

International Resources Staff at the UUA



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FAITH *without* BORDERS

Faith Without Borders
A Program Celebrating
and Empowering
the Effective
International Engagement
of UU Congregations



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**Winter Holidays
2010**

We Covenant to Affirm and Promote the Goal of World Community with Peace, Liberty, and Justice for All

- ◇ Support the [Natalie Gulbrandsen Scholarship for International Studies](#).
- Become a supporting congregation of a U/U organization like:
 - ◇ [The International Council of Unitarians and Universalists](#)
 - ◇ [The UU Partner Church Council](#)
 - ◇ [The UU United Nations Office](#)
- Draw inspiration from the UU Church of Greater Naples' [relationship with Heifer International](#).

Through Pilgrimage and Witness

- Remind congregants of the central role that pilgrimage plays in the Christian nativity story (Matthew 2:1-12) and in the [five pillars of the Muslim faith](#). Emphasize the theme of witness in the Jewish narrative.
- Announce a congregational pilgrimage to your partner church or an opportunity to participate in an international witness/service project with an organization like:
 - ◇ The Casa Collective
 - ◇ Habitat for Humanity International
 - ◇ The UU Service Committee's "Just Journeys" Program
 - ◇ Project Harvest Hope

Through Associational Leadership

- Honor the International engagement leadership that a member of your congregation has provided locally or to the Unitarian Universalist movement during a Winter Holiday service.
- Commit to share your congregation's experiences in international engagement with others through the [congregational pro-filespotlight](#)—the UUA's [International Resources Office](#) would like to help you shine!

Sixth Principle Resources for UU Congregations: Winter Holidays

For everything there is a season—a time to die and a time to be born. With the arrival of winter's low dark sky, communities around the world look to the miracle of light as a sign of re-birth and a source of hope. We celebrate the promise of new life and recommit ourselves to the protection of everyone's right to his or her own radiant humanity. Celebrating the Winter Holidays, thus, is an excellent opportunity for Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregations to express their commitment to our Sixth Principle: *We Covenant to Affirm and Promote the Goal of World Community with Peace, Liberty and Justice for All.*

Following are a few suggestions for bringing Sixth Principle Ministry to life in relation to your winter holidays activities in Seven Areas:

Spiritually,
 Through Education,
 Through Advocacy,
 Through Partnership,
 Through Stewardship,
 Through Pilgrimage and Witness, and
 Through Associational Leadership.

As warm light envelops winter dark, hopefully these ideas will inspire creativity, vision and compassion. For more information about any of the suggestions, or to share additional ideas, please contact the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Office of International Resources: international@uua.org.

Spiritually

- Include a relevant chalice lighting from the [International Council of Unitarians and Universalists](#) (ICUU) during worship services, such as:
 - ◇ We light this chalice to remember that life is born again every day. (Submitted by la Sociedad Unitaria Universalista de España)
 - ◇ So long as a single light illuminates the world's darkness, there will be a joy on earth that empowers our lives. (Herbert Napierky; translated by Erik Resly; submitted by Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft)
 - ◇ Knowing we must die, we question what life means. Final answers may elude us, but by living the questions, we create and discover meaning where we can. (Rev. Dr. Forest Church, 1948-2009, UUA)
- Highlight the miracle of birth and the interconnectedness of all existence using stories like [Zoroaster's laughter](#) at birth or [Indra's Net](#). Tie the process of human birth to the continual cycle of our planet's (re)birth, as emphasized in Readings #557 and #470 (Singing the Living Tradition).
- Incorporate traditional religious stories from around the world that address the themes of:
 - ◇ Birth in the Christian (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20; Matthew 2:1-12; [Brief Summary](#)) and Muslim (Maryam19:16-31; Surah Al-Imran 3:45ff;) traditions (See [The Muslim Jesus](#)).
 - ◇ Mythopoetic origins of human life (Genesis 1-3; [Enuma Elish](#); Hindu: [Laws of Manu 1:5-14](#), [Rig Veda 10/90:5](#))
 - ◇ Hanukkah and the gift of light ([The Story of Hanukkah](#); [Jewish Winter Solstice Tales](#); 1 Mac.4:56-59 and the [Talmud](#))
 - ◇ Human and natural gifts to one another and the world ('Through the Solstice Crack' chapter in Carl Seaburg's [Anthology](#))

home.

