

The BUC Big Picture

January 2026



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“Living with Mortality”

How will we spend our time? We know that our earthly existence has a dawn and a dusk. What will we do with the time in between?

January 18

“Justice Rolls Down” multi-congregational MLK Sunday

Amos 5:24 says “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” This was Martin Luther King Jr.’s favorite scripture. It is also the model for a hymn with which we have a very complex relationship. Amos has a lot to teach us about how we show up in the world and how we live our lives, and MLK was a great exemplar of that as well. Come join four UU congregations at BUC to talk about the legacy of MLK, his favorite scripture, and our complicated history trying to sing it.

To embody MLK’s message of love and justice, children and youth will be putting our UU values into action by creating care packages for unhoused people, and we are asking for donations of items to pack inside the care packages. Click [here](#) for the list of suggested items, and bring them with you to church on Sunday, January 18 or drop them off earlier in the collection bin near the front entrance.

January 25

“Resistance Is Not Futile”

What difference does resistance make? What difference can we make in our world?

January Plate Sharing

The Welcome Inn

The recipient of our plate sharing in January is the Welcome Inn. For many years, BUCers have volunteered at the Welcome Inn, located at Starr Presbyterian Church on the corner of 13 Mile and Crook Roads in Royal Oak. It is operated by [South Oakland Citizens for the Homeless](#).

On any given day between December and March, up to 45 guests use the facility. This year, they have use of the whole building all 24 hours, so guests are able to sleep over. Everyone receives hot meals, clothing from the clothing closet, social services, haircuts, medical treatment and—most important of all—friendly companionship.

BUC volunteers help in a number of ways, including short or one-time opportunities. They work in the clothes closet, bring in food supplies, serve lunch, make purchases of emergent needs (for which BUC can cover expenses) and either deliver these to the shelter or to Annis Pratt at BUC on Sundays. Click [here](#) to view the Welcome Inn’s volunteer signup or [here](#) for the latest needs and easy Amazon delivery setup.

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

Looking forward!

Does this passage describe Birmingham Unitarian Church?

“A community in which everyone is seen as teacher and learner; in which every age and stage of life is equally valued and equally supported by whatever tangible and intangible resources the community has to offer; in which every age and stage of life is allowed to contribute whatever tangible and intangible resources it has to offer; a community in which no decision is made about the life of the community—whether in the area of worship, physical plant, fundraising, budgeting, social action, the arts, education, or any other—without consideration of its impact on and opportunities for every member of the community.”

For me, this description of multigenerational religious community by Judith Frediani, who retired some years ago as Director of Lifespan Faith Development at the Unitarian Universalist Association, is both descriptive and aspirational. A further description and aspiration I would add is that we take into account those who are not yet part of the community.

These considerations are important because these are ways to fully be a community; to be a congregation; to be the “place where you get to practice what it means to be human,” as Unitarian Universalist theologian James Luther Adams described “church.”

For many of us, our religious community is the one place where we encounter people of different generations on a regular basis in our daily lives. As individuals of various ages and stages of life, we may have different needs, different ways of contributing; different perspectives and interests; different communication channels, and different learning styles. And we have so many of those things in common with each other, even as individuals of various ages and stages of life.

Sometimes our needs are met separately, and sometimes together. Even when we are apart, we are not separated.

How do you recognize and embrace each other as full participants in and contributors to the life of your congregation?

In faith and hope,

Rev. Connie Grant

Religious Education Musings

Shannon Snideman, Director of Religious Education

Change is a necessary part of our lives, albeit often a very uncomfortable thing that we have to deal with. Change is hard because it is asking, sometimes demanding, that we confront our emotions.

There are some big changes on the horizon, and how we react to them makes all the difference in our ability to move forward as a congregation. For one, we are in the search for our next minister. While our Ministerial Search Committee has undoubtedly put together a wonderful package that encapsulates as much of the beauty in the BUC community as possible, we won't know who will be joining us or when they will be here until it happens. In the meantime, we can continue to build and strengthen our growing community. And our community is growing! We are so excited to hear all about the babies that were born this past year, and delighted to welcome many more new members!

Sometimes in order to build capacity, there are things that need to be cut—just like pruning a plant. It's nerve-wracking sometimes to cut off what seems like healthy and essential parts, but doing so helps the plant redirect and focus its energy.

