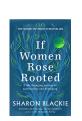
IMBOLC 2023

Member Contributions

DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT THE NEWSLETTER



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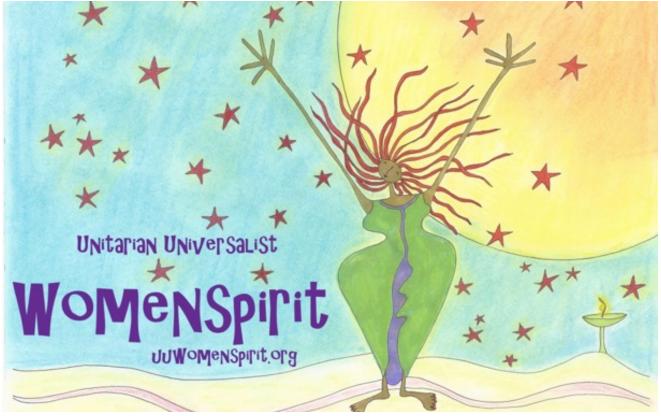


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ORGANIZATIONAL NEWS PAGE 8

SHE SPEAKS



Dear Sisters,

How many times have you heard the phrase, "Blood is thicker than water."? It's been used in common language for hundreds of years and in books and cinema for decades. We all think we know what this means: family ties are stronger and more significant than other relationships. Right? It is a sentiment designed for family guilt and obligation. But, where does it come from? No one really knows. Sources are conflicted. Some claim the bible but I can't find it in any version.

But . . . guess what? This isn't even how the idiom began. We have, in fact, reversed its meaning. The full version of this wisdom reads differently. "The blood of the covenant is thicker than the waters of the womb." A covenant is an agreement or commitment, the most serious of which were historically sworn in blood. Hence, the blood of the covenant. So, the blood of the covenant here refers to the people to whom we have chosen to make promises or commitment. The waters of the womb, on the other hand, refers to people we are connected to by virtue of birth, our biological family.

So the original meaning is that the relationships we've chosen to commit to are stronger than those we inherited by birth. Wow. That rather changes the concept. Of course, biological families are important and our relationships with people we grew up with are significant, but so are the families and relationships we've chosen.

A recent article in *The Atlantic* cites the longest ever study of the human experience. It can be boiled down to this sentence. *Relationships keep us happier and healthier throughout our life spans*. That's it. Cultivating meaningful friendships and maintaining them as we age is the most significant indicator of our ongoing happiness and well-being. It is the people we choose and commit to, our chosen community.

These thoughts remind me of how very important you all are to me. We are so fortunate to have found and cultivated this sisterhood. I look forward to nourishing and deepening our relationships in the years to come. After all, it's for our health.

Be well, Shannon

Mark your Calendars

Spring 2023 May 17-21, 2023 Fall 2023 October 4-8, 2023 Spring 2024 May 15-19, 2023 Fall 2024 October 2-6, 2024



New Moon

You open the door to your dreams and one new-moon winter night I stop by. Your freshness a delight, your compassion acute. I like you right away. But I am new to you and so, I try the traditional conversationa white lace ribbon around a tree branch, a snowy owl's gravelly voice, whisperings behind your ear, paperwhites and amethyst, rosemary, and a small mirror wrapped in red silk you find in a drawer. You are my new child, my new crescent self, we are born luminescent. I cradle stars to gentle sleep, murmur lullabies to pale willows. Do you lack sustenance despite your pots of hot tea? Find me in the silence of snow-shadowed Earth, in the promise of blood red pomegranate seeds huddled in the palm of your hand. Be serene. Hummingbirds will return.

--Nan Lundeen

Photos by Elizabeth Huestis

Celebrate Imbolc

-Jennifer Evans

We build great fires in anticipation of the turning of the season.

Make way for each unfurling frond, each new leaf, each pink bud

opening -

tender and fragrant.

Welcome every new blade of bright green grass.

Each one calls to us to believe again in hope.

Rejuvenation.

Life reborn.

Again, it is early spring stirring with life.

And the ewes are heavy with warm milk for their lambs.

Imagine living in a world that celebrates mother's milk

with parades and ringing bells.

A place that glorifies life over death.

Peace over war.

Imagine the joy, the hope, the compassion.

