

FESTIVALS OF LIGHT!

There are a few risks to presenting a service like this one. There is always the possibility of cultural misappropriation, possibly worsened by the limited way we are able to present each of the Festivals, though we try to make it clear that we are only recognizing that these and other Festivals of Light are celebrated by the various religious traditions. There is also the risk that our presentation of each of the holidays is too shallow to represent its tradition and the full range of understandings that may exist in different segments of that tradition. Further, the limited time that we spend on each tradition prevents significant responses in regard to the deeper meanings of parts of the traditional rituals. There is also a certain risk that some people may opt not to come because this is by its nature a multigenerational service. Even so, this service has, over the years, become one of my favorite services to put together. And that is even in years when I don't take out my trains! Now let me briefly tell you why!

One of the most beautiful, amazing, and unique things about Unitarian Universalism is that we recognize that there are many paths to truth, some religious, some philosophical, some scientific. Some Unitarian Universalists believe in a central deity, while others believe in the life force, and others believe in the laws of physics. We do not require any particular belief in God nor in the lack thereof to belong to Unitarian Universalism. We do generally agree in the Principles of Unitarian Universalism, but even lacking full agreement with them would not necessarily prevent a person of good will from joining our movement. When we share some recognition of the traditions from which our movement has gained insight we not only recognize our openness to learning from many traditions but we also welcome persons who have come from those traditions.

We do expect those joining our movement to respect the beliefs and values of others, to be committed to building a better world, and to share in the work of

the community. We have neither creed, doctrine, nor dogma, and our Principles were never intended as any kind of test of belief. The UU Principles constitute a descriptive statement of what we commonly believe and seek to practice, but they are more aspirational than dogmatic. When we share the Festivals of Light, we are symbolically recognizing that there are things about each religious tradition that we hold in common, that there are individual practices that are interesting and valuable, and that we seek to be in dialogue with these and other traditions.

Personally, I do not feel comfortable preaching about traditions other than those within the Judeo-Christian family and Humanism, but I am glad to encourage others with a deeper understanding of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Wicca and other traditions to share about them. In this service we recognize that each of the many paths offer wisdom, and affirm that we as a tradition welcome the stories, ritual, and wisdom of those many paths. Today, without going into any depth, we at least acknowledge that there is much to learn from each tradition. This is a lesson that we also offer our children. We hope that they will choose Unitarian Universalism but we share our respect for the other traditions and encourage them to learn about the many paths as they continue on their journeys!

Whatever traditions we may celebrate in our homes, we can share in celebrating life and love and community as we gather together. We can celebrate the blessings that we have received and reach out to share blessings with others. Even in challenging years such as this, we can celebrate the blessings that we enjoy in this nation and in this community. Around the world, there are many people suffering and struggling, refugees from ongoing wars are too often being turned away, and many in our nation would turn aside from the ideals of the founders. As this calendar year winds toward its end, our voices are needed in calling for justice with compassion. Today we honor the many paths, traditions, and peoples who share this earth with us. As Unitarian Universalists we seek to include & welcome all who seek to join us. May the festivals we honor today remind us of the best of humanity all around the world!

Happy Holidays & Amen!