Whether it is growing new roots to take in nutrients from the soil and store energy for later, or pouring the energy and resources into fewer flowers in order to have more delicious and nutritious fruits. In this case, BUC's Religious Education

program is the plant and we've been doing some pruning over the years to foster new growth based on the present environmental conditions.

There are some things that have been features of the RE program for many years. A cornerstone of BUC's RE program was the Rites of Passage Experience (ROPE). This was a year of exploration and building identity for 8th graders as they come of age. The experience encompasses a jam-packed fall semester of Our Whole Lives (OWL), followed by a Coming of Age program that included a heritage trip to Boston, developing a credo, and delivering a worship service at the end of the year.

It goes without saying that this is a very big commitment for youth to make, and in today's world it can be hard to manage with all of the other big commitments that youth have as their ever-increasing list of responsibilities grows. That's part of growing up, right? What we should be asking ourselves is, "How do we foster the growth and development of our young people so that they have the tools to be happy and successful in their adult lives?" We know so much more about adolescent development now because of continued research by psychologists and other Religious Education professionals. Compounded by the trauma that comes from growing up during a global pandemic, there is an increased need for young people to build social-emotional skills. Religious Education programming needs to reflect these new insights.

In my first year at BUC, I made the decision to prune the ROPE branch of the RE tree. It was a difficult but necessary response to the conditions that were present at that moment in time. Despite all of the efforts that were made to keep the ROPE program structured as it was, the COVID-19 pandemic certainly had an impact on how the program was running and a change was needed. By pruning, we produced two new branches as each program was able to grow in its own direction. We have been running the OWL and Coming of Age programs on alternating years, allowing us to adapt to the changing needs of participants and their families while still offering an enriching experience. These programs continue to evolve as we continue to learn more about human nature and adolescent development.

Overall, we have to adapt to the climate we are in now where we do not have consistent attendance, and a program that requires youth to be present every Sunday

is not sustainable. Instead, we need to build programming that welcomes people where they are at—wherever, whenever, whatever that may be. And just because attendance isn't consistent doesn't mean that we don't have something good to offer to whoever is able to join us on a Sunday morning. We are ready to welcome them no matter what, so Religious Education programming structure and content will continue to adapt as necessary.

I want to name that change may feel disappointing or even painful for some. Those feelings are valid, and they matter. Oftentimes traditions carry memories, relationships, and a sense of continuity, and it's okay to grieve a change. I feel the weight of it, too, because I have witnessed time and time again how a program like ROPE has helped shape the lives of so many people, many of whom are still a part of the BUC Community. At the same time, I ask for your trust that decisions are made with care and discernment, rooted in sustainability, capacity, and the long-term health of the entire congregation. Doing things for the sake of doing them or “because we've always done it that way” can lead to stagnation, which is the opposite of growth. Change isn't meant to be comfortable, but it isn't meant to be bad either. Just as pruning is never about loss alone; it is about making space for healthier, more sustainable growth.

Music Memos

Abha Dearing, Co-Director of Music Ministry

And so a new year begins! We turn over a new leaf, start fresh, and all the rest. I have the habit of wishing people “Happy New Year” long after January. I like to think the year is still new until June 30. By then, I feel like we should really be settled into the year's newness. In other words, if you haven't realized any of the intentions of the new year by that point, you better put some heat under you, because the year is half over!

I am writing this newsletter reflection from India, a country with a vibrant array of religions, languages, cultures, and so much more. It is a privilege to look back on

the past months from this physical and spiritual distance. For that, I deeply appreciate Steven Dearing, my Co-Director of music Ministry; Mira Walker, Pianist and music leader extraordinaire; Amy Smalley, our blessed librarian; Jo Copeland, top-notch fixer of all the things we miss; and Dave Uricek, whose sound-tech skills make the band sound great. These folx work hard and creatively as part of our team to be sure Music things run smoothly.

Over the past month, in addition to some beautiful solo work by Steven and Mira, the Sound Messengers were joined by resident hype-man Craig Stroup; and, of course, the BUC Chalice Choir worked intensely to bring rich choral singing to the special Christmas service. Bette Moen as Worship Associate that day was effective and thoughtful. Rev Connie delivered a poignant message as did Shannon Snideman's interpretation of the classic "Twas the Night Before Christmas." Thank you most of all to our BUC Chalice Choir singers. Their dedication and efficient use of our limited rehearsal time (reduced hours, emergencies, and weather) allowed them to attain a high level of musicianship, artistry, and expression. I love this group of people!