Brigid calls to us to put into action

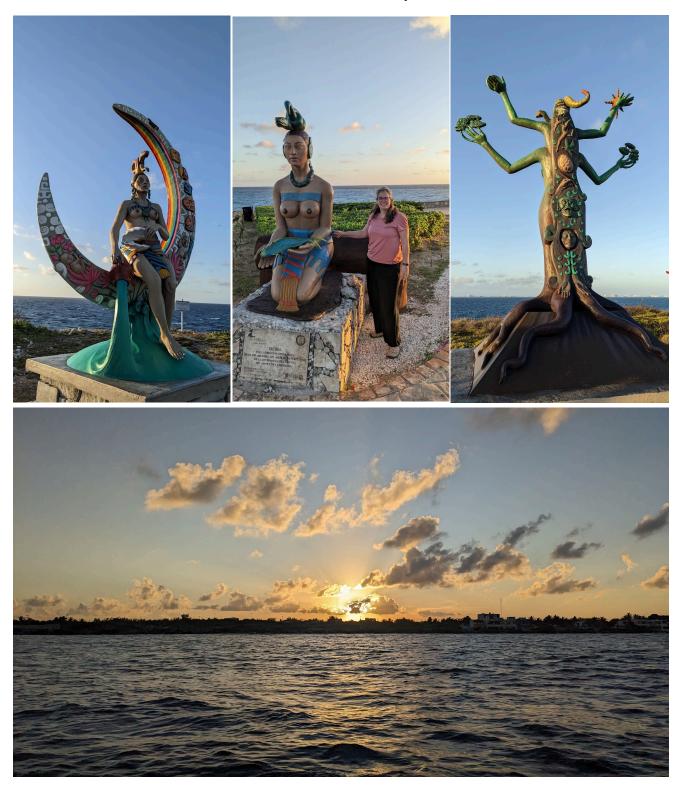
our winter musings.

Be alive and move.

IMBOLC 2023

Isla Muieres from Katie Bloedau

These pictures are from the tiny island a ferry ride from Cancun in Quintana Roo, Mexico. Isla Mujeres is home to an ancient Mayan temple ruins and is rumored to be where women would come to make petition for assistance with fertility and commune with the Goddess Ixchel. At Punta Sur, near the Cliff of the Dawn, the easternmost point of Mexico, there are new beautiful statues that were donated by an anonymous woman honoring Ixchel and the Mayans. My husband and I celebrated New Year's there, watching as many sunrises as we could get up for, and as many sunsets as we could get to the water for. Magnificent frigatebirds swirl and soar overhead constantly.



5

Imbolc

Imbolc is the earliest of the spring holidays, when we begin to see the first hints of the light to come. If you're lucky enough to live where I live, the birds resume their singing and the camellias fade into the first azaleas. No matter where you are in the northern hemisphere, the sun awakes a little earlier every morning. It is a time of beginnings. Time to order your garden seed, but not yet time to plant them. Enjoy this time of planning and preparing.

Imbolc Ritual

Before you begin this ritual, have a plan or intention for the year in mind. It can be specific and measurable. I plan to meditate twenty minutes a day, for example. Or, it can be more general, like I will set better boundaries. You can have one or several. If there are multiple people, each should have their own intention.

Gather at least two candles (minimum one for the cauldron and one for each participant), a cauldron, sand or soil, and matches. In the center of your space, put a layer of sand or soil in the bottom of your cauldron. Stick one candle in and light it. Place the other candles beside the cauldron.

Begin by opening your circle and creating sacred space in the way that is most comfortable for you.

Sit comfortably and ground yourself. Gently close your eyes and take six deep breaths in the following pattern: **Inhale**, two, three, four, five, six; **Hold**, two, three, four, five six; **Exhale**, two, three, four, five, six; **Hold**, two, three, four, five, six.

Slowly open your eyes. Stand and begin to chant: "Fire of my life, heat of the flame, fire of our passion, burn without shame." Continue to chant as you raise a cone of power. Once energy is moving through the space, allow each participant to pick up a candle and light it from the cauldron candle. She can move freely, dancing with the candle as she envisions her intention and calls it out to the group, while the rest of the group continues the chant.

