

# *The BUC Big Picture*

*February 2026*



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## *February Worship*

### *February 1*

*“What Makes a Family?”*

Families come in many shapes and sizes, and evolve through stages of life. Members of some BUC families of differing ages and configurations will help us explore the question “What makes a family?” A worship service for all ages.

### *February 8*

*“Building Racial Justice Allyship in Metro Detroit”*

Hope is built on equity, freedom, and safety. The Racial Justice Team presents actions in the Detroit area that support this mission. Through a lens of hope, joy, and the belief in working together, we create a world of allyship with friends and neighbors.

### *February 15*

*“Moving Forward in Community”*

How will the BUC congregation continue to move forward together as a community? As BUC’s 2026-2027 stewardship drive begins, what does it mean to steward this church?

### *February 22*

*“Humanity and Humanism”*

Metaphorical theism? Eclectic humanism? What’s the difference, and are they mutually exclusive?

## *February Plate Sharing*

### **Voters Not Politicians**

The recipient of our plate sharing in February is [Voters Not Politicians](#), a nonpartisan advocacy organization that works to effect structural and systemic democracy reform through the engagement of everyday citizens in Michigan.

Their people-powered movement started when a small group of everyday Michiganders decided to take on the biggest problem in our political system: politicians who aren't accountable to the people they represent. In the aftermath of the 2016 election, a group of political novices started organizing, and by 2018, grew into a grassroots powerhouse of 6,500 volunteers who, against all odds, got a constitutional amendment proposal on the ballot and passed to establish the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission, ending gerrymandering of Michigan legislative districts.

Now, Voters Not Politicians is the premier democracy reform organization in Michigan and is a powerful leader in setting the [blueprint for democracy reform](#) across the country.

Plate donations can be made via cash or check during worship services or at any time via our [online giving portal](#) (choose "Plate Collection" from the drop-down) or [Venmo](#) (send payment to @BUCMI and note "Plate Collection").

## *Staff "Who to Contact" List / Office Hours*

Do you have an idea, question, or concern and need to know where to direct it? Wondering which staff member handles a particular area? The answers are in our **staff ["Who to Contact"](#) list**, also linked on our [home page](#) in the "Learn About Us" box in the middle of the page. This list has contact information for the minister and staff members responsible for pastoral, financial, worship, program, membership, administrative, and communications issues. **Church office hours** are also included at the top. These hours reflect when the office is open for church business and do not reflect the operating hours of the building as a whole. We kindly ask that you restrict church business (by phone and in person) to the office hours. The working hours of individual staff members, which do not necessarily match the office hours, and are listed on the [Minister & Staff page](#) of our website.

## *Minister's Message*

Rev. Connie Grant

The value of “church”

Over the past several years or even decades, much has been written about shifts in the centrality of religious institutions in the lives of Americans. There have been cultural shifts and many factors that have brought membership numbers down in this and many other houses of worship. I've heard expressions of nostalgia for the good old days when the sanctuary and classrooms were filled.

But the good old days are gone, and these are the good new days, as the need for a life-enhancing, life-affirming message of inclusion, hope, and love becomes evident, and people turn to church for solace and inspiration.

BUC's membership number being reported to the UUA for 2026 certification is 262, compared with 264 in 2025. Of course, this number is always in flux. Your membership is stable and poised for growth—not only in numbers. Sara and I plan to hold a book-signing opportunity and new member covenanting ceremony in February, shortly after the next scheduled Getting to Know UU sessions.

The stewardship drive is a great time to show up for church, in body and in spirit. It's a good time to be together and reflect on what this church means to you.

In faith and hope,

Rev. Connie Grant

## Religious Education Musings

Shannon Snideman, Director of Religious Education

Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve.

You don't have to have a college degree to serve.

You don't have to have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.

You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve.

You don't have to know Einstein's "Theory of Relativity" to serve.

You don't have to know the Second Theory of Thermal Dynamics in Physics to serve.

