



WINTER EDITION 2020

WHISTLER: Alison Latham 387-5711 aliemae1@outlook.com

"A sense of humor, after breath, is perhaps the most important quality in a human being."
Ray Huessy from his Covid Wisdom Chronicles

REFLECTIONS

"RISKING TRANSFORMATION"

Pastor Susie Webster-Toleno

Greetings, dear ones,

I write to you in the midst of a season that is, simply put, unlike any Advent of my experience. Leaving aside the chaos of our national elections and the division that we all see every day, as well as the ongoing struggles for justice and equity for all people, there's the havoc of Covid-19. Even those of us who have not been touched by the loss of life of loved ones have still faced significant losses from the virus, whether those losses be related to our work, our ability to connect in healthy community, and the sadness that comes from a feeling of isolation. And into this difficult reality we're living with comes Advent.

Always, the season of Advent (which is what church-folk call the four weeks leading up to Christmas) is considered to be a time of waiting and preparation. In ordinary years, waiting and preparation could be understood on a surface level – as if we were only waiting for Santa Claus or visiting family members coming from afar, and preparation in terms of housecleaning, decorating, and baking. Of course, that has always been a pretty one-dimensional way of looking at the Christmas story, but it's a cozy and a festive one, and many of us love it very deeply.

This year, though, things are different. While it's always a good idea to clean house, we aren't preparing to welcome tons of guests. If we're decorating, it's for our own pleasure, not for the sake of entertaining others. And with so many events being canceled or shifted to a virtual format, our over-scheduled holidays have shifted a bit. There's a sadness in this, but also an opportunity to pause and consider Advent and Christmas anew.

So if we aren't preparing for things to be just the way they always have been, it must be that we are, instead, preparing for something quite different; that makes sense, doesn't it? On the pulpit in our sanctuary, I have this handwritten reminder taped in just the right spot so that I have no choice but to see it as I start our time of communal prayer: "We gather in this place to be transformed." How often have I reminded our congregation of what a bold statement that is to make at the start of prayers? After all, we claim to believe that prayer is powerful. If we open our prayers bravely proclaiming that we gather for the sake of transformation, we have to be prepared for our prayers to be answered. But are we ready for transformation? And how do we anticipate being transformed? If we're truly transformed, what will need to be left behind?

I have to say, as scary as it is to put so much in God's hands, I long for transformation. Personally, I long to be more patient, more courageous, less afraid of uncertainty, and most of all more fully rooted in love. In terms of our community and our world, I pray for a new vision of the inherent worth of all of God's creation, and a new commitment to fostering what is good, healthy, and hopeful in all people. In a time like this, we really need true transformation. And maybe this time of chaos is the perfect time to let go of things the way we've always done them and begin to look at where transformation comes from.

For Christians, the Christmas story has a word for us: in a world where the power of Empire was strong and feared, God opened the door for a new way of being. A young woman said "yes" when asked to bear God into the world. Shepherds risked looking foolish by believing the angelic messengers who brought them the good news that this transforming love was to bring peace on Earth and good will to all people. This love, this child, was a threat to the powers that be ~ transforming love always is!

This Advent, which is like no other we've ever seen, I hope that we can be transformed by the story that is so familiar. I hope that we can say "Yes!" with great courage when offered the chance to bear love into the world. I hope we can dare to look foolish for the sake of bringing peace with justice and righteousness to a world desperately in need of both. And I hope that we can be strengthened by the familiar story, not simply made sentimental by the memories that come with it. We need strength in this world. We need to be transformed by love.

And I firmly believe that transformation happens more readily in community, where there are people to support us, challenge us, and hold us accountable for living the values we profess. As we gather each Sunday on Zoom, we continue to wrestle with the scriptures (sometimes finding them comforting, and sometimes challenging). We continue to sing (while muted, which is imperfect but will have to do until technology advances). We continue to hear sermons from a wide variety of voices. And most of all, we continue to pray for transformation, believing that this long Advent time will eventually lead us to help bear Christ into the world

Won't you join us?

Yours in Advent hope,

Susie

THE WHISTLE BLOWER

Heidi Bernier is looking for IN-HOME CARE help for her folks, Donald and Verna Newcomb in Westminster West. Services may include personal care, light housekeeping, shopping, respite and more. Room available in exchange for help. Contact Heidi at home 869-2781.

News from the **Henkle/Richardson household**: "New baby in the house! Ronin Claire arrived February 6. Kate, Jordan, sister Aya and grandmother Kathy were very glad to meet her and add her to the family. Kate works part time at The Grammar School and Jordan works part time at West Hill Shop while managing a growing family of two and studying to take their exams for Acupuncture. Uncle Teague met Ronin for the first time this Thanksgiving when he was able to manage all the covid protocols and get home for three days. Teague is living in Virginia Beach completing his training to be a Navy fighter pilot. Beth and Levi are in California for now. Their plans for a wedding in Westminster are on hold until we can all get together safely. Beth works for a large law firm in Mountain View and Levi is busy with his start up: Kitkaton."

Pia Rabin's son, **Micah Rabin**, has returned from NYC to spend Covid with his dad in Saxtons River.

From **Jenny Holan**: "I had a hand in a book that's coming out this month. It's a set of short writings by numerous historians and literary and business people in Windham county, with lots of help and archival pictures from the Brattleboro Historical Society, titled *Print Town*. There are chapters on writers, editors, papermakers, printers, publishers, designers, and booksellers who worked in and around Brattleboro throughout its history. I had nothing to do with the pictures, but I was hired by the Brattleboro Words Project to wrangle the words. I was happy to have something that could be done from home this year. There was a great deal of remote collaboration. I offer my prayers for your health & safety during a watchful Advent."