When all participants have lit their candles, the chanting continues until the energy peaks. When it peaks, blow the candles out, visualizing your intentions traveling on the wind.

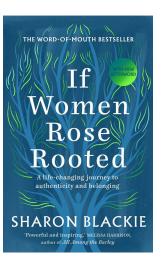
Collapse onto the floor. Ground and feel the energy drain into the earth. This is an excellent time for meditation and visualization.

When you are ready, close the circle in your customary way.

Womenspirit Book Club

If Women Rose Rooted, The Journey to Authenticity and Belonging by Sharon Blackie

Monthly Book Club continues on second Tuesdays, reading If Women Rose Rooted by Sharon Blackie, one chapter a month. February's meeting will happen at a special date: February 7 (not February 14). We will be wrapping up with this book in March. The next book selected is Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer, which starts April 11.



Announcements from Members

From Toni Stephenson: Ellen Hitchcock lost her beloved husband, Whitey, on Jan 10th. Ellen has often been the chaplain at our events and has offered workshops. She can be reached at <u>ehitch@comcast.net</u>



Photos by Shauna Ireland

News from the CoCo

The Coordinating Council, or CoCo, is the governing body of UUWomenspirit. The current members are Nina Brewer-Davis (Marketing and Outreach Coordinator), Tammy Sadler (Volunteer Coordinator), Christine Grewcock (Registrar), Judy Padgett (Membership Coordinator and Treasurer), Maggie Lovins (Program Resource Liaison or PRL), and Susie Sherman-Hall (Communications Coordinator).

Greetings, Dear Ones, from the CoCo,

In this season of rest and reflection, the CoCo has been working and reflecting on our work. We have discussed with the Mountain some clarifications and revisions regarding our relationship with them, including that we will review menus prior to events, and the distinction between Mountain staff/volunteers and event attendees. We will be tweaking our new Registration system, She Meets, based on feedback. The Sacred Text is undergoing a review and update, which has also been the occasion for discussion.

Anti-Racism and UUWomenspirit.

The CoCo is engaged in discussions about race and UUWomenspirit. We welcome feedback, and particularly encourage anyone who may have had a negative experience to share that with us.

Upcoming Events

We are getting excited about our Spring event, Mayan Wisdom for Birthing the New Dawn! May 17-May 21 at the Mountain in Highlands, NC. Join us as we are escorted through Mayan traditions by longtime students of those traditions.

Social hours continue monthly on fourth Fridays. We will have educational and informative social hours in theme with the spring event! There will be many opportunities to learn about Mayan traditions and other aspects of the event, like tracks and workshops.

Looking for a Few Great Sisters for Spring 2024 Event

Have you attended several UUWomenspirit Events and thought, "Hey, I could work on something like this! I have some great ideas."? If so, please consider volunteering to be on a Planning Committee! We are looking for a team of creative, enthusiastic sisters to plan and coordinate the Spring 2024 Event. Not sure what kind of work is involved in putting together an event? Never fear, we have the Sacred Text that spells out exactly what each position on the committee needs to do to create an event to brag about. There are six positions on the committee: Event Coordinator, Worship (two positions), Tracks and Workshops, Sales and Activities and Scribe. If you think you'd like to step into a role on the Event Committee for Spring 2024, or you have questions about what it takes to be on an Event Committee, please reach out to Tammy Sadler, Volunteer Coordinator, volunteer@uuwomenspirit.org.

Report from Membership Chair and Treasurer

It's time to pay your dues! As we celebrate Midwinter and the coming blessings of Spring, UUWomenspirit anticipates the blessing of your new or continuing support for 2023. You should have received a letter recently, reminding you it was time to pay your annual dues, which are \$45.00 for the calendar year. We hope to hear from you soon!

Unitarian Universalist Womenspirit is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, whose financial goal is to remain solvent enough to carry out our main activity, which is to present two events per year, where we can meet together in order to further our spiritual growth as women and honor the Feminine Divine. As a result of the pandemic and our inability to meet for several events, we initiated ways to stay connected virtually. Those have become popular and have some cost to the organization and are supported by dues. The Coordinating Council is also actively studying ways to add value to membership.