You only need a heart full of grace,  
a soul generated by love,  
and you can be that servant.

*Excerpted from "The Drum Major Instinct," a sermon by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1968*

As UUs, we are called to rise up and stand against injustice. To love deeply and unconditionally. To care

for our friends and neighbors. And sometimes that calling can feel overwhelming, especially when the suffering of the world feels so vast and unrelenting.

But service is not about doing everything. It is about doing something. It is about showing up—in ways large and small—with curiosity, compassion, and humility. Service doesn't have to look like a large-scale effort, nor does it require specialized knowledge or extraordinary resources.

At its core, service is community care. It is how we practice love in tangible ways, how we resist dehumanization, and how we begin—again and again—to build the Beloved Community that Josiah Royce first named and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. so vividly envisioned: a world rooted in justice, dignity, and love for all.



Service might look like volunteering with an organized effort, but it might also look like checking in on a neighbor, offering a meal, making space for a difficult conversation, or choosing kindness when it would be easier to turn away. It might look like learning, unlearning, and trying again. It might even look like rest, so that we can keep showing up for the long haul.

In a world that often tells us our worth is measured by productivity, credentials, or perfection, Dr. King reminds us that greatness is rooted in love. Service begins not with expertise, but with a heart open to others—work that is accessible to all of us, wherever we are on our journeys.

Recently, I was reminded of this truth in a very tangible way. On January 18, BUC hosted a multicongregational service with our friends from Detroit, Southfield, and Farmington. While the adults congregated in the Sanctuary and on Zoom for an incredible worship service,



our children and youth packed Blessing Bags, care packages for neighbors who are unhoused or in need. Roughly fifty bags were assembled, entirely from donated supplies. But what mattered most wasn't the number. The intention was always connection. These bags are meant to be handed directly to someone, offering not just practical support but recognition: I see you, and you matter. Some of the bags may go to school offices, trusting that they will reach students who need them. In each case, the act of service becomes an act of relationship rooted in dignity, presence, and love.

May we remember that service is not an obligation we carry alone, but a practice we share. One that weaves us together into something stronger, more resilient, and more loving than we could ever be on our own. May we continue, together, to build the Beloved Community through acts of care, courage, and grace.

## *Music Memos*

Steven Dearing, Co-Director of Music Ministry

Having three other churches join us at BUC on January 18 was a feat. The energy in the sanctuary was electric. I want to shout out to Tony Kubien for capturing how mighty of a sound the congregation made while singing “Pride” during the service. I think I was levitating.

When Abha and I decided to marry the joint choirs with the Sound Messengers for the Anthem, I was reminded that the Rev. Dr. Kathy Hurt, who was the minister who created our Co-Director position, requested “River In Judea” for her last service at BUC. I was flooded with many emotions as I had to recreate the arrangement I made of this piece years ago, an arrangement that was lost in the digital world. I want to shout out to David Uricek, who found a recording of us doing it way back when which helped me recall the outline of my arrangement.

It’s hard to believe that the first month of 2026 is coming to a close and that the church year is about half done. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention how blessed we are to have Mira bringing her formidable skills to the piano as she navigates the last semester of her DMA. I cannot say enough about her collegiality, something not to be taken for granted. Keep your eyes and ears open for an upcoming recital she will give at the end of February.

As Abha and I wonder who will be the next minister to steer the ship, we know that our joint efforts over the last 15 years have been noticed by those who attend BUC. No matter what happens going forward, knowing that we made or left a mark on the history of this organization feels pretty good.