- View the Church of the Larger Fellowship's [seasonal holiday religious education resource](#) for further information on international winter celebrations like [Posada](#) (Mexico) and [St. Lucia's Day](#) (Sweden).

Through Justice Making and Advocacy

- During a worship service, emphasize the advocacy work that your congregation is doing on behalf of international human rights and the defense of everyone's right to shine his or her own light. Invite the congregation to become more involved with efforts like the:
 - ◇ UU-UNO's [Every Child is our Child](#) initiative and the role of the UDHR over the next 60 years.
 - ◇ The UU [Holdeen India Program](#).

Through Partnership

- During the service, remember the importance of your congregation's international partnership with a UU congregation in Transylvania, Hungary, India or the Philippines. Contact your partner congregation ahead of time to share information on holiday rituals and practices.
- If your congregation doesn't have a partner church, invite a conversation to become involved with partner church ministry through the [UU Partner Church Council](#).

Through Faithful Stewardship

- Request a special offering during your service to support Sixth Principle ministry that your congregation is doing. Or, consider one of the following:
 - ◇ Support for the [UU Church of the Philippines BUILD Project](#).
 - ◇ Support for the UUA's relationships with [Unitarian/Universalist groups in Africa](#).

ture, the Church usually sings both Western Christmas carols and native Philippine Christmas songs. The congregation ties the nativity story of Jesus to themes of family, children, new life and the joy of birth.

- ◇ *How does the Church incorporate UU themes and values into the celebration?* The season allows for reflection on the acts of giving, helping those in need, sharing with one another, being thankful for life and spending time in community. The Church also focuses on the importance of working for peace and building just societies. As such, ecumenical and interfaith gatherings are common.
- ◇ *Is there any specific message that the Church would like to share with other UUs around the world?* "In every society there are people with particular needs...It is important that we as UUs provide for all these sectors within our congregations. Therefore I see it fit to say the old story of the birth of Jesus, and there will be people who will be glad and take back with them the simplicity of life. It is equally important for us to look to the star with the wise men and ponder about the universality of understanding and importance of learning about the truth and meaning of life...We learn a lot from things that are common and surround life day by day. The holidays are a great opportunity for us to ponder and learn."
- Practice storytelling with [Dylan Thomas' "A Child's Christmas in Wales."](#)
- Invite a discussion on the complexities of the holiday season in [Jerusalem](#)
 - ◇ Share perspectives on [Christian](#) and [Jewish](#) (in [pictures](#)) celebrations in the Holy Land.
 - ◇ Consider drawing from existing lesson plans. Spark a conversation on the prospect of [peace](#) and [interfaith dialogue](#).
- Point congregants to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's [The Christmas Story in Art](#) online exhibit to view the many artistic renditions of the story from around the world.
- Encourage religious educators to discuss the season's celebration of thoughtful gift giving, using [Tapestry of Faith](#) resources to tease out the multitude of ways in which individuals can show compassion by offering love to neighbors close to and far from

- Make use of lighting ceremonies to emphasize global interconnectedness and the values promoted by international engagement (inspired by Carl Seaburg's 'Celebrating Christmas: An Anthology'):

- ◇ **Advent Wreath:** In preparation for the coming (or advent) of the Christmas celebration, light one candle on the wreath each Sunday until all five lights are burning on Christmas Eve. The candles can hold a variety of meanings, including: the warmth of human relationship; a beacon of direction as we navigate our complex world; truth and knowledge gained through interaction with the unknown; universal peace; the courage to discover the unfamiliar; etc. The process culminates in the birth of Jesus, who for Christians embodies the "light that has come into the world" (John 12:46), and whose message of radical compassion brightens our hearts.
- ◇ **Hanukkah Menorah:** In remembrance of Judah's rededication of the holy Temple and struggle for the freedom to worship, kindle the menorah candles individually while sharing their symbolic value:
 - * The Shamus ('to serve'): the call to help and serve our brothers and sisters from around the world;
 - * Candle I: the source of our highest values, including peace, liberty and justice for all;
 - * Candle II: the wisdom and insight of great religious teachers from many cultures and lands;
 - * Candle III: the need for justice at home and abroad;
 - * Candle IV: the exercise of mercy in the face of cruelty;
 - * Candle V: the holiness of individual life;
 - * Candle VI: the centrality of love in bringing about world community;
 - * Candle VII: the role of patience amidst the misunderstanding that inevitably arises from interaction with the unfamiliar;
 - * Candle VIII: the courage needed to build relationships with people who look and think differently than we do.
- Offer heartfelt thoughts and prayers for all Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist (U/U) brothers and sisters around the world.
 - ◇ Express gratitude for the spiritual leadership provided by [U/Us around the world](#). Offer praise to vibrant pulpits in Auckland, New Zealand; Prague, Czech Republic; Frankfurt, Germany;

