

THE FIRST UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF ESSEX
Member of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations



- Tues., Jan. PFLAG, 7pm
ECCO, Gloucester, 7pm
- Wed., Jan. Book Club, 7pm
- Sat., Jan 9 Coming of Age workshop
- Sun., Jan. 10 Choir at 9am,
Service at 10am
- Mon., Jan. 11 Religious Education
Committee, 7pm
- Sun., Jan 17 Sunday Service
at 10am
- Thurs., Trustees, 6pm
- Sun., Jan. 24 Choir at 9am
Service 10am
- Thurs., Jan. 28 Adult Ed, 7pm &
2/11, 2/25, 3/4
- Sat., Jan. 30 Coffee House
Bill Staines, 8pm
- Thurs., Feb. 11 Cook at Open Door
Pantry
- Wed., Feb. Ash Wed. Service, 7pm

OUR MINISTER

A wonderful historical piece in the Boston Globe reviewed the very odd history of the celebration of Christmas since the birth of Jesus. Because the early Christians (many still Jews until well into the second century) thought celebrating birthdays a pagan practice, there was no Christmas celebration in the churches.



That changed when Christianity became an empire/state religion in about

395. December 25th had been the Roman festival of the Sun; now it became the Christian celebration of the Son of God. Post Protestant Reformation, many of the reformers stopped celebrating Christmas again as a pagan and Catholic feast! The New England Puritans spurned it and the celebration became known as a time for drunkenness and revelry until Christian musicians rescued it around 1770 and starting writing great Christmas hymns, such as "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks at Night."

Then, who else among the "reformers" but the Univer-

salists, recently formed, began celebrating Christmas in the 1790s, the first reformed denomination to do such. And am I glad that such a tradition has continued into our day, despite the attempts at making it a purely secular and commercialized holiday. For me it has always been special and sacred, a celebration of new life and endless hope, embodied in the infant born into "lowly" circumstances.

Thanks to so many elves in our congregation, Christmas Eve service was a wonderful and rich celebration of that sacredness and hope. Thankfully, our service was shared with many friends and neighbors, who helped swell the crowd to approximately 160 — our capacity for sure.



And here we are now on the brink of beginning a new year, a new decade with our struggles and uncertainties, along with new energies and hope for better things: an end to wars, an improved job market for the many

For more information on the calendar, go to:
<http://www.uuessex.org/publications/calendarEvents.html>

INSIDE

- OUR MINISTER 1
- SOCIAL JUSTICE 2
- CHURCH UPDATES 3
- ART AND EDUCATION 4

MINISTER, cont.

who are in search, a renewed spirit of cooperation and concern for those who are hurting. I shared brief thoughts Christmas Eve about angels in Essex who organized many to share gifts with local families in need. It was done through the Essex elementary school. And I shared words from a holiday shopper who, upon reflecting on the hard times, said that he would be spending less this year and making up for it with "heart and hands."

My hope and prayer for the New Year is that our small faith community deepens its spiritual journey and works in the community ever more with "hearts and hands" to bring comfort and encouragement to all of us in Essex and beyond. May this new decade be one of newfound hope and life for us all.

*And "God
bless everyone."
Art*

SOCIAL JUSTICE

I delivered another goodly amount of food donations to the **Open Door Pantry** just before Christmas. Thanksgiving and Christmas combined, we donated over 400 pounds of food. However, the need continues and we appreciate all of the generosity from contributors. Please keep bringing foodstuff as you are able. Sometimes the need is just as great in **February and March**, but it is no longer on **people's radar**. Also, our next opportunity to cook at Open Door is Thursday, February 11. Please look for the sign-up sheet by mid-January.

I'll be turning in our **GUEST at your Table** boxes very soon. If you have not brought yours back, please let me know and deliver it pronto. Thanks.

After many months with no visitors, in December our **PFLAG** meeting had two **new people** as well as a new core member. We are con-

vinced that PFLAG has an important role to play as a resource in the Cape Ann community and will continue to meet every first Tuesday of the month.

Our North Shore Peace and Justice Coalition will

continue to work on two major issues in 2010: bringing the current wars in **Iraq and Afghanistan** to an end, and raising awareness of the strife between Israel and the Palestinians. One of our members, Susan Nicholson, has recently come back from that region and has a slide show to share with us likely in January. Stay tuned.

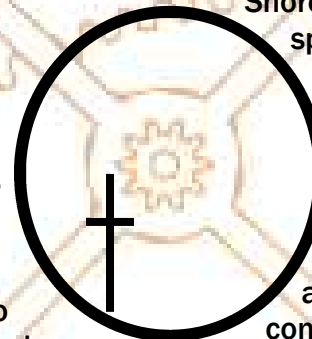
ECCO marches on into 2010 and is looking for some new issues to work on. We have spent much time on intervention with youth at risk in Gloucester and Lynn. But there are other issues we are concerned about and that the community has asked about. We are cur-

rently developing a group in Salem and there will be an emphasis on working with the **Spanish-speaking community** in Salem. So we'll soon have three groups in the North

Shore ECCO network spanning from Lynn to Essex/Gloucester.