"Dreamscapes," episode 2 of the SOLO series featured **Adrienne Major** as Prospero in Shakespeare's "The Tempest." She must renounce the magical powers she has used to bewitch and enchant if she is to attain freedom and redemption. SOLO is a co-production of the Hooker-Dunham Theater and the Rock River Players, and is shown on Brattleboro Community TV and the "Hooker-Dunham Presents" channel on YouTube

OUR CONDOLENCES TO:

Joyce Ranney, whose brother **Wendell** had been diagnosed with Covid-19. On December 1st she learned that he has died of it. Wendell has lived in a skilled nursing facility in northern Vermont for the past couple of years, but Joyce had kept in touch with him by phone. He leaves his wife Rae, and at least one daughter.

AND TO **Amy Cann** and **Lise Sparrow Peppin** who recently lost their mothers.

AND TO the families of **Phyllis Anderson**, who died on November 5th and of **Lilian Chaffee** who died on October 21st.

Some news from the Gifford clan: "We welcome Myles Matheke Gifford - born Nov. 19, 2020, to Michael and Katy Gifford, big brother Logan, and grandparents **Kendall Gifford and Liz Bourne**. Myles and his family live in Colchester."



Missing Since November 11, Just south of the intersection of the Westminster West Road and Patch Road. Friskie is a 10 year old female cat with no teeth wearing a purple flea collar. She is an indoor/outdoor cat. If you have seen her please contact us at 387-4337. Thanks

The Vermont Shepherd Farm Store at Patch Farm Road (off Patch Road) is open daily for your gift shopping convenience. (Sheep milk cheese, gelato, and yogurt, local yarn, Sidehill jam, Stephen's syrup, Miss Mouse's herbal soaps, feedbag totes, etc.)

From **Caitlin Adair**: "The plant community near my home made a lot of herbal medicine this year, way more medicine than food, it seemed. I have reasonably priced organic herbal tinctures and CBD salve to share with community members. Email me for complete list. All profits will be divided between LEAG and CCWW." pcadair@sover.net

After completing Levels I, II & III in Healing Touch for humans this past summer, **Andrea Capron** is now studying to be certified in Healing Touch for Animals. Her specialty will be in horses, but she will also be certified to practice on all animals including dogs and cats. Andrea has always had a love of animals, particularly horses, and is excited to be able to utilize her healing skills not only for humans, but for animals as well. Healing Touch is a form of energy medicine. This technique is a loving, safe and gentle way to support the animal's energetic body in maintaining health and wellness throughout their lives, and can even assist in their final transition. Animals experience all aspects of life just like we do. They know how to feel, give and share love, pleasure, joy, fear, loss and pain. They are adept on picking up on our own emotions and can react to our stress in ways we may not understand or be aware of. Healing Touch works with the energy system(s) to assist the body towards its natural state of wellness.

While Andrea is undergoing her training, she will be seeking animals on which to practice Healing Touch techniques. Andrea will be holding nothing but the "highest good" intentions while she works creating a loving and safe environment. Both animals and human energy systems are highly intuitive and know how much healing energy is needed and where it needs to go. Andrea is merely a conduit of the energy. It does not come from her. Should you be interested in facilitating her training by offering an opportunity for her to work with your animal, or have any questions about Healing Touch, you can reach her at andreacapron109@gmail.com

Disclaimer: Healing Touch for Animals techniques "are designed to enhance the self-healing process and do not replace traditional medical or veterinary health care, medical diagnosis or medical treatment for illness." From Komitor Healing Method, Inc.

WHISTLE BLOWER continued . . .

News from Toronto is that **R Benett (RB/Rachel) Axtell and Ilana Teitelman** have welcomed a charming 22 month old into their family as their foster-daughter. Lior and she are best of friends, sharing a love of their two cats, favorite playgrounds, cooking with their parents and Skyping with their grandparents, Charlotte Gifford and Dan Axtell.

RB also just got the great news that she's had accepted as the lead author a paper about voice-user interfaces in her field's major journal, *Proceedings of Computer Human Interaction*. (The fun part is that she uses transcripts of *Star Trek's The Next Generation* as her examples of interactions!) She's a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto.

A bit of soup history from **Patti Whalen**: "I started the soup sale with Kathy Richardson and Nick Keil (in 2001). The first year it was a fundraiser for George Shuster's family. In the earlier years Westminster Cares sold soup on the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend. Kathy, Nick and I ran it together until 2007. I left to work in Bosnia and Kathy and Nick ran it. Leslie and Tom also were main volunteers. I was back assisting Kathy in 2014. 2019 was our last year as coordinators. Kathy has been there since the beginning. In the early years we delivered soup to the crafts people. We had a number of teenagers who drove and would take orders directly to their studios. In those years we had little competition for a hot lunch site. It was great fun as people (locals and tourists) came year after year looking for the same soups."

Wednesday Walkers are a pick up group of people and a few dogs who meet Wednesday mornings at 9am at the West West church to go on a walk in the woods. It's been going on for a couple of decades in the same spontaneous style: we decide the route on the spot, at 9:00, and stay out most of the morning, often on trails or old roads, sometimes just bush-whacking from the church. Rarely do we go out of Westminster; there's lots to learn about local topography when you cover the distance on foot. Right now the Covid surge has discouraged the walks--hard to stay 6 feet away even outdoors. So for the time being they aren't meeting. But walks will resume when it is safe to do so. Anyone is welcome to come along. Just show up, or for more information call Bari Shamas 578-8295 or Libby Mills 387-5596.