Here are some financial details I hope you find interesting:

Our cash flow has remained healthy through 2022

Both of our events last year showed small profits

Our General Operating Fund showed a small gain in 2022

Our Scholarship Funds grew in 2022 (funded by donations, not dues)

We were able to award all scholarships that were requested last year

We had 103 paid memberships in 2022

All of our in-depth, detailed, official financial records are available at all events and to any member at your request. Just contact Judy Padgett, Treasurer, at treasurer@uuwomenspirit.org and I'll be happy to send copies to you.

Financial Report Fall 2022 Event	
Income	
Program Fees	\$6250.00
Merchandise Sold	519.00
Total Income	6769.00
Expense	
Credits given (Planning Committee,	
Track and Workshop Facilitators	s,
Chaplain)	4945.00
Event Expenses (meetings, worship,	
registration, social hour, merchandise	
cost, bank processing fees)	1207.10
Total Expense	6152.10

Profit

\$616.90

From Toni Stephenson:

As a member of the Fall 2022 Planning Committee I feel compelled to write my personal feelings. When I said yes to Gail Stephenson about serving on the committee, I agreed to be scribe. However, due to some unexpected changes on the PC, I was reassigned to co-lead worship. I had never worked with Penny Featherstone before and had never planned worship long distance. What a blessing it turned out to be! Penny and I seemed to immediately "click" and we each honored the personal strengths that the other brought to the planning process. I have been privileged to offer worship several times before but I can honestly say that I received more personal satisfaction with this event than I have ever gotten before. It was a real joy to share it with my Womenspirit sisters. Thank you for the opportunity.

I also want to thank Gail for the great job she did as Event Coordinator. She met the challenges with aplomb and never seemed to get flustered. Her leadership skills were superb. Andrea Johnson's beautiful decorations allowed Penny and I to focus on the services and not how to decorate the space. Lastly, the wonderful youthful energy that Raven Stephenson brought to the committee was so helpful. She stepped up when us "older" members were low on energy and did much more than her part as scribe.

The CoCo was very helpful and quick to reply when we had a question. Kudos to them also. If you are considering offering to be a part of a future planning committee, I hope this inspires you to make that offer, maybe even if it means stepping out of your comfort zone. The blessings you can garner from doing this can be numerous.



Callings by Penny Featherstone

Some callings are quiet, almost imperceptible. You might brush them away like shooing a fly from your face. Someone's name comes to mind. Do you call them? Once in a dream I saw a friend but didn't recognize her. As I approached her I saw my very dear friend had been ravished by a disease. When I awoke she was unavailable and the memory of the dream faded for a while until discovering this wonderful woman, who was loved at UUWomenspirit, developed melanoma. As the disease progressed the dream flooded back with sadness, pain and mystery.

Callings, subtle or vivid, deserve our attention. We may shoo them away, call a friend, forget it, or struggle and question "Why me?" Some callings are great opportunities to move, grow, bloom, connect with others, learn new things, and to claim one's own power.

Planning worship services for The Magic Within The Cauldron, with wise and fun-loving Toni, and the entire Planning Committee was an amazing gift. It opened me in more ways than I can list. The biggest gift of this experience is that I feel called to offer a track to explore what is involved in planning worship services for UUWomenspirit. This track will include the basics, how to follow a theme, how to create and maintain sacred space, how to use music, chant and dance to maintain flow and how to create simple, meaningful services. More important than the "How" is "Why". Why is worship a critical part of UUWomenspirit? Why do we choose to take on this challenge? Am I called to be a part of this event planning? What do I have and want to offer to others to experience at UUWomenspirit? Who do I choose to create with? When is the timing right for me and for Womenspirit? We know where the call leads, to the wonder of Womenspirit and Magic of The Mountain.

Womenspirit is blessed with a rich herstory. We have a wealth of institutional knowledge. Yet we need to reach out to newer members and young women to grow our future. We need to share our knowledge and gifts to provide tools for our newer members to carry the mantle.

I do not know when I will be invited and able to offer this track, yet I do know it will happen. I invite you to consider whether such a track speaks to you.



Interview with Sue-Anne Solem by Sherri Philpott

After Sue-Anne retired, over 10 years ago, she was thinking about teaching Spanish to children. She began taking night classes to improve her language skills. Her teacher, aware of Sue-Anne's desire to deepen her study of the language and culture, offered her an opportunity to stay with her parents in Costa Rica and attend a language school. After that experience, she learned that it was more affordable to study in Guatemala.

