

MINUTES OF WTB PROGRAM MEETING

DECEMBER 12, 2021

There were about 14 members present in person and about 10 on zoom.

Barbara Bova, president, called the meeting to order at 3:10 pm. She suggested that WTB will have a meeting on the immigrant experience later in the year and will consider sponsoring an Afghan family.

The goals of WTB and the Mission Statement were read by Liz Spence.

Danya Wellmon introduced the speakers in the order of the holidays occurring this year.

Carol Lipson, Chanukah, the Jewish Festival of Lights

The history of Chanukah stems from the invasion by Alexander the Great in the 4th century BCE. He divided the large area he conquered into smaller kingdoms, each controlled by one of his generals or high officials. Judaea experienced ~150 years of benign rule until the Greek rulers of the adjacent Syrian area invaded and conquered Judaea. One of these rulers in particular forbade any participation in Jewish religion and culture, and converted the main religious site — the Jerusalem Temple — to honor the Greek god Zeus. In 164 BCE, a high official ordered a local Jewish priest Matthathias in the countryside to bow down to a Zeus altar and sacrifice a pig to Zeus. Matthathias refused; his five sons, led by the eldest — named Judah Maccabee — fought against high odds to liberate the Jews and win back the Temple. When they won the war, they sought to dedicate the Temple to the Jewish god, and declared an eight-day holiday. The only problem — the temple required an eternal light, and the Greek plundering had left only enough consecrated oil for one day. Somehow, the oil lasted for eight days until they could procure more purified oil — a miracle. Although Chanukah is a relatively minor holiday, not even included in books of the Hebrew Bible, it has gained greater status because of its proximity to Christmas. The holiday involves preparation of food cooked in oil, and now in America, there is generally an exchange of gifts. Carol lit a beautiful brass menorah; beginning with one candle, each of the eight nights an additional candle is added until finally the entire menorah is lit. Often each member of the family lights their own menorah; the glowing light of all the menorahs is truly magical. She also showed us several dreidels (special tops with Hebrew letters on the sides, signifying 'a great miracle happened there'); during Chanukah, children and adults play a gambling game — often for gold foil-covered chocolate coins called gelt. Friends hold Chanukah parties where guests bring menorahs and light them, celebrating together. Traditionally, menorahs are placed in a front window. In Jerusalem, in the religious areas, apartments and houses often have special indentations in the outer walls, with glass boxes for their menorahs to glow outside. This holiday is truly a Festival of Lights

Terra Harmatuk, Pagan Festival of Yule, with a focus on eclectic Wiccan, Circle of the Rising Phoenix

Terra brought yule candles, greenery and wreaths, a pentagram and a sun child doll to help us visualize Yule traditions. Winter Solstice has been celebrated in various forms for 30,000 years. While there are many different Pagan traditions, Yule is celebrated on the astrologically longest night of the year as an affirmation of our connection to the Earth. Yule celebrates the return of light to the world as the Goddess gives birth to the Sun Child. The evergreen wreath represents the everlasting life as the never-

ending wheel of the year as it turns through the seasons. People used to decorate forest evergreens with berries and nuts, eventually bringing them inside and lighting them with candles. The tradition of wassailing began as people poured a special drink on trees to help them grow. A Wiccan Yule log is lit with three candles representing the three aspects of the Goddess: maiden white, mother red, and crone black. People may jump over the Yule log as they state what they most wish for. Men in the group may enact the semi-annual fight between twin brothers: the Holly King (wearing a holly wreath, who looks a bit like Santa Claus representing the darkness) and the Oak King (wearing an oak wreath representing light). At Yule, the Oak King wins— fertility, life, and growth will return with the sunlight as the longest night passes. An altar is set up, the Elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water are welcomed, the Goddess is welcomed. The group sits in darkness, chanting to the rhythmic beat of a drum: “Waiting in the darkness, waiting for the sun, waiting all the long night...” The birth of the sun child is re-enacted. As the sun child is born lights are lit; members talk about their hopes and dreams for the coming year. Yule is a good time to interact with family and friends and a time to look inward and reflect.

Lorraine Markley, the Christian holiday of Christmas with a focus on the Catholic customs of the Immaculate Conception Church

Advent is the beginning of the liturgical year in November and leads up to the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. Lorraine began by sharing memories of family traditions in her childhood and adulthood that infuse the Christmas holiday with magic. She remembered the wonder of coming downstairs to a decorated Christmas tree and a visit from Santa Claus, stockings filled with sweets and an orange, Christmas Eve dinner Italian style with the Feast of 7 fishes. Her family would visit Radio City Music Hall’s Christmas show with living nativity, bake cookies and honey balls together, and gather with family and friends. She continued these traditions with her children including acts of kindness and good deeds such as gathering bikes and toys for the Christmas Bureau. Advent is the time of preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ and involves inner reflection to prepare our hearts and waiting. The Advent wreath has four candles to mark each week before Christmas and a candle in the center. Each week at Sunday Mass, a candle is lit focusing on a different theme relating to the coming of Jesus Christ. Candles represent hope, peace, joy (pink), love and faith. Each week certain Bible verses are read; the 4th week verses speak to the events happening to Mary and Joseph leading to the birth of Jesus in a manger. Lorraine brought an advent wreath and Torrone candy—the Italian almond and nougat candy special to Christmas—in her mom’s original candy dish. She shared a bulletin from today’s mass at Immaculate Conception showing the giant advent wreath with the Joy candle alight.

Sue Savion, the holiday of Kwanzaa which begins on December 26 and culminates on January 1.

Sue taught in Syracuse City schools and many of her students celebrate Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is a new non-religious American holiday created by Maulana Karenga in 1966 based on African customs and honoring the Africa-American culture. About 15 million people commemorate Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is based on a Swahili word meaning “first” based on African “first harvest” festivals. Decorations include a straw mat (representing tradition), ears of corn (representing children) and a candleholder with seven candles called a kinara. The kinara holds one black candle (African ancestors), 3 red (blood) and 3 green (land). Each of the 7 nights of Kwanzaa the family gathers, lights a candle, and talks about that day’s principle.

The seven principles of Kwanzaa are: Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), Imani (faith). Homemade gifts, often food, clothing or beadwork are exchanged. There is a Karuma feast on the final day – often a community celebration where African garb is worn and African dance and music performed. The focus is on unity, cooperation, purpose and faith. The holiday encourages participants to think about African roots and the American present. Sue read Maya Angelo’s “Reflections on Kwanzaa” which shares memories of her family’s Kwanzaa observances.

There was time for final questions which focused on specific observances, sharing of personal holiday traditions, and comments about the overlap between these holidays—all festivals of light. Participants present at Jowonio enjoyed snacks and chatting as the meeting ended at 4:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalie Young, CoSecretary, and Barbara Bova, President