LEAG PROGRAM FEATURING RICH HOLSCHUOH



Join us for an evening of conversation with Rich Holschuh who will speak with us about "the Atowi Project, an Elnu Abenaki community initiative to affirm Native relationships to the Land and its inhabitants, raise Indigenous voices, and foster inclusion with understanding, in place." To join this community circle

offered by the Atowi Project and the Living Earth Action Group, email Guy Payne at gpaynevt@gmail.com to register to receive the link to join via Zoom. The event will occur from 5pm to 6:30pm on Friday, December 18, 2020. An email with the link will be sent to you in the morning on December 18.

A NEIGHBOR ASKS

(in response to my request for Whistler New)

How can there be no news!!!

The world has turned upside down and inside out.

I don't have any news. My life is as everyone else's. I would encourage everyone to be kind to, and understanding of those around them. Do what you can do for others and do not judge anyone or yourself.

Till I am in someone else's shoes how can I know what their life is like. It's funny how whatever I have judged, turns out I end up doing the same thing. Just didn't see it before. And sometimes I have sensed something, but did not dig further to find out the problem and help.

It is a sad and difficult time for so many people, animals and nature. So much suffering in this world has intensified.

So my news is try and help where you can. It doesn't have to be big, even a little thing is good! A real heart felt little act goes into the heart of God.

Now is a hard time, I cannot go near anyone to lend a hand, or take care of someone. I do what I can when I see it. Sometimes it's only work because I think it's good, sometimes it is from my heart.

Everyone needs kindness. Peace. Love. God.

Otherwise what is our human purpose?

I ask myself this question.

MEMORIES OF MOUNT FUJI

By Eshagh E. Shaoul

A poem I had written when living in Japan during 1987 to 1989 (*Images that came to mind as I was waiting by the campfire for my son Cyrus and his friends to come down from Mount Fuji in Japan*)

Flames of love
Burning
Like fire
Left behind caravans
Lonely
Longing.

Mount Fuji
Sunset, Sunrise
A tear a smile, dreams
Touching, burning,
Love, fear, confusion, hope,
Memories.

Flames of love,
Like fires left behind caravans,
Finally die,
Waiting to give.
Waiting to share,
Waiting to be touched.

Flames left behind Mount Fuji
Sacred, beautiful, open, honest,
Still burning with happiness,
Wanting,
Waiting
"To remember, to remind."

BOOK CLUB SET TO GO AT LIBRARY

The library book group meet over Zoom the 3rd Monday every month (from 7-9 pm). The job of presenter and discussion leader is shared among members, with the person who proposed the book under discussion being the leader. New members are welcome. Please call Lise Cavanaugh (387-4682) with your questions and/or to sign up as a participant. Lise will order copies of the books through inter library loan. Please get in touch with her if you have, or are planning to have, copies of the books. Here is our list for the new year:

January 18: Sarah Steward Taylor: "The Mountains Wild: A Mystery"

February 15: Christy Lefteri: "The Beekeeper of Aleppo"

March 15: Michelle Obama: "Becoming"

April 19: Sonia Shah: "The Next Great Migration: The Beauty and Terror of Life on the Move"

May 17: Ruth Bader Ginsberg: "My Own Words" or "Notorious RBG", do you have a favorite you can recommend???

June 21: James Rebanks: "The Shepherd's Life: Modern Dispatches from an Ancient Landscape"

THE FUTURE AT OUR BIG LITTLE LIBRARY

It goes without saying that 2020 has been a year like no other. We each have stories of change, uncertainty, fear, loss, and disappointment. Everything feels different, but change can also be inspiring. We can all grow through this complex time, we can innovate, and expand our understanding of the world. As we face the future, the Library has you to thank. With so much community love and support, we are thrilled to move forward; stronger, more resilient, more inclusive, and ready for the future.

As the Library continues to grow, we rise to meet the needs of the community. We have an active board membership with lofty goals to keep the library up with these changing times. 2021 is the year we automate! Yes, we used the quarantine time to clean, organize, weed out old books, fundraise, and plan. Our automation committee and volunteers are poised to barcode all our books for better service. We have an amazing collection of books, and purchase new books all the time. In fact, we just got 90 new children's books with a grant and a generous local contribution. This year we will combine our collection with the Catamount network of libraries, and you will have access to hundredths of thousands of books. And you can browse on your computer for your next cozy read. Please keep an eye out for this year's appeal letter or go to: www.westminsterwestlibrary.org/donate to support the library, we hope, you know and love.

Thank you!
THANK YOU!
THANK YOU!

The trustees and members of the Congregational Church would like to thank each and every one of you for making our 31st Annual NON-Community Fair a great success. So many of you helped by attending concerts, dining at our take home Tristan Toleno food events, bidding on a virtual Auction item, or by donating your time or money. It didn't totally fill in the hole in our budget, but in made a big dent. During this difficult pandemic time, we are truly grateful for your support. Stay safe over the holidays.



David Mulholland's photo of the sunrise seen from his house.

WESTMINSTER CARES LAUNCHES 2020-2021 ANNUAL APPEAL

Through the generosity of community members, the Town of Westminster, local businesses, and fundraising events and grants, Westminster Cares raises money each year to meet our budget requirements and pay for the programs and services we provide to seniors and adults with disabilities in our community. The Annual Appeal typically raises between 20%-30% of our annual budget. Funds generated from the Appeal support programs and services such as Meals-on-Wheels; Equipment Loans; our Community Nurse; Shopping Assistance; Friendly Check-In Calls; the Healthy Aging Group; Healthy Aging Exercise classes; and resource and referral assistance.

