

UNIVERSALIST UNITARIAN CHURCH Waterville, Maine

Date: Sunday, March 12th, 2023

Theme: “Sacred Rebels: Women in Ministry”

Throughout history and down to our modern day, women have influenced spirituality and shaped faith traditions. This service is a glimpse at some magnificent female spiritual leaders and the values and beliefs they challenged and promoted.

Worship Leader: Rev. “Twinkle” Marie Manning

Message: “Sacred Rebels: Women in Ministry”

*I call into our gathering circle
these Mothers in Ministry
The Ancient,
The Ancestors, and
ones Alive today:*

***Hildegard of Bingen
Antoinette Brown Blackwell
Angela Warnick Buchdahl
Ruth Barrett
Kate Braestrup
Thandeka
and
Sally Azar***

Radical Way-showers, all!

***May your names be known;
May your teachings be heard;
May your wisdom linger
in our hearts,
forever.***

Hildegard of Bingen

Born circa 1098

was a **German Benedictine nun**, abbess, and polymath active as a writer, composer, philosopher, mystic, visionary, as well as a medical writer and practitioner.

She is credited as the **Originator of German alternative medicine** and is recognized for her contributions to **holistic** health and wellness.

Alive during the High Middle Ages, her music is among **the most recorded** in *modern* history.

She also invented an alternate alphabet.

Lingua ignota (meaning “*Unknown Language*” in Latin)

Is essentially a **secret code. Consisting of** a series of invented words that corresponded to an eclectic list of 1000 nouns.

Barbara Newman, author of the book: “Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World” believes that Hildegard used her *Lingua Ignota* to increase solidarity among her nuns.

Sarah Higley, author of “Hildegard of Bingen’s Unknown Language: An Edition, Translation and Discussion” suggests that the language was **not intended** to remain a secret; rather, *because of the presence of words for mundane things*, may indicate that the language was for the whole abbey and the community beyond at large.

Hildegard's most significant works are said to be her three volumes of visionary theology. Their titles translated as:

“Know the Ways”; “Book of Life's Merits” or “Book of the Rewards of Life”; and “Book of Divine Works.”

In much of her work, she first describes her visions **then** interprets their theological contents in the words of what she calls the **“voice of the Living Light.”** A channeled work.

About her theology, **her writing and her experience** of this light she says:

“In this vision my soul, as God would have it, rises up high into the vault of heaven...I can measure neither height, nor length, nor breadth in it; and I call it "**the reflection of the living Light.**"

Hildegard perceived it a divine command to "write down what you see and hear.”

She is known for her compassion and for her loving guardianship of the sisters in her charge and the community in her care.

She is said to be a fierce advocate of justice and service to others, even when it was in direct opposition to The Church’s directives.

There is **evidence to suggest** that Hildegard helped women with birth control and abortions via her holistic practice.

Hildegard is an anomaly in that she **is known**. To this day she is known, a miracle of sorts. While there were attempts to discredit and erase her, her good name survives to this day.

Her works, while some have been lost, intentionally destroyed and stolen, her works largely remain accessible to this day.

May it ever be so.

Hildegard of Bingen

May your name continue to be known

May your teachings be heard

May your wisdom linger

in our hearts

forever

Antoinette Brown Blackwell, born in 1825. *A poet, activist, public speaker and the **first woman** to be ordained as a mainstream Protestant minister in the United States.*

She was a well-versed public speaker on the paramount issues of her time and distinguished herself from her contemporaries with her use of religious faith in her efforts to expand women's rights.

Antoinette was given a license to preach by the Congregational Church in 1851 and then **offered a position as Minister** of a Congregationalist Church in South Butler, New York in 1852.

She is noted for **interpretations of Biblical teachings**, delineating which ones, were not intended to be applicable to the modern era. Such as the description of what a minister should *and shouldn't be* - Namely **male** and not female,

Yet, while her congregation accepted her and her beliefs, many obstacles remained in the **male-dominated system** she chose as her career path.

For instance, a month after her ordination Antoinette traveled as a delegate to the **World's Temperance Convention** in New York City, where despite representing two temperance organizations, she was denied a chance to speak by the organizers.

Nevertheless, she was a highly sought after **suffrage speaker** and **religious preacher**, serving many positions therein over the years - including in 1903, she helped found the **Unitarian Society of Elizabeth, New Jersey**, serving as its minister. Indeed, she was a kind of **interfaith minister**.

In one of her most public speeches, Antoinette attended the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago. There, she said,
"Women are needed in the pulpit as imperatively and for the same reason that they are needed in the world—because they are women...they will become—indispensable to the religious evolution of the human race."

Amen!