## *Membership Matters*

Sara Constantakis, Director of Congregational Life

“Maybe we don’t need to know.” That’s the title of an essay by [Haley Nahman](#) that captured my attention mid-last year. It opens with Haley relating an experience she and her partner had at a performance by a sleight-of-hand artist at a [tiny Brooklyn theatre](#), which left them marveling at the art form and having to sit with the question of “how’d he do that??” without being able to know the answer. This led into an exploration of the human impulse to have all our questions answered. Haley talked about her parents’ newfound fascination with ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence (AI) tool which uses machine learning to digest large amounts of online data and generate text, speech, and images in response to user prompts. Haley’s parents were excited to share what they could do with ChatGPT and all the questions it could answer, but Haley confessed to “feeling a bit worn out by answers.” She continued, “To be fair to my parents, I’m no less entitled to knowing stuff—I may have misgivings about AI, but I Google things basically all day. We share the same human impulse to search for answers. I’m just not sure we were supposed to get so many of them.”

It is human nature to want answers and to understand things, and I don’t think any of us can say we haven’t felt this way at least a few times in our lives. While I don’t use ChatGPT very often, like Haley I do Google things basically all day. I’ll call it exercising our 4th UU Principle, “a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” It can be very difficult to sit with questions and uncertainty. That’s why I was so intrigued by something else Haley said in her essay, that “putting so much stake in the answers... presupposes that the answers, and not the questions, are the point.” This also reminds me of a line from one of Rev. Connie’s recent sermons: “Could be good, could be bad... it’s too soon to tell.”

We are sitting with a lot of questions right now, both out in the larger world and here in our congregation—questions about our budget, building, membership numbers, and, perhaps most pressingly, who our next minister will be. We are also working to answer questions around how we want to function together in

community (by revising policies) and questions around what we value and the goals we want to accomplish as a congregation (by revising our strategic plan). This work can be wearying, especially if you've been doing it a lot or for a long time. It is not easy to explore questions and not know when answers will come. Though I think maybe I've lived long enough to know—and perhaps some of you can vouch for this—that, often, certainty never comes, and we just must proceed without it.

So what if we did flip the script and learn to live with questions and uncertainty, rather than resist them? Perhaps it can be useful, comforting, and even, as Haley puts it, “infinitely better to live life in the questions, reveling in the absurd and experimental, than to know exactly how everything works or ought to.” I think many UUs are questioners at heart (I know I am). We just really want the answers, too. (And we're convinced that enough committees can help us get them.) But let's consider that the questions themselves are worthwhile, too; that “they teach us that wonder, more than merely a worthwhile human experience, is something that requires active protection—a willingness, even, to feel annoyed or desperate in the face of the unknown. To wonder is a human impulse and a bottomless well of a gift, not a problem to constantly solve.”

“Maybe we don't need to know” ... yet. Wishing you wonder in the questions.

## *Board of Trustees Update*

Be sure to attend the Sunday, February 1 Town Hall, which will be in the Sanctuary immediately following the service. The board will provide brief updates on strategic planning and the contract minister search and answer any questions.

Get ready for the Stewardship Campaign, “Moving Forward in Community,” kicking off with emailed pledge packets on February 10. Join us for a special service followed by brunch and fellowship activities on Sunday, February 15. Pledges are due March 14 to allow the Minister and the Board time to prepare a balanced budget for the upcoming year based on the results of the Stewardship Campaign.

We saw a large crowd at a meaningful and celebratory service commemorating Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on January 18, with guests joining us from First UU, Northwest UU, and UU Farmington. One First UU congregant drove from Belleville (downriver) to attend! Watch for other joint services in the near future so that we can also show support for our community of UU fellowships.

We continue to operate with a balanced budget, aided by larger-than-normal draws from the general endowment fund, made possible by strong annual earnings in the financial markets. In other financial news, HVAC replacement for the Lower Level classroom will begin this spring. The Budget & Finance Committee have taken on the (exciting!) task of reviewing and redrafting financial procedures in preparation for a procedural audit.

In faith,

Your BUC Board of Trustees for 2025-2026

President Mary Jo Ebert, Vice President Harper West, Treasurer Keith Ensroth, Secretary Bill Fox, Trustees: Donna Cunningham, Art Hillman, Claudia Kocher, Tanya Nordhaus, Brian Schandavel



“Anyone can tell what we’re about just by walking in our front door and seeing the signs,” says Soren Andersen, a member of this year’s stewardship team.