This year has been an extraordinarily challenging year for individuals, families, businesses and non-profit organizations alike. We've all been faced with difficult choices and more demands on our resources. Due to the pandemic, we were forced to cancel most of our event-based fundraisers, including the 2020 Garden Tour, our major fundraising event.

Since the shut-down in March, we've been humbled by the outpouring of community support – offers to volunteer; donations of masks, gloves and supplies; contributions made by individuals and businesses; and grants received. We hope you'll be able to contribute to this year's Appeal and help raise funds so Westminster Cares can adapt to the challenges we face in the coming months. No gift is too small and every single gift is appreciated.

✱ STEALING SOME EGGS ON A SNOWY EVENING ✱

By Peter Adair

(with acknowledgement and apology to R. Frost)

Whose hens these are I think I know
His truck is in the village though;
He will not see me idling here
To watch his flock a -roosting so.

With my little Toyota in neutral gear
I stop along the driveway near
Between new moon and unlit coop'
The darkest evening of the year.

I give its tiny horn a toot 🚗
In case the neighbors are about.
Only the sounds of scratching feet
And soft cluck-clucks amid the loot.

I do not mean to be a creep,
But homeward sneak now with my keep,
With eggs to fry before I sleep,
With eggs to fry before I sleep. 🍳

WESTMINSTER PLANNING COMMISSION NEWS

From : Seroya Crouch, Westminster Planning Commission,
and Lead for Agriculture and Silviculture Chapter
SeroyaCrouch@gmail.com.

The Planning Commission is in a 2-year process of developing a new plan for the town of Westminster VT. We are interested in public input and are beginning to reach out to the community regarding a number of areas.

Agriculture in Westminster: A Rich Heritage in Flux.

Westminster depends on its farms and we are blessed to have a wide variety of farms here from large organic vegetable and annual crop farms, sheep and cow commercial dairies, fruit orchards, mixed family farms, plant nurseries, and maple syrup operations, to smaller family homesteads focusing on heritage breeds and self-sufficiency. The diversity of agricultural practices and value-added products, including award-winning artisanal cheeses, made by our farmers, growers and foragers lends a delightful and unexpected richness to this town! This diversity also helps create economic resiliency and food security in world that is constantly changing, and in which macroeconomic and climatic forces impact our national food system in ways beyond our local control. For example, the extraordinary economic pressures on dairies combined with COVID-related impacts that led to the sad closure of Thomas Dairy in Rutland in October. It is more important than ever for us to plan for a future. How can we, as a town, encourage a thrivable, not just survivable future for all of us? Surely part of that future depends on local farming, growing, and value-added food and medicine production. However, that all depends on rebuilding and maintaining the soils that were depleted by overgrazing in the past so we can grow healthy and abundant crops, as well as all of us engaging in our local economy and supporting our farmers and growers.

What is the Future of Farming and Forest Products in Westminster? We are reaching out to farmers to solicit ideas, feedback and input to the planning process to so that our Town Plan supports our farms to thrive long into the future. We will be asking farmers to submit written feedback and ideas, meet to share concerns and ideas, participate in a working group, and engage in generative conversations as together we craft a vision for the future of farming in Westminster. I suspect that if you are a farmer or grower, you think about this a lot, and I look forward to meeting you and learning about your challenges and successes. I invite you to reach out to me about this important topic. As a start, we are creating a list of farms and sugar operations in the town. I encourage you to click [here](#) to access link so see so see if your farm or value-added business is listed, and please contact me with your information if we do not yet have it.



Christmas
Tree
Photo:
Guy
Payne



IF WATER IS LIFE, THEN WATER IS SACRED

From Caitlin Adair

We learned the phrase “M’ni wiconi” from the Lakota Sioux at Standing Rock, back in 2016. A lot of water has passed under our bridges since then, but, Water is still Life. Water is within every single living cell. Did you know that water on Earth came from rocks? The water was released by the fiery impact of a huge meteor crashing into our just-forming Earth, slowing her spin and taking a chunk of Earth rocks with it. That powerful meteor-melded-with-Earth-rocks became Earth’s radiant companion, Moon, ultimately resulting in oceans, tides, seasonal variation, indeed, making Life possible on this fiery-cored rocky planet. That’s the short version of the most likely scientific explanation of the origin of Earth’s oceans.

A Practice Everyone Can Do: Begin to see water as sacred. Just that. Find out what it might mean to your daily life and spiritual life if you began to remember that Water and Life are inseparable, and that both are Sacred. It has changed and enriched my life, that remembering. May it do the same for you.

CONNECT WITH OUR REPRESENTATIVES

From Mike Mrowicki

In our community of Westminster, VT “Neighbors helping neighbors” is alive and well. State Representatives Michelle Bos-Lun and Mike Mrowicki of the Windham 4 District (Westminster, Putney & Dummerston) will be hosting a Monthly Online Community Meeting on the 3rd Saturday of each month, during the Legislative session (January to May).

With Covid precluding the Legislature from meeting in person, it also prevents them from meeting with constituents in person. (Hopefully, this will change sooner rather than later in 2021) Your State Legislators do want to stay in touch and share what’s happening with Legislative work. These regular Online meetings will provide a regular forum to hear updates and share your suggestions and questions. For Log-In info to participate in these meetings, please email either legislator.