She stayed in a town on Lake Atitlan with a Mayan family, taking classes 4 days a week. In the intervening years, as she become increasingly fluent in Spanish, she found herself drawn more intimately into Mayan culture and ceremony. Her Spanish teacher, now her friend and traveling companion, introduced her to a shaman, known as an ajQ'ij. (Sue-Anne mentioned that the ajQ'ij did not particularly like the term shaman, per se, so I'll refer to her as a guide).

She explained a bit about her spiritual journey to this guide who told her that based on her birthday, her Mayan sign is "The Path." Sue-Anne asked for this guide's blessing. While being in this casual setting, sitting on a white bucket beside a fire, Sue-Anne reflected on expressing gratitude for the path which she had taken so far and the path that lay before her. She was hoping to stay in Guatemala and not return to the States. The guide observed that she was likely resisting her path and suggested she still had work to do back home. Sue-Anne took her advice and returned to North Carolina.

Since that time, Sue-Anne has continued her studies, which include The Book of Destiny: Unlocking the Secrets of the Mayans and the Prophecy of 2012, by Mayan priest Carlos Barrios. She has a daily spiritual practice related to the Mayan calendar. The indigenous calendar year consists of 260 days, with each month lasting 20 days, for a total of 13 months.

December 21, 2012, is considered to be the end of a 5,050 year era and a day of liberation from patriarchy, with male and female energies existing in balance with each other. Sue-Anne was in Guatemala on that date and participated, with many others, in ceremonies related to this momentous transition.

The themes at the upcoming UUWomenspirit event will be based on the indigenous Mayan teachings Sue-Anne has studied over the years. She states that because all indigenous Mayan ceremonies are fire ceremonies, she will re-create something similar in the worship space.

A word about cultural appropriation: Evangelical Christianity has grown significantly in Guatemala, as well as other Central and South American countries, since the 1970's. Along with this trend is a turning away and devaluing of indigenous beliefs. Those invested in preserving the culture and spiritual practices of the Mayan people often welcome others to learn about and share a way of being in the world at risk of dying out. This has been Sue-Anne's experience.

Why Mayan From Sue-Anne Solem

Well, Happy New Year everyone, and Happy Imbolc! As we celebrate the visible increase of the Light, and the hints of Spring's beginning, I'm thinking about the many different cycles of time we humans can observe and experience.

This Spring, Womenspirit will focus on the indigenous wisdom of the Maya, who observed at least 20 different cycles of time: agricultural, astronomical, astrological, and spiritual. Their "long count" solar calendar of 5,125 year periods, allowed them to accurately predict solstices, equinoxes, and positions of stars and planets way into the future.

Why should this be of concern to us at this time? Well, remember the date December 21, 2012, when the "Mayan calendar" was supposed to end, meaning perhaps the ending of the world? Well, that was a complete misinterpretation of the Mayan cosmology.

The calendar which "ended" did not end; a great cycle of time came to an end. This cycle began Aug 11, 3114 BC, and ended on December 21, 2012. The Maya recognized it as a cycle characterized by a patriarchal culture dominated by war, conquest, and oppression. The Maya have looked forward to this new cycle for hundreds of years, because they knew it would usher in an era of peace, cooperation and higher consciousness. In fact, this important date written in Mayan glyphs was carved into stelae found all over the Mayan world. This new cycle, it was prophesied, would be the first cycle in human history of a balance of masculine and feminine energies.

When I was in Guatemala in 2011 studying Spanish, I had the opportunity to be given two Mayan ceremonies to answer questions about my path. These experiences were so profound, I wanted to learn more about Mayan wisdom. So my Spanish teacher, who had accompanied me to the ceremonies and translated from the Tzutujil language, brought me a book that would change the course of my life: The Book of Destiny.

The first half of the book is about Mayan wisdom, prophets, and prophesies, and the second half is about the Tzolkin, also called the Chol Q'ij. This is a spiritual calendar, uniquely attuned to the human experience, serving as a guide along one's path. It is a calendar of 260 days, and following it is a daily practice many Maya.