Angela Warnick Buchdahl was born in 1972. She was the first Asian-American to be ordained as a rabbi, and the first Asian-American to be ordained as a hazzan (or cantor) which is a **Jewish musician** trained in the vocal arts who helps lead the congregation in **songful prayer**.

She was **ordained cantor** 1999 and **Ordained rabbi** 2001.

In 2013, Angela was named the **Senior Rabbi** of the **Central Synagogue**, a notable Reform synagogue in Manhattan, New York, where she serves to this day.

Her ministry defies the lines of religion and of religious and cultural segregation. It is said to be one of welcome.

On March 22, 2019, she opened the doors of Central Synagogue to **hundreds of worshipers** from a nearby mosque ravaged by fire.

Angela has been nationally recognized for her innovations in leading worship, which draw large crowds both in the congregation's historic Main Sanctuary and via livestream and cable broadcast to viewers in more than 100 countries.

One of her most shared blessings is,
"May You Be Written in the Book of Life."

She affirms the importance of **retreats**, as essential to her spiritual practice. She calls it "**A vacation with God.**"
"Where you can take the long walks and have the really big talks about what really matters in your life."

A few years ago, in her sermon entitled,
"Nothing More Whole than a Broken Heart"
She retells a mystical version of the creation story that casts a new light on "the beginning." She says that there is something faulty in a **creation narrative** that leads to us measuring ourselves against an original state of perfection.

She says believing such we would never escape our deficiencies and would live lives of resentment and anger for this senseless striving of an elusive perfect state.

She tells a story of a **divine contraction**. And then **holy shattering. Divine light sprinkling out everywhere**. And, thus, the manifesting of all around us as **Sacred**.

Angela asserts that brokenness and *not perfection*, is our inheritance. She encourages us to not “*search in vain for some lost paradise, But, rather to seek out sparks, tiny sparks of light that is in the divine debris all around us, to find **the Holy in the broken and imperfect.**”*

Antoinette Brown Blackwell

and

Angela Warnick Buchdahl

***May your names be known
May your teachings be heard
May your wisdom linger
in our hearts
forever***

Ruth Barrett

She is a Dianic High Priestess and seasoned ritualist, Co-creator of Guardians of the Grove, a woman-sovereign community, where for over 40 years, she has been providing spiritual services to thousands of women.

Leading women in circles of sisterhood; teaching them the ways of old. And, creating new ways in alignment with the understanding that the Creator is Female, the Female is Sovereign.

She is the author of “**Women’s Rites, Women’s Mysteries**”

In her writings and in her classes, she teaches her Woman-honoring tradition of what could be referred to as **Goddess Theology**. One of her missions is to lift up the works and voices of other women. Paramount to her is the preservation of such voices, and the preservation of women-only spaces. For safety and for spirituality.

She, as with women in positions similar to hers, been met with no small amount of opposition targets over the years for advocating women’s rights and for teaching spiritual traditions that are not sanctioned by the **Powers that Be**. She believes that, “Together, with open minds and hearts, we can learn to **shape chaos and human needs** into works of great power and beauty.”

Ruth reminds her students that **They** get to claim *who they are* and **what they are**.

Of the word “**Witch**,”

Originally (**spelled “Wicce”**) She says: “It means wise woman; Shaman; Seeker of the sacred.”

Witch is a **sacred** word not a **secret** word.” And with that in mind she teaches **Female-Centered Feminist Witchcraft**. And encourages women to discover Lost lineages of priestesses Earth and Goddess worshippers.

Ruth Barrett

May your name be known

May your teachings be heard

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As you may know, one of the most famous living Unitarian Universalist resides right here in Maine! **Rev. Kate Braestrup!!** Her ministry is unique as **operates** outside Unitarian Universalist institutional norms.

It has in measurable ways **introduced more people around the globe** to Unitarian Universalism, in **concept and in principle**, than anyone else.

For example, when a story she told on **NPR's *The Moth Radio Hour*** went viral, it meant ten million people had listened to the voice of a UU minister.

Similarly when she is interviewed on **national and international programs**.

Her books are each best sellers.

She frequently receives **communications from readers** saying before they read her books, they had never heard of Unitarian Universalism let alone the free pulpit, free pew **concepts** it is rooted in.

As a result of the impact of **Kate's** literary work, she was presented with the esteemed UUA's **Frederic G. Melchor Award**, bestowed yearly for the book "judged to be the most the **significant contribution to religious liberalism**."

And that is just one among many awards she has been presented with.

She has been honored at various state and national awards, including, recently in the past 3 years, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill **Lifetime Achievement Award**, the University of Maine's **MaryAnn Hartman Award** and, in 2019, she was named by **Maine Magazine** as one of its "**50 Influential Mainers**."