At first, I wondered: What are the signs of Unitarian Universalism? Soren meant the literal signs in our front garden—the ones declaring “Climate Action Now” and “Black Lives Matter.”

I’m grateful those signs endure everything the Michigan weather throws at them, because they tell our story. They represent a world that needs people who believe in the inherent worth of every soul and the interdependent web of all existence. Especially now, the world needs UUs to stand for peace, liberty, and justice; for equity and compassion; and for the protection of our planet.

As our stewardship campaign, “**Moving Forward in Community**,” begins this month, we invite you to consider how much the world needs a thriving UU community.

**Join us on February 15 for our Stewardship Kickoff Sunday!** Following the service, we will put our theme into action as we move from the Sanctuary to Hodas Hall for a celebratory brunch and numerous fellowship activities. One activity will be making mini-yard signs to share what BUC stands for and what we want the world to know about us. What will yours say?

—Jane O’Neil for the Stewardship Team

## *Meet BUC's Flamekeepers*

By Tanya Nordhaus

As many of you know, I have been interviewing congregants about their connection to BUC and their lives. If you haven't done a Zoom interview with me, I encourage you to schedule one via [this link](#). I will be doing interviews through the end of February, so please get on my schedule by then. And if you would prefer to interview in person, we can do that, too.

Each month, I will be introducing you to three congregants. This month, I introduce you to Dr. Edward Sharples, Jordan Schwarz, and Pat Schwing.



Dr. **Ed Sharples**, 93, came to BUC after his wife, Diane, thought she had exhausted all the area churches where they could raise their family. Explaining this to a friend, she was told that she sounded like a Unitarian. Needless to say, she was, and they joined in 1968. Ed is sort of a celebrity at BUC. I mean, doesn't everyone at BUC know Ed Sharples? In interview after interview, people have spoken so highly of Ed, calling him a significant influence on them. Ed served as president of the Board of Trustees for two 3-year terms. He facilitated Religious Education classes for children and adults alike. He has sung in the choir for as long as I can remember. He is a Worship Associate and a Pastoral Care Associate, and more. Ed, not a stranger to hard work, was a Dean and an Associate Vice President at Wayne State. He is a thoughtful man, as exemplified by the story of how, at the age of 6 or 7, he rang farm bells on Christmas Eve, so that his younger sister would think she heard Santa. So endearing.

**Jordan Schwarz** tried out BUC with his family after hearing a guest at a book group speak of her UU faith. He may have only been at BUC for a tad bit over three years, but he has packed a lot into those few years. He is the organizer of BUC's Family UU Network, which brings newcomers and families together to do fun activities. He has served on the Religious Education and Building and Grounds committees. Jordan's career is in automotive engineering, specifically as a technical specialist for turbochargers at GM, with a



background in aerospace engineering. Jordan is a self-proclaimed “airplane nerd.” As an 8th grader growing up in North Carolina, he won an art contest and got to fly on the governor's airplane. In his free time, he enjoys writing science fiction for young adults, leading the Oakland County 4H Sport Rocket Club, and spending time with his wife, daughter, and various beloved animals, including horses, goats, chickens, and a barn cat.



**Pat Schwing** is a BUC gem. She joined in 1971 and was married by Bob Marshall to the love of her life, Dick. She raised her family here, and for many years, as the Director of Religious Education, she had a hand in raising many youth at BUC. One of Pat's claims to BUC fame is that she was instrumental in creating the ROPE, now Coming of Age, curriculum. She just loved those with braces and acne, she jokes. She has

served as president of the Board and the Alliance. She's even a former choir member. Like Ed Sharples, many BUCers say that Pat has been influential for them. Pat was well known for taking on major projects here at BUC and for being able to recruit anyone to do anything. It wouldn't surprise anyone who knows Pat that one of her majors in college was Public Speaking. Today, Pat still considers BUC as a very important part of her life and comes just about every Sunday. BUC was lucky to have Pat walk through those doors.

