

The Enchanting Holiday Pageant: A Time-Honored Tradition for Unitarian Universalist Churches



Opening Doors, Opening Hearts: A Holiday Pageant for Unitarian Universalist Churches by Jane Riley

★★★★☆ 4.1 out of 5

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As the crisp autumn air gives way to the gentle embrace of winter, Unitarian Universalist (UU) churches across the United States and beyond prepare for a cherished tradition that has captivated hearts and kindled spirits for generations: the Holiday Pageant.

Origins and Evolution

The origins of the Holiday Pageant can be traced back to the mid-19th century, when a group of UU ministers in New England sought to create a service that would celebrate the Christmas season in a way that was inclusive of all faiths and backgrounds. Inspired by the traditional Christmas pageant, they crafted a service that incorporated elements of Christian, Jewish, and humanist traditions.

Over the years, the Holiday Pageant has evolved to reflect the diverse and evolving nature of the UU community. Today, it is a syncretic celebration that draws upon a wide range of sources, including Christian carols, Jewish prayers, humanist readings, and Indigenous storytelling. This eclectic blend of influences creates a truly unique and inclusive service that resonates with people of all ages and backgrounds.

The Spirit of the Pageant

At its core, the Holiday Pageant is about more than just celebrating the holiday season. It is a time for community, reflection, and the sharing of hope and love. The service often incorporates readings and music that explore themes of peace, justice, compassion, and the importance of caring for one another.

While the pageant is typically held around Christmas time, it is not exclusively a Christian celebration. Many UU churches choose to celebrate the Winter Solstice instead, acknowledging the pagan roots of the holiday season and honoring the return of the light after the darkest days of the year.

Variations and Customs

The Holiday Pageant is a flexible and adaptable tradition, and it varies from church to church. Some congregations choose to stage elaborate productions with elaborate costumes and music, while others opt for simpler, more intimate services. Common elements of the pageant include:

- **Opening Procession:** The pageant typically begins with a procession of participants, often carrying candles or lanterns, symbolizing the bringing of light into the darkness.

- **Storytelling:** The pageant incorporates readings and storytelling that recount the stories of the Nativity, Hanukkah, and other holiday traditions from around the world.
- **Music:** Music plays a central role in the pageant, with choirs, soloists, and instrumentalists performing a variety of carols, hymns, and other musical pieces.
- **Rituals:** Many pageants include special rituals, such as the lighting of a unity candle or the sharing of a chalice of water, symbolizing the coming together of different faiths and traditions.
- **Closing Circle:** The pageant often concludes with a closing circle, where participants join hands and sing a song or chant that expresses hope and goodwill for the coming year.

The Enduring Legacy

The Holiday Pageant has become a beloved tradition in UU churches, and it continues to captivate audiences year after year. It is a time for community, reflection, and the celebration of the human spirit. Through its inclusive nature and heartwarming message, the Holiday Pageant reminds us of the importance of love, compassion, and the power of coming together during the darkest days of the year.

If you are looking for a meaningful and uplifting way to celebrate the holiday season, consider attending a Holiday Pageant at a UU church near you. You will be greeted with open arms and treated to a truly unforgettable experience.

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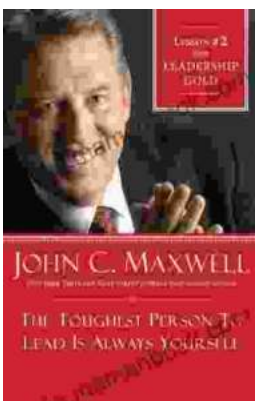


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