



The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Waynesboro

Light One Candle! Or more...

This evening, I first lit the *shamash*, sang the two blessings, and then used that helper candle to light the four candles in an antique *chanukiah* for this fourth night of Chanukah. I looked out my back window and saw my neighbor's Christmas lights through the reflection of the light of my candles. According to the old custom, the lights of Chanukah may not be used for any functional purpose but only enjoyed for their own sake. No reading or tallying the day's business receipts by the light of the *chanukiah*! No work could depend on that light! At home by myself, I wasn't busy frying latkes. I watched the candles until they were fully consumed.

I then went into my living room and sat on my sofa, looking at the beautiful poinsettia I received as a gift.



It is another source of pleasure for my eyes. I looked over at pictures of my grandparents at ages younger than I ever knew them and

thought about family and differences and developments in family holiday traditions.

When my parents were newlyweds, they lived halfway between their parents, who lived seventy miles apart from each other. So the families agreed, our Christmases would be spent with Mom's people, while New Year's Day would be the Oakley Christmas. And that's how it remained for decades, more or less. There were a



couple of Christmases when we didn't do Christmas at all because my parents were under the influence of a Puritanical preacher. That didn't last, but my parents retained a great modesty around religious holidays. The only decorations were the cards we'd received and a small, inherited manger scene. As we moved into the 1970s, Christmas Eve became the nuclear family's Christmas. Mom would make a nice evening meal, ending with plum pudding and other desserts. After the meal, Mom would read the Gospel account of the lowly birth and swaddled baby in a manger from an old family Bible. Dad would say a prayer. Then we all would exchange simple gifts we had gotten or made for each other.

When Walter and I began our lives together, we didn't initially stake claims in December. And then in the years when my grandmother banned us from Harris family gatherings, we would often travel abroad at Christmas, taking in concerts and midnight masses where they were expressions of the local culture. In the last couple of decades, Chanukah lights and treats were the clear focus in our home.

My children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren do not observe the winter holidays that are important to me, following, instead, my ex-wife's family practices. But when we are together at the holidays, there is more room for difference and acceptance than was ever the case before, which reminds me of a few quotable quotes. "We created you and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another," from the Q'uran. "Peace on Earth, goodwill to men!" from the Gospel according to Luke. "An it harm none, do what ye will," from the Wiccan Rede. And, finally,

"A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle," from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

May the many differences within our families and our communities serve as a source of joy as we stop using each other and learn more fully to bask in each other's holy light.

Happy Holidays!
Peace and Blessings,
Rev. Paul

More Special Collection Updates

In last week's newsletter, the Social Justice Team began providing updates on some of the organizations we collected donations for during the past year. They remind us of how our contributions are being used and provide information on how you can make a donation in case you missed the special collection. Here are three more.

Augusta Health Mobile Clinic

In 2023 and 2024 the Mobile Clinic team saw an average of 124 patients per month. Year to date (as of December 2), the team has had 1,941 patient encounters (an average of 176 patient visits per month). The really good news is that they've served 649 patients, including 289 new patients, since launching the Mobile Unit five months ago. So, patients are coming back for return visits—exactly what we hoped—and establishing a trusting professional relationship with the team.

Currently, about 1/3 of patients are on Medicare, 1/5 are on Medicaid and 22% declined to answer, leading the team to guess they are uninsured. Primarily, they are treating patients for hypertension, diabetes, anxiety, GERD, COPD and routine vaccinations. Donations may be made through the [Augusta Health Foundation](#).

Verona Community Food Pantry

In 2025, through the end of September, the FCFP served over 19,000 clients, with an average of 2,425 clients per month, or just over 900 households.



In addition to private donations, the pantry receives donated food from Walmart, Starbucks, Aldi, Food Lion, and Whole Foods. Food is also received from Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, which includes USDA food.

Donations go to buy food from the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and milk from Mt. Crawford Creamery. Volunteers, including UUFW members, distribute the food to clients for an average 1,200 hours per month.

Donations may be made to [Verona Community Food Pantry](#), P. O. Box 187, Verona, VA 24482.

New Directions Center, Inc.

New Directions is the local nonprofit serving survivors of intimate partner violence, sexual assault and human trafficking in Staunton, Augusta County and Waynesboro. In fiscal year 2025, the Center answered 609 crisis hotline calls and provided safe shelter to 69 adults and children, totaling more than 3,200 nights of shelter, alongside advocacy and counseling services for over 200 adult and child survivors. Staff provided more than 1,500 hours of advocacy to adults, served 46 child survivors, and reached the broader community through 187 engagement activities and 43 educational programs in schools, colleges, and community settings, engaging 745 youth and adults.

The Center's most critical ongoing needs include gift cards (Walmart, Sheetz, Food Lion), nonperishable food items, household cleaning supplies, paper products, and personal care items for the families served. In looking to the new year, one of the greatest challenges will be meeting rising demand for safety and housing with limited shelter space, increased barriers to housing due to recent changes within the housing program, and higher levels of need in the community. You can learn more, including how to make a donation, by visiting the [New Directions website](#).