Of course, your State Reps are available anytime something comes up that you don’t know where to turn to about. Email is the quickest way to get in touch at the following addresses; mmrowicki@leg.state.vt.us and mboslun@leg.state.vt.us

Updates are also available on Facebook or online at www.windham4.online Lastly, phone messages can also be left at 802-387-8787.

THE CHURCH IS OPEN BUT THE BUILDING IS CLOSED

WESTMINSTER WEST CHURCH SERVICES

Sunday worship begins at 10am – via ZOOM
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3431416617?pwd=QUIhaXh3L1oxaEJOTUFDLzJ3TjV6Zz09>

Meeting ID: 343 141 6617 Passcode: 05346

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

In this year of so very many changes, our church's traditions around Christmas season services have also shifted slightly. If you have a hankering to participate in our service of lessons and carols, we'll be holding that via Zoom on **Christmas Eve at 7 p.m.** The service will include the traditional Christmas story as told through scriptures, as well as musical offerings by church musicians Fred Gray and Eric Robbins, and parishioners Nick Keil, Kathryn Tolbert & Ingrid Brinkman, Amy Cann, Jenny Holan, and Malcolm Toleno. In addition, we'll sing a number of carols as a congregation (from the comfort and safety of our homes, to be sure). If you plan to participate, it might be fun to have a candle at the ready, so that we can share the candlelight as we sing "Silent Night."

ONLINE PAYMENT OPTION NOW AVAILABLE

Did you know how easy it is to support the work of our church? There is a "button" on the home page of our website (www.westminsterwest.org), where a one-time or repeating donation can easily be made, either using your favorite credit/debit card or using PayPal. We certainly thank you for helping us get through this difficult season!

FOCUS ON HUNGER

The Second Sunday of each month is Hunger Sunday at the church. On this day we receive our monthly Manna Offering benefiting Our Place in Bellows Falls. Each \$ that is given can be used by them to purchase \$10 worth of food from the VT Food Bank. The deacons suggest that people consider offering the cost of one meal for their household. If folks aren't able to be in church but wish to participate, they can send money to the church directly. Worshippers are also given the option of non-monetary donations, such as extra produce from your garden, that are helpful to Our Place.

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

Due to our church building being closed for the time being, our pastor, Rev. Susie Webster-Toleno, is observing more flexible office hours, not always on-site. That said, she reserves **Thursday** afternoons for visits to people's homes or outdoor walks when requested, and appointments for other times can be made via email to: susiewt@gmail.com or phone or text: (802-579-8356). She takes Mondays as her day of Sabbath rest.

BUILDING USE: Tom Griffith 387-5694
tgriffith@hilltopmontessori.org

DEACONS: Charlotte Gifford 387-4145
gifford@languagehead.com

TRUSTEES: Guy Payne 869-2600
gpaynevt@gmail.com

WEB SITE: www.westminsterwest.org



Photo by Guy Payne

NEW ENTRANCE FOR OUR CHURCH

The Congregational Church has a new walkway as you enter the church. Gone are the yew bushes that trapped snow causing ice build-up inches thick near the road. With Alison Latham's encouragement we retrieved the stone foundation blocks that had been stored in the back parking lot after our church burned in 1989. They had been piled there since that tragedy. Now they have a home welcoming all and conveying our desire for openness and inclusion. Thaddeus and Jan Guild of TMG Enterprises in Cambridgeport did the excavation and placement of the stones, they also raised the sidewalk as much as possible to allow water to drain away.

A TRADITION OF REACHING OUT

by Pastor Susie Webster-Toleno

As has become our tradition, the church will be sending gift cards to a number of local families. Each year we are supported in this effort by some of the funds from the Women's Fellowship Soup Sale, for which we are so grateful. But alas that sale did not take place this year. Luckily others have stepped forward to insure we can continue this tradition. We would welcome community help with our project too – if you would like to donate money to offset our costs, please call Susie (579-8356) or email Alison (aliemae1@outlook.com) and leave a message. If you know of any children, families, or adults who need help over the holiday season (and also over the winter,) please let us know

WEEKLY MID-DAY PRAYER SERVICE

Pastor Susie continues to set time aside for prayers for the community, usually on Thursday afternoons from 1:30-2:00. She is not welcoming prayers in person at the church at that time due to current restrictions on gathering beyond household groups, but most weeks during that time she offers prayers and a brief reflection time via live stream on our church's Facebook page. This can be accessed even by people who don't have Facebook accounts! Join her at that time (or later, as it remains available online) to light a candle and raise the joys and concerns of our community in prayer. If you have prayer concerns that you'd like to include on her list (to be said aloud or held in confidentiality), call or email her and let her know. (See contact information in Church Office Hours.)

HEAR ALL ABOUT IT

THE PINNACLE ASSOCIATION'S LATEST PROJECT

Whistler readers won't be surprised to learn that the Pinnacle Association is working on yet another exciting conservation project! WHPA is now preparing to acquire and preserve the 615+/- acre Massey property. The land lies to the west of the Pinnacle ridgeline, in the immediate view from the Pinnacle. It's what we see in the foreground below us when we look out to the sunset. Because it meets the Pinnacle boundary at the access point of the Town Line Trail on Grassy Brook Road, it is contiguous with the 2100 acres already conserved by WHPA.

