liked evening worship: there is a serenity, a peacefulness that can happen just around nightfall that is really entrancing. Hinduism and Judaism, among other faiths, light candles at dusk to honor the darkness and the light.





Rev. Bob Janis tunes up before a First Thursday Vesper service.

When you start a new worship service, it brings up all the old seminary questions about what worship is, just what it's really about. I could give you a theological answer, or even a historical-theological answer, but in practical terms, what's really fun about worship is you have an hour or so to craft a collective experience that invites participants towards reflection, calm, fellow-feeling, and happiness. I have found that the "worship leaders" have major responsibility for that hour, but they don't actually *do* that much. Oh, in some ways we do a lot – if you've been at Thursday Vespers you've seen me read poetry, lead guided meditations and other activities. But when I say that worship leaders don't *do* a lot, I mean that people already bring the means of their own enlightenment. They're ready to feel inspired, to think their own deep thoughts, to participate in the shared experience of worship. And the fact that they walked through the door means they are already carrying a vastly powerful intention – the intention to make the time worthwhile, to have a good experience with others.

A big part of the job of leading collective worship is to try not to get in the way too much. A maestro guitarist will sometimes play a few notes, evocative of the entire melody; the listener does the rest. In sharing a few readings and exercises, we're not trying to create something wholly new – rather, we are trying to help people get in touch again with their deepest selves, and the evolving melody of their lives.

For most congregants – for all of us, in fact – what happens in our Meeting House is just a fraction of the experiences of our lives. I like to think in our services, we all learn a little bit more about how to pay attention, to notice what it means to be alive, and what it feels like to be with others. We can practice this kind of noticing at home or at the grocery store, anywhere, any day of the week. First Thursday Vesper services are another place to practice together.

~ Rev. Bob

The late Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese monk and reknown pacifist said:

The next Buddha will not take the form of a person. The next Buddha will rather take the shape of a community, a community that practices understanding and loving kindness; a community that practices a way of conscious living. This may be the most important thing for the earth's survival.



What's Cookin' ?

During the dark chilly winter months, many of us look to “comfort food.” USH Membership Chair, Laurie Kelliher, is one of those folks. She has lots of fun (see photo) in her kitchen by baking up tasty treats. We all look forward to the goodies she brings to meetings! Here she offers us a favorite New York Times recipe for Lemon Pudding Cake.

Laurie says, “Pudding cakes are desserts that make two distinct layers while baking: a moist fluffy cake on top and a rich pudding sauce on the bottom – all formed from a single batter! The cake pan is immersed in a hot water bath while baking. The pudding-to-cake ratio is affected by the depth of the water; the higher the water, the more pudding is created. As with most baking, ingredients at room temperature work best.”



Lemon Pudding Cake 6-8 servings

Place a roasting pan large enough to hold the baking dish on a rack in the center of the oven. Fill it halfway with hot water and heat the oven to 350°. Butter an 8-inch baking dish.

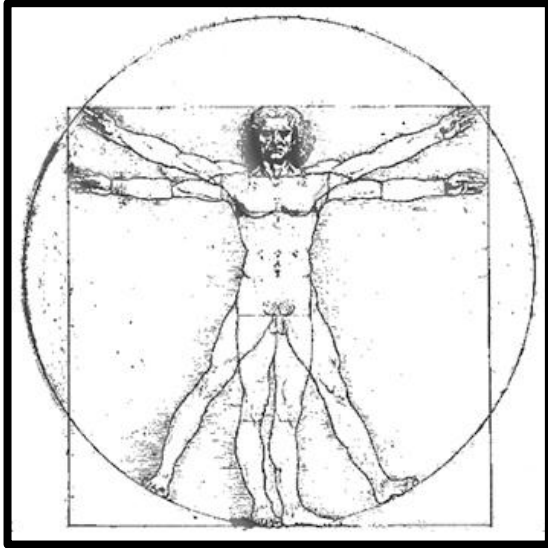
4 large eggs, separated
1 Tbsp finely grated lemon rind
1/3 cup lemon juice
1 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted
1 cup sugar
1/2 cup flour
1/2 tsp salt
1 1/2 cups buttermilk or whole milk



