

# Celebration of the Flame

By Sadie Jay-Edwards

There is a great warmth and joy in my daughter's eyes, sparkling with anticipation, as we gather in our home to decorate, celebrate and light a candle in the Chalice. In this, the winter holiday season, many neighbors are celebrating their own personal, family, religious and cultural traditions, as well. There is a rich variety of religious holidays that imbues this season with a strong sense of tradition and great meaning. For a week, here in the Olean area, the Unitarian Universalist Community celebrates the week-long holiday of Chalica — Celebration of the Flame.

Chalica is celebrated by the local Olean Unitarian community and runs from the first Monday in December on through Sunday. Like the Festival of Lights, each day there is a lighting of the candle. A flame within a chalice (a sacred cup with a stem and foot) represents the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and is a symbol of the Unitarian Universalist faith. The flaming chalice, like our faith, stands open to receive new truths that pass the tests of reason, justice and compassion. A chalice, is lit each day, and gifts are given and received.

In our family, the little gifts, like the Yule Time Solstice, can often have a magical quality, like a little chocolate coin that mysteriously appears hours later, where the flame had been, that fills a 5-year-old girl with wonder and yummy chocolate. The small gifts that show appreciation for one another can be bought or made, the kind words said, a written note, random acts of kindness, shared personal experiences, like going roller skating or bowling or maybe just the gift of your time in a hectic season.

For Chalica the gifts we speak of are often the gifts that we have to offer. Like the spirit of Christmas, the spirit of Chalica represents

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a time to be aware of the wealth we have in our own lives and to remind ourselves of the ways that we can share our own personal gifts with others. Perhaps by sitting down to dinner and sharing in conversation with some of the folks at the Warming House or putting on a coat and standing in silent protest with the Sisters on the corner of State and Union streets, or bring a sign that says what is in your soul and stand with others on Friday in front of Tops. Remember, you are the expert who knows in what way your work is most needed in this world.

Each of the seven days, like Kwanzaa, represents a different Universalist Principle. On the first day of Chalica, we celebrate the inherent worth and dignity of every person, on the second day we light our chalice to celebrate the divine compassion in human relations, and on the third day we pray for the acceptance of one another and encouragement of spiritual growth in our congregations. Much like during Ramadan, we meditate and reflect on spiritual growth through a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, we also take a day to rationally examine the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large, and on the sixth day of Chalica, we, like Miss America and Superman, reflect on nothing less than the goal of world peace, liberty and justice for all. On the final day we remember the fragile web of life in which we live and all the beauty we have inherited in this world and we pray "May our faith heal our world" and believe that it will.

My 5-year-old daughter is discovering and creating traditions of her own. For a week, before the hustle and bustle of the shopping season is fully upon us, we are spending a bit of time, each day, to remember things that are truly important to us, as we pause for lighting the flame of the sacred Chalice for Chalica.

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