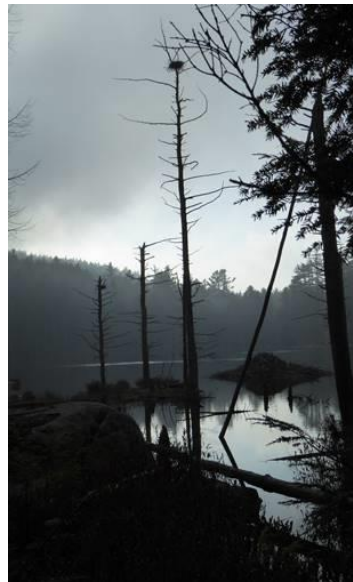
To learn more about the Massey land, and why it's important to conserve, come to the Living Earth Action Group's zoom meeting on January 15th, from 5-6:30pm. Camil Roberts, Libby Mills, Lisa Merton and others will be there to explain the project in more detail with photos and maps, and also suggest ways for you to be part of the project as it gathers steam—and funds for the purchase. To join in this meeting email Guy Payne at gpaynevt@gmail.com to register to receive the link to join via Zoom.. An email with the link will be sent to you in the morning on January 15th.

This remarkable property deserves protection. Its unfragmented forest is primary habitat for bear and moose; the wetlands and vernal pools support the endangered Northern Bullrush along with other uncommon plants, and wood turtles live in the watershed of Grassy Brook. Near the highest point—over 1700 feet—lie two pristine ponds, containing beaver colonies, a heron rookery, and several species of ducks. Since undeveloped ponds are rare in our area, their protection is crucial. The entire property lies in state ranked priority habitat block, and connects to another large conserved property to the south. By allowing the trees to grow on this large tract, there will be ongoing carbon sequestration and storage for mitigation of climate change impacts, a vital step for our planet that the Pinnacle is perfectly poised to take! Below is a photo of the Lily Pond that is on the edge of the property.



Formerly owned by the late Jim Massey of Westminster West, the land is now in the hands of his nephews in Ohio. The purchase price of \$500,000, is hefty, but the owners have agreed to sell to the Pinnacle below the appraised value of \$610,000; they want to carry out their uncle's wish that it be conserved. Raising funds to meet the purchase price is a challenge that the Pinnacle is meeting head-on, with growing momentum!

This acquisition may be the most ambitious conservation project undertaken by the Association. It is arguably the most important because of its size, location and the present and potential connections to other large blocks of protected land. It will be an enormous gift to future generations, as our climate changes and many species (including our own) seek



new habitat. Right now, it's conservation will guarantee that the land stays undeveloped, that the habitat will be there for the beaver to build and the heron to reproduce. Not to mention our own pleasure in seeing the familiar green hillside in the foreground as we all look toward Stratton and beyond. Photo of heron's nest and beaver lodge on Lily Pond.

THE DAY I ALMOST CAUGHT MY FIRST TROUT

By Steve Belczak

The mills were closing. The river had been harnessed, used, and now was returning everything back to the Earth.

Everything was a crumbled, decaying mess. We celebrate the day when the landlords of the river harnessed water power creating civilization for all. But now we have it all for ourselves

My friend and I made our way through the crumbling rocks, poison ivy, blocks, and bricks to the river's edge. Under the flatter rocks along the shoreline, crayfish hid. That was our bait for the larger fish.

We saw the shadows of fish during low flow in eddies and slower whirlpools where all things congregated. baitfish, leaves, bottles. The predators, the top of the food chain fish, were somewhere in there as well.

One mill was still open and the colored dye emitted from their bowels indicated the type of newsprint that day. Glossy mostly, for supermarket inserts included in the weekly paper. What level poison we never knew and that mill died as well, leaving the river to itself.

We would use artificial lures after the bait ran out.

In between a stronger and slower current, creating a conveyor belt of food, a drifting spoon caught a fish. A red and white colored curved spoon that wobbled luxuriously beneath the waves

The spoon sunk to greater depths that day because I was distracted by a nest of ground bees. The current pulled the spoon down into the depths. A flakey painted red spoon, the edges rusted, with a white stripe down the middle

There's an aggressive streak right away that I noticed when the fish grabs the thing. The spoon resembles nothing natural or creature like. The fish dives downstream and his power and presence drags me down and he turns on top the water splashing.

The fish came close to shore and showed me his eye, his silver back side with black and red spots and a hooked upper jaw. And the splashing. This was his world.

My friend Albert grabbed for the line to pull him in, but the line broke, leaving a moment in time for everyone to contemplate. Then the fish jumped and the spoon went flying past me like a bullet and hit poor Albert in the head.

The fish lived and Albert joined the Air Force.

WESTMINSTER WEST SCHOOL NEWS

From Principal Elizabeth Harty: While this year has been anything but normal, here are a few snapshots of what's happening at Westminster Center School.

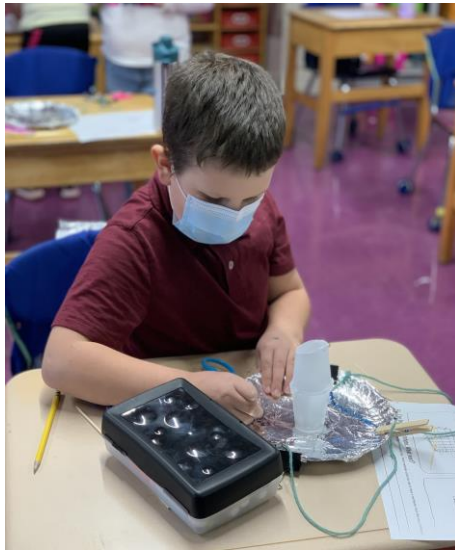


With many COVID restrictions on wind instruments and singing, we are lucky our PTO has purchased ukuleles for our students this year. Our Music teacher, Danielle St. Amand, wasted no time getting them into the hands of our learners.