Looking ahead, we are thrilled to join voices with First UU Detroit and UU Church of Farmington to prepare music for a joint MLK service on January 18. As usual, our 2026 services will feature high-quality music that is carefully woven with the spoken words to help create meaningful experiences for our beloved community.

Membership Matters

Sara Constantakis, Director of Congregational Life

“...When someone asks me what I think will happen, even about the simplest things, I shake my head & say I don’t know for sure, but leave room for something wonderful.” –Artist Brian Andreas

Happy New Year, BUC! It’s January, a time of transition and new beginnings and the turning of a symbolic page from one year to another, at least according to the [Gregorian calendar](#) used in most parts of the world. The month of January is named after Janus, who in ancient Roman religion and mythology is the god of beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, frames, and endings. Janus is usually depicted as having a double-sided head, as if looking back at the old year and forward to the new one. While January is more like the middle of our church year, this transitional month is still an opportune time to do some reflecting on the church year so far and looking forward to what’s to come.

Looking back, one of the most exciting developments this church year has been the creation of new opportunities for community, fellowship, and belonging. The BUC Craft and Chat Group and the BUC Gaming Group were founded by Valerie Phillips and Shannon Snideman and held their inaugural monthly meetings in October. Valerie also organized a Thanksgiving Day potluck and a Christmas Day gathering at BUC, bringing new life to a former tradition. The BUC Alliance, in the second year of their revival, hosted three fall programs, including a performance by BUC’s beloved Pianist, Mira Walker.

Looking forward, monthly meetings of the new groups will continue, as well as meetings of established groups like the Racial Justice Book Club, BUCers at the Theatre, and Alliance spring programs, and a new session of Living the Pledge to End Racism, led by BUC Racial Justice, begins this month. And near the end of the church year, we’ll turn another page as we bid farewell to Rev. Connie and welcome our next minister.

Not everything about the year to come is set in stone and lots of change is ahead, but as Brian Andreas says in the quote above, there's plenty of room for something wonderful. Together, we can make 2026 a year to remember. May it be so.

Membership Update

Please welcome **Jon Kabbe**, who signed the membership book in December!

Board of Trustees Update

The minister search team completed the Congregational Record, which describes our congregation, the community we're in, and other information for minister candidates to learn about us. It incorporated feedback from our mid-America region representative, Sharon Ditmar. Meanwhile, board members drafted the ministerial agreement (contract), which will be negotiated later in the process. These and other required documents are now available for ministerial candidates to read. The search team will begin reading candidate information, and the interview process will commence. Our search team members are Tanya Nordhaus, Bill Fox, Dick Rappleye, Karen Stankye, and Sarah Sullivan.

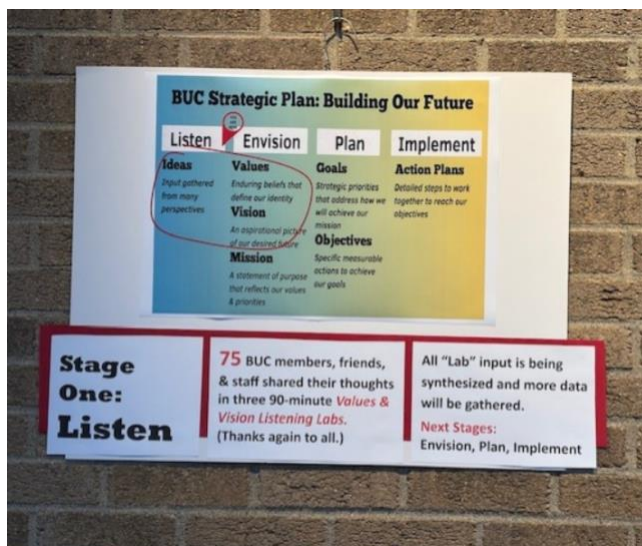
For the January 18 service, we will be joined by fellow UUs from area churches. We encourage BUCers to attend the service and coffee hour. Let's make it a special day for all visitors and congregants to join together for an MLK-themed Sunday service.