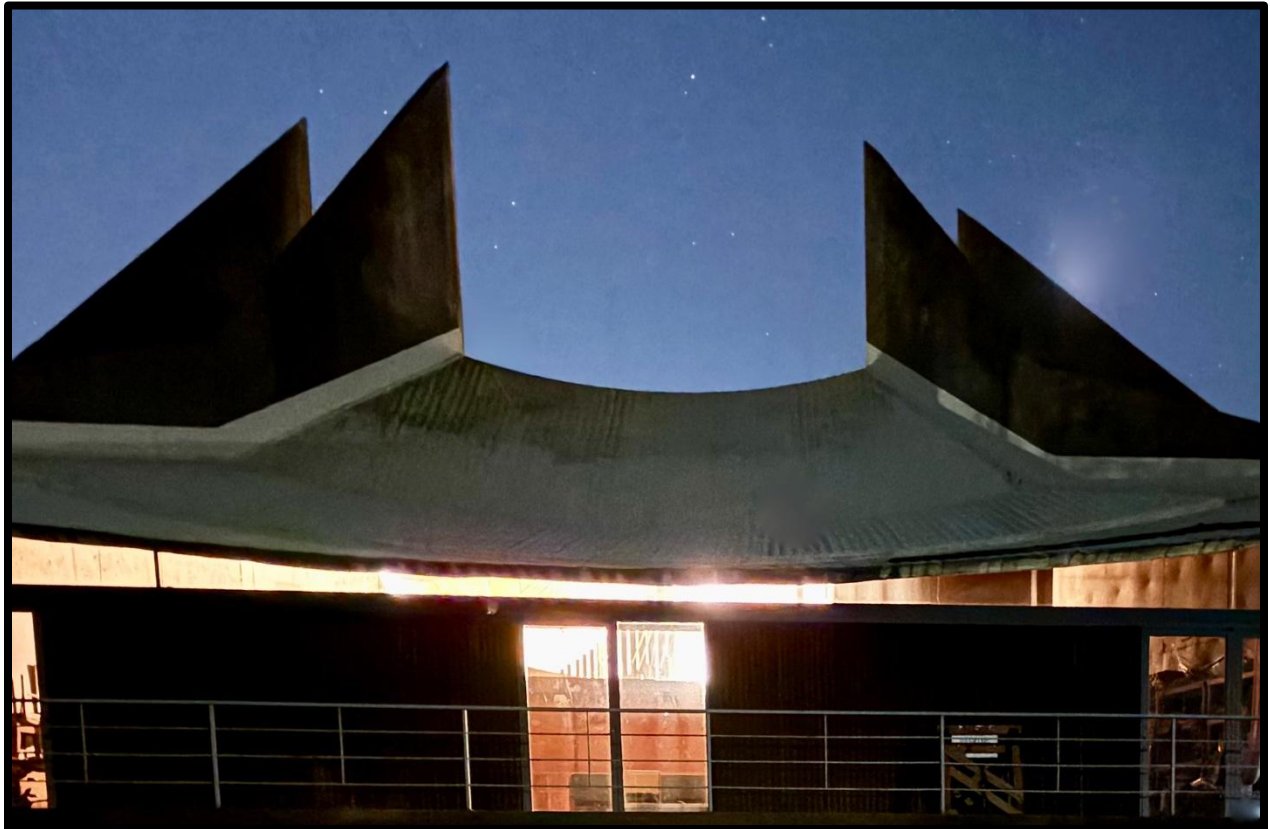
Whisk egg yolks, lemon zest, lemon juice and butter in a large bowl. In a second bowl, whisk sugar, flour and salt together. Whisk half the flour mixture into the egg yolk mixture, then half the milk. Whisk in the remaining flour mix and then the remaining milk. Whip the egg whites until soft peaks form and gently fold into the batter. Pour the batter into the buttered pan and place the pan in the water bath in the oven. Bake 40-45 minutes or until the top begins to lightly brown. Remove the cake pan from the water bath. Be careful removing the water bath; it's boiling hot water.

Serve warm or cold. Whipped cream is welcome.

In 1490, daVinci showed how to make snow angels.



When you're too lazy to build a snowman.



USH, viewed from the back, on Christmas Eve 2025



Contact Information for people in this issue:

Magdalene Circle: Lisa Burch spiritmattersct@outlook.com

SpiritChat: Nicholas Bartoli info@nicholasbartoli.com

Great Decisions: Ed Savage EdSavage03@gmail.com

The USHer thanks all who contributed to this issue, especially Sue Smolski, Gloria Mengual, Marye Gail Harrison, Ed Savage, Louise Schmoll, Kayla Costenoble, Ginny Allen, Harriet Gardner, Carol Simpson, Lisa Burch, Laurie Kelliher, Maggie Greene, Nicholas Bartoli, Karolina Wojtysko, Rev. Bob Janis and others too many to cite.

Want to contribute to The USHer? Click [here](#) for Guidelines.

You can read this and all past issues of The USHer by scrolling down the USH Home page at <https://hartforduu.org/> *The USHer* appears quarterly and is edited by Judy Robbins. You can reach her at USHerEditor@gmail.com