The final challenge in our second graders unit on animal biodiversity is for students to create a prototype for a bird feeder. They are hard at work putting their skills to the test. These

prototypes are currently being tested out on a tree in our schoolyard. (Photo below: student making a bird feeder.)

Studio Y is in full swing. This week 5th graders took a voyage through time to recreate the Early Explorers' journeys in this year's adventure, Navigating Time. These adventurous fifth graders have researched the time period known as, The Age of Discovery, convinced a king to fund a dangerous voyage, and even built small sailing ships that sailed. Only time will tell what amazing feats our young explorers will accomplish, in this year's Studio Y adventure...Stay Tuned



WESTMINSTERS VOTERS TO CONSIDER

Withdrawal from Unified School District January 5

A special election of the voters of Westminster has been scheduled for January 5, 2020 to consider whether or not to take steps to withdraw from the forcibly merged school district of the towns of Athens, Grafton and Westminster. This district, now named Windham Northeast Union Elementary School District, was created by the Vermont State Board of Education in November 2018. Current law makes it possible for a town's voters, after more than one year within a school district, to vote to withdraw. Voters should know that all three towns' schools would remain part of the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union. This change would allow deliberation of school matters, including budgets, to return to Town Meeting within the town of Westminster, rather than in a special meeting of the voters of the three towns.

The vote will be by Australian ballot. In person voting will be held on January 5. All voters may request that an absentee ballot be mailed to them by contacting the town clerk, 722-4091. The ballot will include two articles that read as follows:

Article I Shall the voters of Westminster approve the withdrawal of the Town of Westminster from the Windham Northeast Union Elementary School District?

Article II In the event Article I is approved, shall the voters of Westminster authorize and instruct the Westminster Select board to undertake all steps necessary to do the following;

- 1) Form a Westminster Town School District to be responsible for the operation of schools and educational programs for Westminster students;
- 2) Obtain the return to the Westminster Town School District of all school buildings and property owned by the Town School District prior to the forced merger;
- 3) Appoint five (5) town residents to an interim Town School District Board to effect the transition and return of the operation of schools and educational programs to the Town School District;
- 4) Schedule a Town election at the next annual Town meeting of 2021 to elect five (5) town residents to the Town School District Board with staggered terms as existed prior to the forced merger.

If the vote to withdraw is successful in Westminster, then within 90 days, voters in both Athens and Grafton would vote whether or not to ratify Westminster's withdrawal. If all three towns vote to approve, then the request would go to the Vermont State Board of Education. Current law requires the board to approve the request, as long as the State Board determines a) that the town students can attend a school that is in compliance with the rules pertaining to educational programs, and, b) that it is in the best interest of the state that Athens and Grafton remain as one district.

The Town of Westminster will host an informational meeting regarding the vote to withdraw on Tuesday, Dec 29 at 6:30 pm. The meeting will be held via zoom. Look for more details and a link to the meeting at the town's website in the coming days.

SUGGESTED DONATION FOR THE WHISTLER

Basic \$15 Neighborly \$50 Angelic \$100

Send donations to CCWW Whistler, 44 Church St, WW, 05346

"CHRISTMAS COMES"

by Maren Tirabassi

Christmas comes to my friend in withdrawal
at Strafford County House of Correction,
and the ninety-year-old grandpa
in the nursing home
who hasn't spoken in six months.

It comes to the beagle who bays at the skunk,
balsams and Frazier's leaning wrapped
against the fence in the Christmas tree lot,
and many children who also,
for some reason, and in some place,
have not been chosen.

Christmas comes to the shoppers who pause
to listen to the bell-ringing
and put a little money in the kettle.
It comes even if they do it
because someone is watching,
and it comes for those who never stop.

Christmas come to the man
who mourns his partner,
and to the woman who mourns her mother,
and Christmas comes to the partner and mother -
differently, of course -
less fruitcake, more angels.

Christmas comes in December
to unprepared pageant committees
and the soldier deployed.
It comes to small dancers in the Nutcracker
and to a previously unemployed man
who grows and powders a beard
because mall Santas earn more with their own facial hair.

Christmas comes in 2020
to the grieving and the exhausted,
those who have never known
so much loneliness
or so much desperation just to be alone,
those facing financial disaster
or deciding never to nurse again.

Christmas comes whether we are ready or not;

It comes whether we want it or not;
It comes whether we used to believe,
or try to believe, or are afraid to believe.

Christmas comes with presents and with absence.
It comes as expected,
and it comes as a nearly unbearable surprise.

(By Maren Tirabassi in her book Christmas at the Epsom Circle McDonald's and Other Poems, copyright 2020.)

RIGHT; Photo of a painting by Nancy Calicchio of Live Water Farm's barn on a hazy fall morning.