Soon we'll have a meeting at our church to talk about issues of concern to our congregation. Our next Cape Ann ECCO meeting will be on Tuesday, January 5, at 7pm in Gloucester, at the Temple. We are always looking for new participants. Let me know of your interest.

Now that the **major climate conference in Copenhagen** is over, it seems that there is a long way to go to gain consensus on climate change and action. **Our new Environmental Committee** has work to do and should be meeting in January to begin planning actions. Talk to Max Schenk if you have interest.



CHURCH

UPDATES

VOLUNTEERS for REFRESHMENTS & FLOWERS:

We are always in need of the generosity of the congregational friends and members to help with providing refreshments for after services in the church hall and for flowers for the sanctuary altar. Please sign up for refreshments on the bulletin board in the church hall and see Lynne Marchetti or other members of the flower committee to donate Sunday flowers.



CHURCH DIRECTORY:

Look for the church directory within the next few weeks. Thanks to Debbie Frontiero, we'll have a complete listing of members and friends available to all.

CHOIR:

Choir starts up again on Sunday, January 10, at 9am. We will be working on African American spirituals for a February 21st church service, as we celebrate that rich musical tradition.

We have 20 or so choir members at the moment, which is phenomenal for our size church community. But we are open to more, especially men as our male members are few.

Thanks to Betsy Vicksell and Fran Pierce for such a great program.

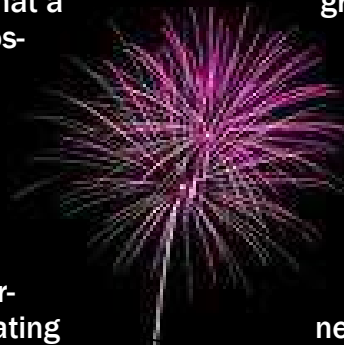


Annual mid-year church meeting on Sunday, January 31, potluck after church service.

Fire me anytime! Happy New Year

BUILDING UPDATES:

You will remember that we reported the need to replace our 56 year-old furnace and kicked off a fundraising campaign to meet the nearly \$5000 cost for the new furnace. We generously received a matching pledge, thus we needed to come up with at least \$2400 as a congregation. As of Christmas Day, we seem to have gone well beyond that goal as we await a full accounting from treasurer, Tom Duff. What a great symbol of generosity and ownership on the part of members and friends. Thanks You. Looks like we'll have excess to fund our heating update or some other pressing building issue. Many, many thanks to all. And thanks to the many members/friends who helped organized the effort to decide to proceed with this project. We expect the new furnace to be in by January 20th or so.



There will be a church fundraiser on February 10 at the Pomodori restaurant in Ipswich. Twenty percent of the bill will go to the church by just saying you are from the church. They do this every Wednesday night and Paul L'Herrou thought it would be a great day for Valentine's Day or Mardi Gras.



ART AND EDUCATION

ARTSPACE:

Thanks to many art contributors and especially to Lynne Marchetti, the art space downstairs is looking wonderful. Please think about purchasing gifts from this wonderful and unique project of our church.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

As most of you know, our wonderful RE Director, Lois Bairstow, will soon deliver another addition to her family and will be on a 6-8 week leave from her duties at church. Lois is due in the middle of January. Anyone who might be interested in helping the great RE Committee during this time, please talk to Peggy Duff, Jen Sauriol, Ellen Attridge or Karin Carroll. Also, once Lois and Bill's child is born, Ellen Attridge will be coordinating a meals program for a few weeks to help lighten the work load. Stay tuned.

ADULT EDUCATION:

Although we have had some good suggestions for Adult RE, we haven't as of yet chosen a topic. We are open to more suggestions and will be-

FUNDRAISING:

Our special collection for the new furnace project has been incredibly successful. And, currently, we have a number of excellent fundraising activities/events that help us in our quest to balance the budget: Ride Share to the airport, Coffee House, Artspace, Fair Trade Coffee, Summer Boat Cruise, Holiday Fair, buck a book, etc. I think we need one more fundraising event to occur sometime in February/March. We have a newly elected committee that needs to meet and brainstorm an event. Does anyone have a great idea?

gin classes on Thursday, January 28, at 7pm. The following sessions will then be on Thursdays, Feb. 11, 25, and March 4.

SEARCH ART'S SERMONS— NOW ON THE WEB!
www.uuessex.org

COFFEE HOUSE:

Our next Coffee House will be on Saturday, January 30th, at 8pm. Folk singer and song writer Bill Staines will be performing. He's a regular at the Coffee House because of his talent and popularity. Don't miss it. Bring a friend. It's a great evening and helps with our exposure to the community and with fundraising. We pay musicians a very good wage, but also make money for the church.

BOOK CLUB:

The Book Club meets on Wednesday, January 6, and the book is MARCH, by Geraldine Brook. February's selection is: TRAVELING WITH POMEGRANATES, by Sue Monk Kidd.

BUCK A BOOK:

Thanks to Diana Hughes, our buck a book shelves are full of items to take way. Why not do some browsing. Also, we are open to book donations!