## *Program News & Info*

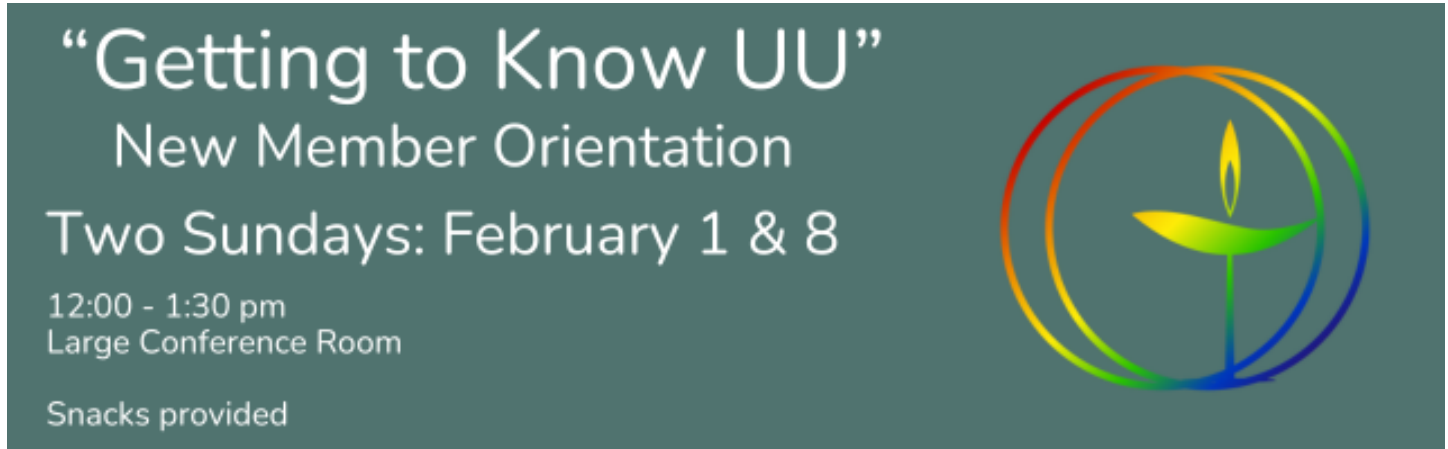
### *Grief Support Group*

The Pastoral Care Team would like to hear from you if you have an interest in participating in a grief support group. Grief demands the support and compassion of our fellow human beings. A grief support group would provide an opportunity for those in our congregation who have experienced the death of a loved one to give and receive care and support from each other. We are recommending the group format be a combination of education about grieving and open discussion/sharing. While this is not a therapy group, the goal is to facilitate healthy ways of coping with loss of a loved one. We would meet in-person (only) at BUC.

The group would be confidential and led by Pastoral Care Associate Terry Mihlbauer. Terry is a psychologist who was licensed in Michigan and Indiana and retired in 2022. She was trained as a volunteer grief group facilitator in 1993 at a children's grief center, Erin's House, in Fort Wayne, IN. She facilitated groups for children and their parents for three years and went on to be a consultant for the center for several years. She continued to obtain training in grief and bereavement, including annual day-long seminars with Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a prominent death educator, grief counselor, and author.

Information about the grief support group will be at the Pastoral Care table in Hodas Hall. For more information and/or if you are interested in participating, please contact Terry at (260) 417-2916 or [tcmhlbr@msn.com](mailto:tcmhlbr@msn.com) prior to February 15.