MYSTERY CAIRN

Once long ago a group of Wednesday Walkers came across this cairn on the top of the Windmill Hill Ridgeline. We wondered who built it, and when. Was it ancient or modern? Did it serve some astronomical purpose? At sunrise on the Winter Solstice, we came back to see if the sun shone directly through the slots between the stones. Alas, no such romantic truth—but we had a wonderful walk anyway. The walkers were Libby Mills, Alison Latham, Toby Young, Carol and Arthur Westling and Randy Major. Photo: Libby Mills

PUTNEY CRAFT TOUR WENT VIRTUAL

The 42nd Putney Craft Tour was virtual this year. Judy Hawkins, Jeanne Bennett, Parish Hill Creamery and Nancy Calicchio were participants in Westminster West. Visit their studios and do your Christmas shopping at the same time. The website putneycrafts.com will still be up after the weekend so if anyone missed the virtual tour weekend they can make virtual contact with the artisans if they want to purchase a holiday gift or treat themselves to an original hand-made craft



Congregational Church of Westminster West
THE WEST PARISH WHISTLER

44 Church Street
Putney, VT 05346-9098



A bowl of soup is like manna from heaven

WINTER CALENDAR

WEEKLY EVENTS:

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH of WEST WEST

Church Service – by ZOOM Sunday 10am

To access Zoom, go to our website, www.westminsterwest.org and the link is at the top of the homepage. Password is 05346

HEALTH AND FITNESS:

For new comers to exercise classes, Westminster Cares needs to determine if the person is appropriate for that class first so they need to call Donna Dawson at Westminster Cares 722- 3607 and she will put them in touch with the instructor.

STRONG LIVING is happening by ZOOM

Karen Walter and Ronnie Friedman lead online weight classes 10:30am on Mondays and Thursdays. There is room for more folks and a donation to Westminster Cares is appreciated. To get on Karen's list email her Karensww7@gmail.com. However the Zoom host is Karen Blanchard, ren.blanchardreddog@gmail.com. To get on Ronnie's list email her - veronicafriedman24@gmail.com

YOGA is happening by ZOOM

Lisa Nigro leads a class Monday mornings from 10 to 11:15.
Email Lisa at lisa.nigro.yoga@gmail.com

PRE-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Cancelled due to Covid 19

WESTMINSTER WEST LIBRARY

Mon 7-9pm * Tue & Wed 2-6pm * Thur 10am-noon
Sat 10am – noon Questions: email Lise Cavanaugh
Masks and social distancing are required
LiseHCavanaugh@aol.com

BUTTERFIELD LIBRARY

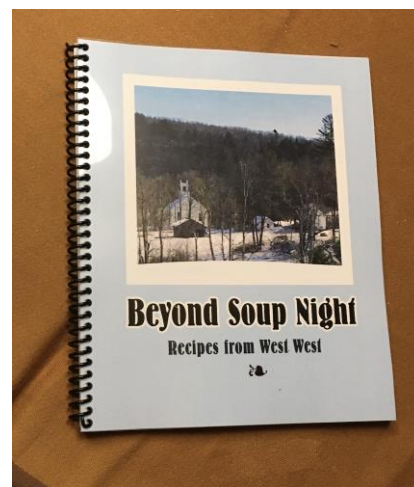
The Institute is closed but the library is doing curbside delivery of books. For service, contact their website: <https://butterfieldlibraryvt.wordpress.com/>
The Institute & the Library share a Facebook page.

SENIOR ACTIVITIES

Secrets of Healthy Aging is happening by phone (WebEx).
To register for this activity, call Donna Dawson 722-3607 and a number will be emailed to you the day before the event.

RECYCLING

Recycling Center on Rte 5 - Wed & Sat - 9am - 1pm



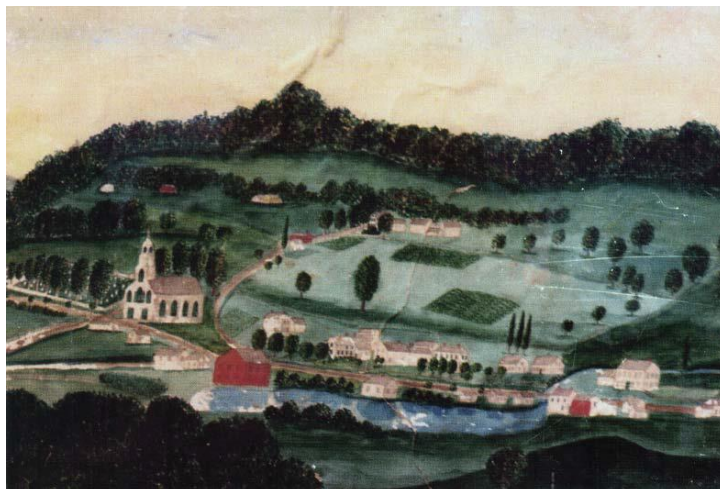
BEYOND SOUP NIGHT

is now available for Holiday shoppers

"Beyond Soup Night," is a collection of recipes to benefit the Congregational Church of Westminster West donated by the congregations members, families and friends, to whom this book is gratefully dedicated.

It all began in 2001 when a group of community members (Patti Whalen, Nick Keil, and Kathy Richardson) wanted to have a fund raiser dedicated to causes and needs beyond the church itself. They came up with the idea of selling soup during the Putney Craft Tour traditionally held the weekend after Thanksgiving. Then Leslie Turpin, a member of the River Singers, realized how many of the singers came to rehearsals hungry because they didn't have time to eat. So Leslie and Tom Griffith organized the selling of soup before rehearsals.

People loved the soups so much, we kept getting requests for the recipes. For many years we toyed with the idea of putting together a soup cookbook but it took the onset of the COVID pandemic and Ray Huessey's willingness to design and edit the cookbook to make it happen. The book will be available for purchase as of December 19th for \$25.00. You can pick up your recipe books at Charlotte Gifford's home (1674 Westminster West Rd.) She or Dan will be happy to do a socially-distanced transfer of your copy for \$25, cash or check. Please call 387-4145 to arrange a pickup time; leave a message if necessary. Generally we can complete the handoff 8 am to 8 pm.



An early 19th century painting of the village of Westminster West