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

Strategic Planning Team Puts “Lab Results” to Work

As the 75 participants in our three Values & Vision Listening Labs will recall, the number of thoughts and ideas they recorded via sticky notes was impressive. How is the Strategic Planning Team using it all?



To ensure that each “voice” is registered—and to avoid our own personal biases—we turned to artificial intelligence tools for organizing the large volume of inputs. This initial compilation and prioritization step is being taken in preparation for a mid-January work session. There we will follow process advice from *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* to absorb, abstract, and

generalize all we heard. Our tasks are to craft a BUC Values statement and evaluate the themes our Lab folks expressed in their Year-2030 Headlines to draft a Vision statement. We will then compare these proposed statements with BUC’s current Mission to refresh that if needed.

The team intends to test these draft statements as part of conversations with several of BUC’s lay leaders, both current and past. This will complete the “Listen” stage and validate our “Envision” stage of the strategic planning process. We then will present the results to the Board of Trustees and congregation before moving to the Plan, Implement, and Evaluate stages. We invite you to forward any questions to bucstrategicplanningteam@gmail.com as we go along.



In gratitude for your support,

Kasey Alderete, Drieka DeGraff, Barb Eschner, Kevin Kozlowski, Chris Slon
BUC Strategic Planning 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 is the "month of Carols." I would like to introduce you to Carol Lee, Carol Glass, and Carol Jackson.



Carol Lee and her family came to BUC in 1974 after their daughter, Laura, came home and declared that if you're not Jewish, you must be Catholic. After a brief tour of local UU churches, Carol and her late husband, Al, found they felt at home at BUC. Carol joined the choir immediately, and she has been singing in it on and off for about 50 years. She also quickly immersed herself in everything Alliance, even chairing it the year after she joined BUC, and remains committed to Alliance to this day. She's also been a stalwart for rummage. She has

also served as the acting church historian for many decades. She even had a considerable hand in writing the 50th anniversary book that so many of us turn to. However, Carol's most significant commitment to BUC was as the friendly face at the church administrator's desk for 23 years! Many of you know Carol well, and so none of this is news, but did you know that she paraglided off a mountain in New Zealand about 15 years ago?! That's Carol for you.

Carol Glass came to BUC in 1969 because she and her fiancé were looking for a place to get married. Then-minister Bob Marshall and BUC won her over. She was a very active member of BUC into the early 2000s. In the 1970s, they started a popular couples' club that many people have mentioned in their interviews. She served on the Board of Trustees, co-chaired Rummage, and led the Outreach Committee, where she organized church fundraisers like the Empty Bowls project. Carol spent many years with the Women's Alliance, which she found transformative. And that's just a few things she did while at BUC. She credits BUC for helping her to raise her two boys, Brad and Devon, with a strong foundation of values. Carol, a retired teacher, now lives on the West Coast with her husband, Jeff, but continues to support BUC. She is a world traveler with only five countries remaining before she meets her goal of visiting every country. She has plans to see three of those countries in 2026. Amazing!



Carol Jackson was raised in a “hardcore” Methodist family. When she became engaged to her late husband Dr. Alex Tselis, an agnostic, they had to find a church that met the needs of both Carol's family and Carol and Alex. So they decided upon getting married in a UU church because it “had ‘church’ on the label.” Carol, after living in 10 other states, came to and joined BUC with her husband and two sons, Zach and Ben, in 1994. The first group she joined upon joining was the Welcoming Congregation committee, which focused on a topic she was and still is interested in. When she wasn't working as a technical writer supervisor, she was active with Habitat for Humanity, which BUC participated in frequently. She also enjoyed volunteering for South Oakland Shelter and facilitating Religious Education classes. Carol only scores one point in the extrovert piece of the Myers-Briggs test, so you may have to go talk to her if you want to get to know her better.

Upcoming Events

Community Aid for Empowerment
Supporting our immigrant neighbors and their allies

Sunday, January 11
12:00 pm | Sanctuary + Zoom



Community Aid for Empowerment (CAFE) co-founder Emily DuThinh will join us **THIS SUNDAY, January 11 at 12:00 pm** to discuss ways we can support our immigrant neighbors and their allies. Her presentation will include Know Your Rights information as well as ways to support ICE watch, education/outreach, and mutual aid. CAFE’s mission is “to empower the community with knowledge of their constitutional rights. CAFE is committed to serving and uplifting individuals by providing the support and resources needed to pursue and create opportunities for long-term success.” Join in the Sanctuary or on Zoom. Contact Kym Worth (kymworth@gmail.com) with questions.