Carlos Barrios, the author, has been my spiritual guide ever since that time. He stresses the importance of revealing and sharing indigenous wisdom now. All the Mayan elders who are Day Keepers (Wise elders who keep to the days' energies in the sacred calendar) agree that it is time for this once secret knowledge to be revealed.

Like for many other spiritual groups, it had become dangerous, even life-threatening, to practice the old sacred ways. Even now, in the Maya diaspora, the majority have become Evangelicals who condemn the old ways. Those who do follow the ancient wisdom want it to spread throughout the world, and so are teaching it to non-Mayan people. On December 21, 2012, I went back to Guatemala to attend the ceremonies that would usher in this new 5,125 year period, called The Fifth Sun. At dawn, in the little town of San Pedro La Laguna, where I had lived and studied with the Maya people for several winters, we gathered to watch the sun come up over the distant active volcano. At sunrise, a great cry went up from the crowd of a few hundred people, many of whom had come from far away to witness this important day.

I attended fire ceremonies to welcome in the New Era, from dawn to evening, and made a commitment to continue following the Sacred Calendar, and share its wisdom in whatever ways I could. For that reason, I am very grateful for the opportunity to create this Spring's Womenspirit worship services with the theme of Mayan wisdom.

I feel very fortunate to have discovered what has become a daily guide for my life, and is the heart of my spiritual practice. Following the spiritual calendar, the Tzolkin, is a powerful and practical way of looking at one's life.

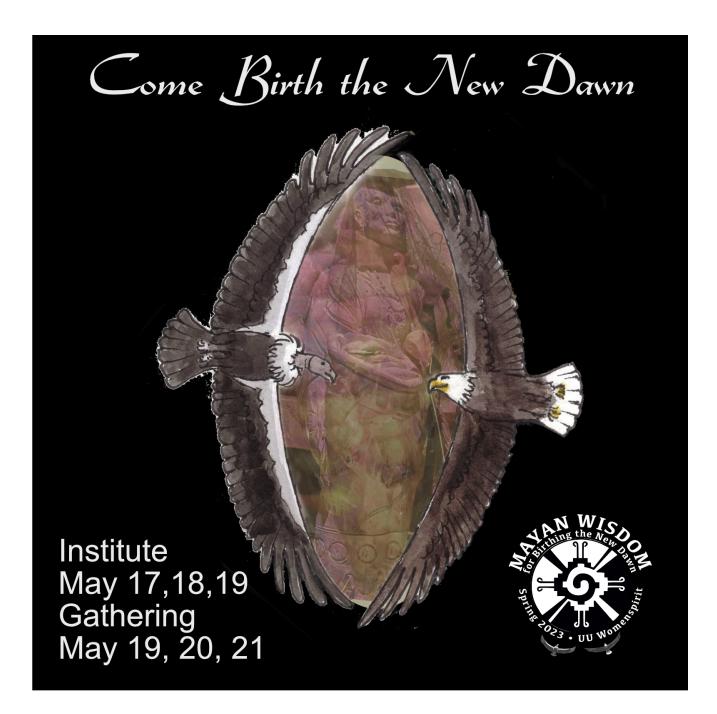
The Maya believe in The Sac Be: literally The White Road, or the Sacred Road. It is believed that following the Tzolkin can help us walk this Road. Each day in the calendar is called a Nawal, and there are 20 Nawales altogether, which repeat 13 times to make a 260 day Sacred Year. Each Nawal has its unique energy, which if we attune to it on its day, our path is smoother.

When we come together in Spring WomenSpirit, we'll "walk" five of these Nawales along the Sac Be. Each worship service will honor these days in sequence, through invocation, prayer, song, dance, and inner journeying.

We have called this Spring Womenspirit "Mayan Wisdom for Birthing the New Dawn" because we begin on the day KAWOQ: "The Midwife," and end with AQ'AB'AL: "The Dawn." The Mayan elders tell us that we must be the ""midwives" necessary to bring in this new consciousness. Other spiritual traditions are giving us this same message!

We will walk together this Sacred Road, The Sac Be, learning about and honoring the days KAWOQ, AJPU, IMOX, IQ, and AQ'AB'AL. KAWOQ is the midwife that births AJPU, the Spiritual Warrior within us, and through our dreams and ideas (IMOX) we align our voices (IQ)to bring in AQ'AB'AL, the Dawn of New Consciousness.