## *Upcoming Events*

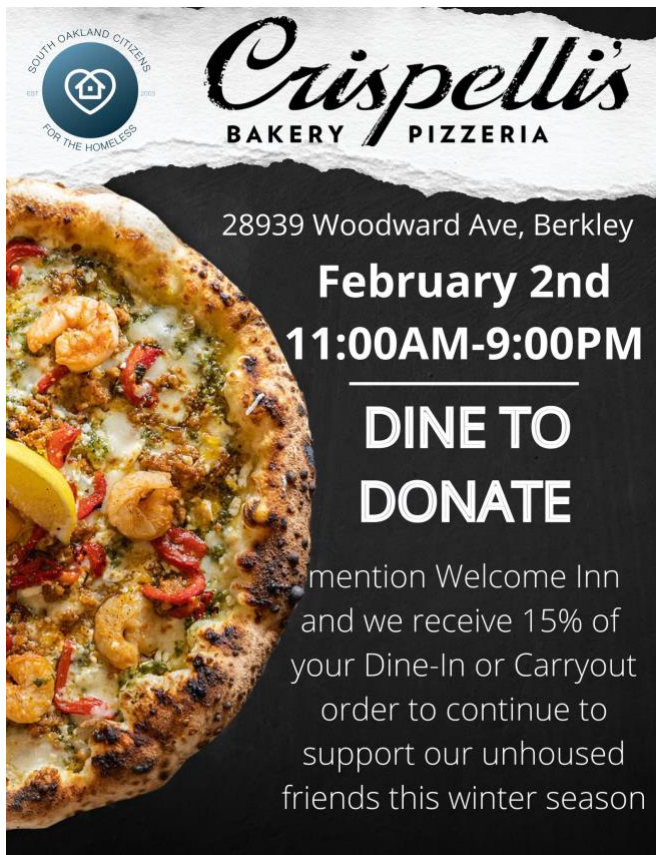


**“Getting to Know UU”**  
New Member Orientation  
Two Sundays: February 1 & 8  
12:00 - 1:30 pm  
Large Conference Room  
Snacks provided

Considering membership at BUC? Just want to get to know us better? Join us for the next session of Getting to Know Unitarian Universalism (GTKUU), happening **Sunday, February 1 and Sunday, February 8 at 12:00 noon in the Large Conference Room**. GTKUU is a welcoming space where you can explore your own spiritual journey and learn more about Unitarian Universalism the BUC community. Led by Rev. Connie and Director of Congregational Life Sara Constantakis, GTKUU is a step along the [path to membership](#) at BUC. Light snacks will be provided.

The **Sunday, February 1** session will include Rev. Connie’s Four Corners exercise, which she mentioned in the December *Big Picture*. We invite participants to move around the room in response to a series of questions about their beliefs, starting with lighter topics and continuing with questions such as: are you a theist, agnostic, humanist, or atheist? What do you think will happen to you when you die? Which is more active in your life, fate or free will? This session of the class always leads to a rich and lively discussion and sparks relationships as people connect over their beliefs and experiences. Even if you are a longtime member of the congregation, you are invited to participate. You might learn something about yourself, each other, and this UU way of faith.

**If you’d like to attend, please RSVP to Sara at [sara.constantakis@bucmi.org](mailto:sara.constantakis@bucmi.org), or just drop in and join us!**



**SOUTH OAKLAND CITIZENS FOR THE HOMELESS**

**Crispelli's**  
BAKERY PIZZERIA

28939 Woodward Ave, Berkley

**February 2nd**  
**11:00AM-9:00PM**

**DINE TO DONATE**

mention Welcome Inn and we receive 15% of your Dine-In or Carryout order to continue to support our unhoused friends this winter season

You can support BUC's long-time partner, the [Welcome Inn](#), just by eating pizza! Join South Oakland Citizens for the Homeless **THIS MONDAY**, February 2, 11am-9pm for a "Dine to Donate" at Crispelli's Bakery & Pizzeria, located at 28939 Woodward in Berkley. Mention Welcome Inn when you order and your meal will help make a difference for their guests. And if you're there around 6:00 pm, you can say hi to Welcome Inn's Director, Heather Duenes. Dine in or carry out and the Welcome Inn will receive 15% of your order to help sustain their work.



**HAPPY FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS!**

Join us this Sunday for a coffee hour celebration... with cupcakes!