BUC Craft and Chat Group

Friday, January 16
6:00-8:00 pm
Green Door

Looking for a place to get crafty and connect with others in our community? Join us on **Friday, January 16 from 6:00-8:00 pm in the Green Door** for the next meeting of the Craft and Chat group—a relaxed, all-skills-welcome group where we gather each month to make art, swap ideas, share stories, and laugh together. Whether you have a project in hand or simply want to soak up inspiration, you’re warmly welcome. Contact Valerie Phillips (valerie.phillips@bucmi.org) or Shannon Snideman (shannon.snideman@bucmi.org) for more information.

MAMA's Coffeehouse

a monthly acoustic music concert series

Saturday, January 17, 7:30 pm

Billy King & Emily Slomovits

Beverly Meyer opens

Admission: \$20 regular | \$18 student/senior
No advance sales; cash or check at door only

Stalwarts of the Southeast Michigan folk music community, **Billy King & Emily Slomovits** have performed across the Midwest for many years.

Their musical talents range from guitar, banjo, mandolin, and keyboards for Billy King to classical violin, jazz and folk fiddle styles, and guitar for Emily Slomovits. King has been performing since childhood and now helps run his family's beloved Frog Holler Farm, where he co-founded its annual music festival, Holler Fest. Slomovits has been performing from a young age as well, playing with her father and uncle in the treasured Ann Arbor duo Gemini since the age of eight. As a duo the two blend their melodically compelling original music with vibrant covers of songs by Paul Simon, Joni Mitchell, and the Beatles, among others.



Beverly Meyer, known to many (especially younger audiences) as The Music Lady, is an accomplished performer with impressive instrumental skills and a big, beautiful voice. MAMA's Coffeehouse is happy to have her back.

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

BUCers at the Theatre

BUCers at the Theatre invites you to Drama in the D! This legendary arts venue in the heart of the city has a lobby bar, cocktail lounge, café, and union theatre professionals—all in an art gallery setting. BUCers can join together to

carpool or meet up at Detroit Repertory Theatre for afternoon matinees. Sign up for our email list during coffee hour, or contact Maryl Kacir Huntington at (313) 407-4377 to receive email alerts.

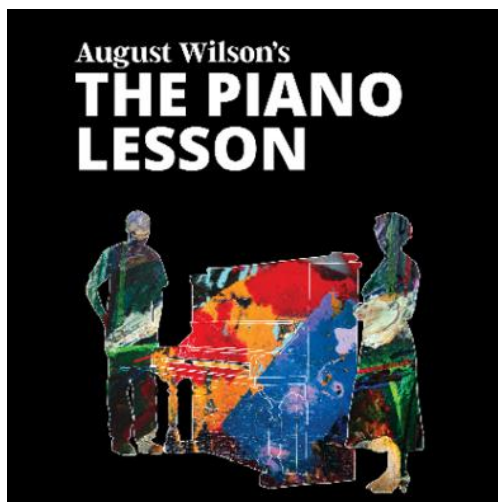
Tickets: \$21 general seating with BUC discount (\$35 at the door)

1:00 pm: lobby, art gallery, and café/cocktail bar open (vegan options available)

2:00 pm: curtain opens promptly

Reserve by text or email to Maryl Huntington at (313) 407-4377 or

marylk@live.com. Pay by check made out to the DRT at the show, or pay Maryl in cash/Venmo (@Marylynn-Huntington)