Madras, India; Tokyo, Japan; Nairobi, Kenya; Cape Town, South Africa; Manila, Philippines; and many more.

- ◇ Lift up prayers for those affected by the AIDS pandemic in light of World AIDS Day, and express gratitude for the work of the [UU Global AIDS Coalition](#). Offer thanks for the [International Council of Unitarians and Universalists](#) (ICUU), [UU Partner Church Council](#) (UUPCC), [UU United Nations Office](#) (UU-UNO), [UU Global Aids Coalition](#) (UUGAC), [UU Service Committee](#) (UUSC), [UU Holdeen India Program](#) (UUHIP) and many others. Consider the following Responsive Reading by Erik Resly:

As we open the doors of our sanctuary to welcome those hungry for fellowship, *we recall our blessings and the many faces that work to bless others around the world.*

Let us remember the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, *for weaving a spiritual network of member groups committed to strengthening the worldwide Unitarian and Universalist faith.*

Let us remember the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council, *for forging and supporting meaningful partner relationships that reach across boundaries in love.*

Let us remember the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office, *for bearing witness and speaking out on our international commitment to peace, freedom and justice.*

Let us remember the Unitarian Universalist Global Aids Coalition, *for mobilizing communities that honor and respect human dignity in the fight against AIDS.*

Let us remember the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, *for daring to envision and work for human rights and a world free from oppression.*

Let us remember the Unitarian Universalist Holdeen India Program, *for exercising equity and compassion in bringing India's most excluded peoples into the country's social, economic and political consciousness.*

For the tireless dedication of these visionaries to the goal of world community, *we lift up our hearts in gratitude and strive to give of ourselves using their example.*

- Consider weaving an international theme into a candlelighting ritual, where congregants witness the interdependence of the world community first-hand as they pass light around the sanctuary.
- ◇ Give a [brief history](#) and include a [German verse](#) of the hymn

Silent Night.

- ◇ Call the congregation's attention to the fact that many Unitarians and Universalists from around the world celebrate similarly.
- Integrate hymns that focus on renewal (Singing the Living Tradition: 110, 174, 191, 232) and nativity (Singing the Living Tradition: 228, 229, 239, 246, 256, 338).

Through Education

- Share the story of the Christmas tree:
 - ◇ Discuss the meaning of the Christmas tree at home and around the world. Show a [video](#) and share [stories](#) about this symbol.
 - ◇ Let congregants learn about and sing the classic '[O Christmas Tree](#)' ('O Tannenbaum'). Use different versions of the song in various formats: piano sheet music ([Part I](#) and [Part II](#)); [English](#) and [German](#) lyrics.
 - ◇ Inform the congregation about the importance of Unitarian Charles Follen in [bringing the Christmas tree to New England](#).
- Learn about the ways in which U/Us around the world celebrate the winter holiday season, by focusing on a summary of remarks by Rev. Nihal Attanayake, from the UU Church of the Philippines.
 - ◇ *What December/January holidays does the UU Church of the Philippines celebrate?* Beginning in October, local businesses and other commercial establishments begin to display decorations (one of the most common being the Banana tree) and prepare cards, gifts and food. In December, the youth and young adults hold conferences, during which they reflect on an annually chosen theme (this year: 'The Environment and Caring For It') and visit homes in the greater vicinity of the church to sing carols. The congregation itself throws a Christmas Party from December 22-27, which includes a gift exchange, worship service and social activities. Another worship service is held on New Year's Day.
 - ◇ *Are there any particular songs that the Church sings or stories that the Church tells?* Balancing religious tradition with local cul-