Minutes of WTB Monthly Meeting – December 11, 2016 at Jowonio School

President Betty Lamb opened the meeting at 3:20 PM, welcoming about twenty women to our “Celebration of Light.” After the WTB Mission Statement and Safe Place Declaration were read, Betty updated us about recent and upcoming WTB events.

* Our 15th Anniversary Dinner on November 8th with Ruth Colvin as speaker was truly special. Thanks to Betty Lamb for spearheading the event, Penny Hart for co-chairing, and all those who worked so hard to make it a success. Treasurer Eve Tamela anticipates we will end up “in the black” which is an unexpected gift.
* Betty recently attended a Temple Concord Brotherhood/Sisterhood program on Africa presented by Joe and Fran Greenberg, who volunteered at the Starfish School in The Gambia. Yassin Fox, a WTB member active years ago, founded this school; WTB was involved in some early fundraisers. The Greenbergs are currently hosting an exchange student, Madeline Kunab, who graduated from the Starfish School and might be available to speak at our upcoming Lifecycles program on Adolescence.
* The WTB wreath entered in the Everson Festival of Trees was very well received. Themed on the diversity of immigrant cultures in the Syracuse community, it sold opening day to Mrs. Audi, who will display it in the cafeteria at the Stickley factory, a facility with a diverse workforce. Thanks to Bunny Hannum, Penny Hart and Betty for making the ornaments and to Sue Savion, Barb Bova, Penny Hart, and Betty for putting the wreath together at the Everson. Our wreath referenced that Syracuse has been declared a Compassionate Community—an effort shepherded by Jim Wiggins and supported by many members of WTB. There was some discussion about doing another wreath next year. Jennifer Crittenden offered notions from the sewing program that she typically donates to other groups; Diane Lansing suggested decorating a wreath with 1000 cranes and offered to teach us how to make them. We discussed the possibility of doing both a tree and wreath for 2017, as we did in 2015, utilizing both ideas.
* Sis Zucker will chair our volunteer efforts at the WCNY Travel Auction this January. Betty passed around a sign-up sheet for this popular event.
* The World Interfaith Harmony Assembly will be Monday February 6th at 6 PM at University United Methodist Church. The theme is “Love Is the Answer” and each participating group will come up with a question to which love is the answer.

Chairs had been arranged in a large circle for a “Celebration of Light.” Danya Wellmon introduced our program, saying this would be an informal discussion about how light has informed our paths as shaped by our religions, cultures, and beliefs. Penny Hart spoke about the Christian season of Advent, the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, a period of waiting and anticipation. Penny brought a candle holder with space for five candles representing Hope, Love, Joy (always pink), and Peace. The fifth candle (always white) is Christ’s candle. Typically these candles are arranged in a wreath symbolizing the eternity of God with the Christ candle in the center. A member or family in the congregation will light a new candle each Sunday in Advent—the Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve symbolizing the light of Christ coming into the darkness of our world. Scriptural readings accompanying candle lighting focus on the story and meaning of Christmas.

Carol Lipson brought a menorah. Light is important in Jewish worship. Each temple has an eternal light just above the Torah; this symbolizes God and can never be let to go out. Hanukkah celebrates a time when the Assyrian occupiers demanded that Jews honor pagan gods. The Maccabee brothers and their father resisted the Roman demand, fought them and won. The oil they managed to get to light the temple lamp miraculously lasted for 8 days instead of one, so Hanukkah is celebrated for 8 days. The “helper candle” (middle, highest one) is used to light the rest, from right to left, one candle each night as special prayers are recited. Candles are left to burn down and the glow makes this holiday really special. Carol has a menorah for each grandchild so each can light his/her own. As oil plays an important part in Hanukkah story, fried foods and desserts are prepared. While gift giving is not part of Hanukkah, it has been added because Christians give gifts at this time of year. Children play a dreidel game.

Betty Lamb brought in a menorah where the candles holders were figures on a keyboard. She played a humorous story on tape entitled “The Two Menorahs” from the book “Hanukkah Lights.” Two old friends argued about the two different schools of thought, one from Rabbi Hillel and the other from Rabbi Schmai, on the proper order in which to light the menorah candles and whether or not the menorah needs to be displayed in an outside window.

Danya, Diane Lansing, and Sue Savion talked about the centrality of light in Wiccan/Pagan worship. While practices differ by sect, all Yule and Solstice ceremonies involve the leaving of the light (entering darkness) and return of the light in the spring. There will be a celebration next Sunday (leaving of the Goddess of Light) at 2 PM at May Memorial. WTB is invited, but contact Danya first if planning on attending. The Roman Sun Goddess’ birthday was December 25th; under the Roman emperor Constantine, the Christian Church declared that date to be Christ’s birthday as well. Another Pagan tradition incorporated into Christmas is the lit Christmas tree itself; a tree brought into homes and lit with candles was thought to protect against devils.

Diane also referenced the 1993 Billings, Montana hate crime incident; a brick was thrown through the window of a five year old Jewish boy who was displaying a menorah there. Christian Sunday schools and town leaders banded together to say “Not in Our Town” and stand up for tolerance and compassion.

Joy Pople noted that in the modern world light pollution usually blocks our view of the stars. Thankfully, there are places in the United States, such as Oklahoma’s tall grass prairie or Bryce Canyon, that are still dark enough to display the splendor of the stars in the Milky Way. Barb Bova shared a personal story about how the light of candles and a glowing fireplace can bridge family and holiday tensions in a way that transcends any one religious tradition.

Betty Lamb was briefly honored for the time, talent, and leadership she gives to WTB and its programs; she was presented with three roses and our deep appreciation the wonderful job she is doing as our president.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Bova, Sunday Secretary