The Piano Lesson by August Wilson

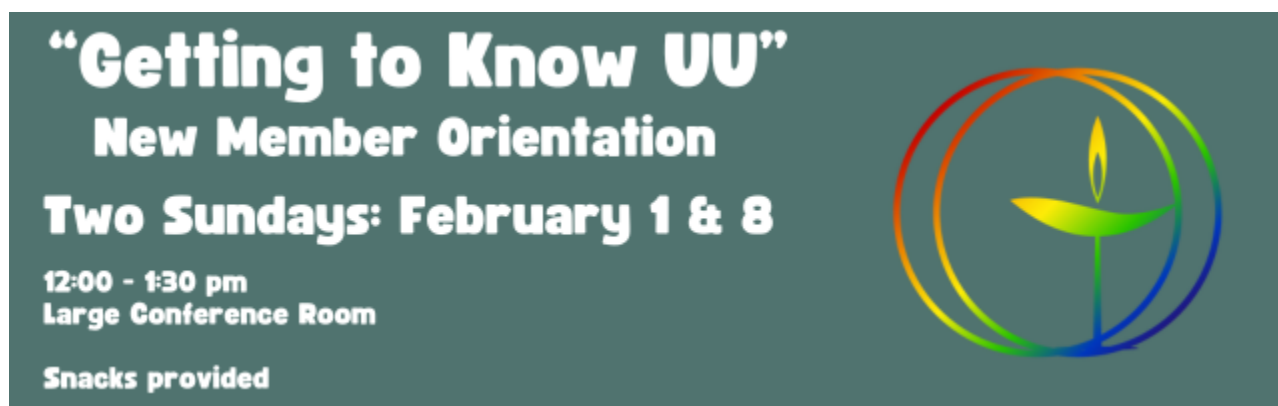
BUC date: Sunday, January 18 at 2:00 pm

Winner of the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for Drama

It is 1936 and Berniece and her brother Boy Willie fight over the fate of the family piano. She treasures it as a precious connection to their ancestors, and he means to sell it for a more prosperous future. This fourth installment in Wilson's American Century Cyle is a haunting play about legacy.



Join us on **Wednesday, January 28 from 6:00-8:00 pm in the Purple Door** for the next meeting of the BUC Gaming group—an all-ages monthly meetup of fun, laughter, and connection. With rotating themes like board games, card games, puzzles, and pen-and-paper classics, there’s always something new to play and great people to play with! Whether you’re a seasoned strategist or just looking for a lighthearted way to connect, there’s always a place for you at the table. Contact Valerie Phillips (valerie.phillips@bucmi.org) or Shannon Snideman (shannon.snideman@bucmi.org) for more information.



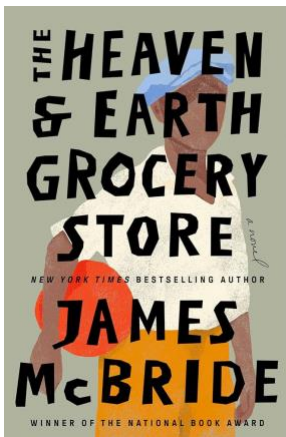
Interested in becoming a member of BUC? Join us for the next session of Getting to Know Unitarian Universalism (GTKUU), our new member orientation class, happening **Sunday, February 1 and Sunday, February 8 at 12:00 noon in the Large Conference Room**. Led by Rev. Connie and Director of Congregational Life Sara Constantakis, GTKUU is a step along the [path to membership](#) at BUC.

If you’d like to attend, please RSVP to Sara at sara.constantakis@bucmi.org. And if you’ve been around for a while and would like to get to know people who are considering joining, we’d be happy to have you!

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.

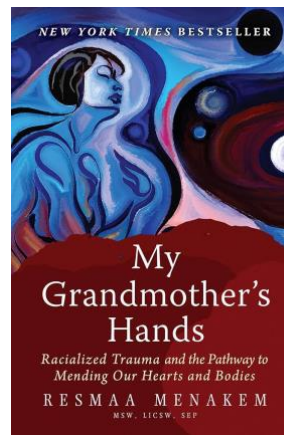
The club voted to skip reading a book in December as we all have a lot on our plates over the holidays. January and February were also omitted from our schedule due to overlap with the Living the Pledge workshops. SO...you have a long time to get ready for our March, April, and May meetings!



March 9

The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store

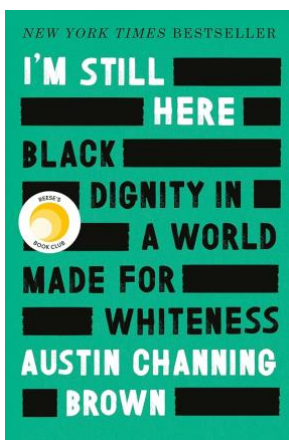
by James McBride



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 or (248) 568-6544.