Our hope is that by sharing this ancient wisdom we can strengthen our commitment to the growth of an expanded conscious in the world. Our vision is that by honoring the wisdom of the indigenous cultures of this land we live on, coming together in Mayan Sacred time, we can better be in right relationship with Mother Earth, the Divine, ourselves, and each other.





Spring WomenSpirit will be embodying five Sacred Mayan days we are together. We are tapping into a revolving twenty day cycle of collective meanings that have been counted thru time for a very long time indeed. These days come with long astrological energies and meanings defining the Mayan Cosmos.



Beth Flanagan - EC • Betsy Bickel -Workshops & Worship • SueAnne Solem - Worship Maggie O'Neil -Sales • Carole Dixon - Scribe Carolyn Pilgrim - Chaplain

We will come together on the very feminine day of the Storm which is washing away that which does not serve us.

Thursday, we move into the day of being a spiritual Warrior and maker of wonder, who is at the crossroads of the completions of cycles.

Friday is an ancient day of mystery, receptivity, new beginnings, of the sea and primal beginnings. The institute ends and the gathering begins on this day of beginnings and we get to explore the eternal cycles of overlapping endings and beginnings.

Saturday will be the day of Wind. Will it blow in like a hurricane? Or will your soul be quietly whispering? Will you find your aligned voice, your way to speak truth in this new day? Will you allow winds of change?

We leave on the Day of Dawn, the womb, that which lies between shadow and light. We will leave pregnant with possibility of living sustainably into a new dawn.

These are a smattering of meanings for the ancient energies for the five days we will be together. This is tiny window into sacred energies we hope to embody.

IMBOLC 2023

From Barbara Stiffler

"THE NEW WOMAN" :From my upcoming book on Mabel Powers (1872-1966); Mabel lies reminiscing in Jamestown Hospital in 1966.

In the1890s, I am in my twenties. Ella Hepworth (author of The Story of a Modern Woman), Olive Schreiner (also anti-war) and Florence Bascom (first woman Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins) are names on the lips of every forward-looking woman. Writer Sarah Grand coins the term "New Woman" to describe these independent women who are set on radical change.

It is a heady time! Young women alive today cannot, perhaps, imagine the vitality, the emotional and mental ferment AND turmoil, the "throw it to the winds" daring of those days. For every closed and barred mind we come across, we subsequently meet like-minds, drawn together by a force larger than ourselves. We talk. Oh, how we talk. We talk early and late; we talk over one another; we complete each other's sentences; we say things aloud we have never even articulated to ourselves.

What are we talking about? Votes for Women, so women can command respect and power. We want to: attend university; work for a living; dress for greater physical freedom; have equality between marriage partners; and the choice to remain single.

It becomes international seminars – in the original meaning – seed beds of new solutions to old grievances. Conversations are so crowded with life stories; books that changed lives; and people from whom a single sentence served to put us on new paths of inquiry that they burst out of all confines and run amok! The result? New literature, art and drama; and no where more so than in Norwegian Henrik Ibsen's plays.

In January, 1914, I begin a series of evenings on Ibsen – 'the great disturber'. His A Doll's House brings us into a home where a married couple are having a reckoning. Nora, suffocated by marriage and otherhood, is not fulfilled by her socially-approved life. Understanding this, she declares: "I believe that first and foremost I am an individual. If I'm ever to reach any understanding of myself and the things around me, I must learn to stand alone."

I acted both parts in the pivotal scenes including the final scene where Nora leaves. Oh, how I relished the sound of that final slam of the door! Before I began, I enjoyed demonstrating the required loudness to the prop-man backstage.

I wish everyone could still feel that "devastating blast of light and air that came with Ibsen's Doll's House," as F. Scott Fitzgerald put it. People nowadays say Ibsen is no longer relevant.

I have to admit that these freedoms were exercised more by white women. All women did not rise at the same rate. Ah-h-h-h (a world of disappointment in that sound she makes aloud). Mabel Powers typified The New Woman who struggled for equality. She did lecture on Ibsen. I have no proof that she ever saw one of his plays, but they were printed for the public.



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Hand-dyed yarn and clothing, embroidered items including towels, tarot bags, and UUWomenspirit logo items, chainmaille jewelry, and various other shiny things.