In addition to these, she is the **Chaplin to the Maine Warden Service**. Where she responds with game wardens when called to the scenes of all manner of emergencies. Lost children, missing people, tragic accidents, murders.

She has **trained law enforcement officers and other first responders** in the theory and practice of compassionate on-scene bereavement support and death notification.

Indeed much of her work is focused on **coping with grief**, while being faced with unspeakable situations. Yet even within the realm of grief, she has **faith** in the miraculous.

One of my favorite passages in her book entitled, ***“Here if You Need Me,”*** she says:

*“A miracle is not defined by an event.
A miracle is defined by gratitude.”*

I love that!

She also says in that book:

*“If I could only speak one prayer for you, my children, it would be that your hearts would not only beat but **grow** ever greater **in gratitude**, that your lives, however long they prove to be and no matter how they end, continue to bring you miracles in abundance.”*

Kate is truly a treasure. An inspiration to so many.

May we ever **embrace, appreciate and share** her ministry.

Another fairly well know Unitarian Universalist minister is:

Thandeka.

Born Sue Booker, the **Rev. Dr. Thandeka** is a theologian, journalist, and congregational consultant.

She is the creator of the **Love Beyond Belief™** initiative for moderate, liberal, and progressive congregations and the founder of **Contemporary Affect Theology**, which is designed to explain emotional development in religious settings and terms.

She received the name Thandeka, which means "beloved," by **Archbishop Desmond Tutu** in 1984.

Her name **became** her calling.

She strives to help others build the beloved community.

A stated goal of her ministry is to reclaim **compassion** in action and in communications within Unitarian Universalist spheres and encourages Unitarian Universalism to not be swayed by trendy new missions, but, rather to remain true to its **doctrinally-free** faith tradition.

Her **Love Beyond Belief** programs and workshops offer rich congregational development strategies and meets congregants exactly where they are while providing them with tools to expand beyond their wildest dreams.

Rev. Kate Braestrup

and

Rev. Dr. Thandeka

***Many your names be known
May your teachings be heard
May your wisdom linger
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Sally Azar

Rev. Sally Azar was ordained on **January 22, 2023** by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land in a ceremony at the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, making her **the first female Palestinian pastor** in the Holy Land.

Yes, **Sally** is the first female **Arab Christian** Pastor in Jerusalem; she is **the only one** in the middle east.

In fact, she is now one of only **5 female clergy** in the entire region, joining: 1 in Syria, and 3 in Lebanon.

Sally leads her denomination's English-speaking congregations.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were home to about 47,000 Christians as of 2017. Most Palestinian Christians belong to denominations that do not allow female clergy.

Of her monumental appointments, she had this to say,
“The rite of ordination is an honour. The chance to be ordained as a woman in my church is an added honour.

I am happy to be a part of history and gender equality in my church.

It is exciting, but there is some uncertainty, as well. I do not expect this to be an easy road.”

May her ministry be blessed.

***Rev. Sally Azar
May your name be known
May your teachings be heard
May your wisdom linger
in our hearts
forever***

Hildegard of Bingen
Antoinette Brown Blackwell
Angela Warnick Buchdahl
Ruth Barrett
Kate Braestrup
Thandeka
and
Sally Azar

You are among our Mothers in Ministry
Both, Ancient and Alive.

Our gathering today is one of **remembrance and gratitude**.
In honor of your names and your work that has, ***and does***, ever change
our world in positive ways.

You have taught us to stand firm on the side of compassion and justice,
to be courageous in our Faith, even if the powers that be oppose such
compassionate ways of being.

You have taught us we can be many things, **and that** we have **sovereignty**
over who we are and what we choose to be.

You have taught us to take vacations with that which we identify as Holy,
to spend time in nature and with ourselves. And that there is **sacredness**
in the imperfect, impermanent human life.

You have taught us the power of music in ministry, and in life;

That we can make sense of the Chaos;
To see the **Miraculous through gratitude**;
And,
To **Love Beyond Belief**.

We remember you.
We thank you.

(CHIME)

Let us too, give honor to the **Women around the globe** alive today, too many to name in one service, who **minister courageously** in their communities to the extent we can, may we seek them out and thank them.

And let us honor the **names and works** of Women in Spiritual Ministry that have **sadly been forgotten** through time, yet their lives and their works **vibrant with the power** of truth and compassion, justice and hope have ever changed our world and our spiritual lives in positive ways.

May we **hold dear** their impact.
May they rest easy **and in peace**.

For they **remain part of us**, and **we of them**.
And together, we can continue to create
lasting positive change.

May it be so.
Blessed Be.

(CHIME)
(CHIME)
(CHIME)

Let us sing together:

***“She Changes Everything She Touches, and
Everything She Touches, Changes.”***
By Starhawk