Join us in Hodas Hall on **Sunday, February 8** during coffee hour for our monthly all-ages community birthday celebration! If your birthday is in February, you're invited to come forward for special recognition. There will be cupcakes!

*Mark Your Calendar!*

*Be There!*

**Stewardship KickOff**

**Sunday, February 15, 2026**

after service

**Games • Brunch**

**Prizes • Activities**



**Moving Forward**

*in Community*

Birmingham Unitarian Church Stewardship Campaign 2026-27

## *MAMA's Coffeehouse*

a monthly acoustic music concert series

Saturday, February 21, 7:30 pm

A Couple of Couples

*Rochelle Clark & Jason Dennie*

*Shari Kane & Dave Steele*

**Admission:** \$20 regular | \$18 student/senior

No advance sales; cash or check at door only



Two remarkable musicians, **Rochelle Clark and Jason Dennie** are a pairing of gifted singers and talented players who also know their way around the intricacies of songwriting. Rochelle's powerful voice commands attention while her engaging and personal songwriting draws listeners in. Jason's spectacular instrumental chops and impressive vocal talents almost threaten to overshadow his own songwriting abilities. Together, they share an intimate and intuitive interplay that's inspiring to hear and see.

As an acoustic blues duo, **Shari Kane and Dave Steele** throw a four-handed guitar party of original and time-honored blues, gospel, swing, and ragtime. Steeped in Dave's smoky vocals, percussive rhythm, and innovative lead lines and Shari's crisp picking style, rootsy leads, and stinging slidework, their music has been described as "street swing and stomp blues," like a testament to sounds once heard on the streets of Harlem, the juke joints of Mississippi, or from the jug bands of Memphis.

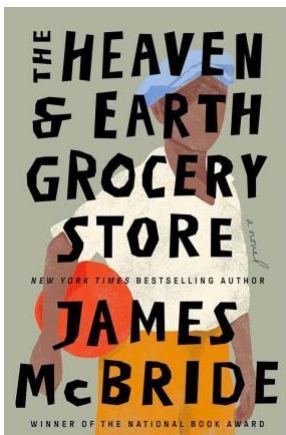


*Income from MAMA's Coffeehouse (after operating expenses) benefits BUC*

## *BUC Racial Justice Book Club*

The BUC Racial Justice Book Club began with alumni of the Living the Pledge workshop and is a way learn more about racism as we continue our individual and group work to end racism. All are invited to join the discussions on the second Monday of the month from 6:00-7:30 pm. Zoom links will be on the BUC calendar.

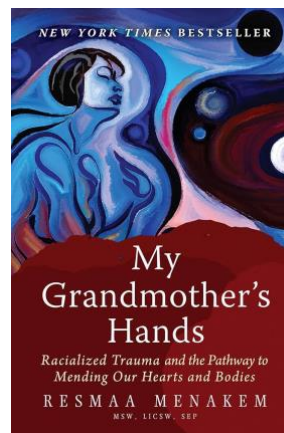
February was omitted from our schedule due to overlap with the Living the Pledge workshops, so you have a bit more time to get ready for our March, April, and May meetings!



March 9

*The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store*

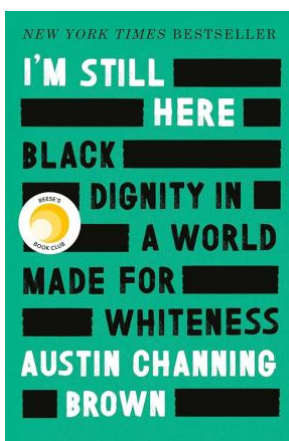
by James McBride



April 13

*My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*

by Resmaa Menakem



May 11

*I'm Still Here  
Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*

by Austin Channing Brown

We look forward to seeing you on Zoom and discussing these wonderful books next year! Happy reading! For questions or more info, contact Mary Masson at [mmasson@wowway.com](mailto:mmasson@wowway.com) or (248) 568-6544.