

Still Watching, Still Waiting

Each year at this time I begin to feel agitated at the grotesque annual orgy of consumerism riding on the back of one of the most subversive anti-establishment stories in all of Scripture. It may be that the only way normative society can cope with a story of such disruptive force is to bury it under a mad celebration of power and wealth – the very same idols of domination and oppression that the story subverts! The infancy narratives of Jesus in Matthew and Luke portray not the slightest iota of a hint of justification for the present-day American schlock-and-shop extravaganza – the worst cultural embarrassment on the planet since the continents inexplicably drifted apart, lo, so many eons ago.



The story of God-with-us (*Immanu – El*) as a child born into poverty to a young unwed mother, in a barn, in a land occupied by a brutal foreign power (Rome), in a time of increasing imperial repression and revolutionary ferment, is about as far away as one can get from Santa Claus, Clement Moore, and Currier & Ives. The idea of a savior who grows up to practice nonviolence and healing, and who teaches about a realm of God in which the ways of justice, peace, and love prevail over the world's violence and greed is an ongoing scandal to the guardians of world power. The entire gospel story of Jesus is anti-Establishment, and the narratives of his birth are very clear about grounding this story in the socio-political context of Empire, which is to say that these stories are the introduction to a larger story that is intended to subvert the power of Empire.

We in the techno-industrial-affluent West should learn to listen carefully to this story. The good news of Christ's birth is announced first to low-income workers (shepherds) and foreigners (magi). His birth is seen as a threat to the Establishment (Rome and Herod) and provokes a violent response. His family is forced to flee from their home to escape the violence of the ruling powers and become refugees in a foreign land. His mother, prior to his birth, sings a song of rejoicing that makes no attempt to conceal the revolutionary hope of an oppressed people ("He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty"). The "good news of great joy" announced by the angels was not about an individual salvation detached from the world's suffering and injustice, but was instead the proclamation of deliverance for a people held captive by the iron chains of Roman power.

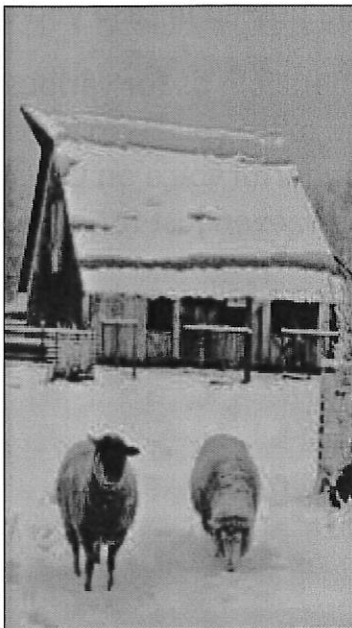
It's hard to square military violence and economic imperialism with the heart of the Christmas story. And it ought to be hard for all of us Christians in our fair land to hear this story without experiencing a profound sense of discomfort, if not dismay. Sadly, however, we rarely *hear* it at all, for each year it is drowned out by the clanging sounds of the true objects of our worship: unrestrained materialism and nationalism.

In fact, the American Christmas festival has *never* been about Jesus' birth or the gospels. In the early centuries of Christianity, the Christmas celebration was an attempt to counter the Roman pagan festivals around the time of the winter solstice. In the Middle Ages and well into the early modern period in Europe, it had become a peasant celebration marked by carnality, heavy drinking, and all manner of excess. The Puritans in colonial America were so offended by it that they outlawed Christmas observances altogether: between 1659 and 1681, it was *illegal* to celebrate Christmas in Massachusetts! Since the nineteenth century it has been about the reenactment of an idealized golden age of Christmas celebrations that never existed ("I'm dreaming of a white Christmas, just like the ones we used to know"), and about the social construction of childhood and "family values" (see the excellent book, *Christmas Unwrapped: Consumerism, Christ, and Culture*, Richard Horsley and James Tracy, editors). The successful creation of the present American Christmas festival had the added effect of legitimizing consumerism as a primary facet of the

celebration, while eliminating the rowdiness that had characterized the former holiday observance, and replacing the practice of giving to the poor with a more domestic pattern of giving among families and friends. Some have proposed that the American Christmas festival has become a religion in and of itself: the religion of consumer capitalism.

Hence, my annual agitation, which is rooted in the way our culture uses the Christmas story as a thin cover for the flaunting of material wealth and for the conspicuous consumption of overwhelmingly useless products (many of which find their way to the local landfill by spring). Yet, in all of this, in spite of everything, each year I find hope.

I find hope in the way countless communities of faith – large and small - observe and celebrate the *real* Christmas story. I find hope in surprising acts of generosity and mercy and grace. I experience God's glory in the most unlikely places, in the most unexpected ways – in the side streets and cattle sheds of life. You can find them there, too. I know many of you have.



The *really good news* is that Christ is born each year in that stable no matter who is in power, no matter how oppressive the Empire, no matter how much the nations are engulfed in their warring madness, no matter how much the powers of the world try to drown out the angel chorus. We can always find this Child, and the manger where he is born. Always. We can kneel down in the straw. Whatever *really* happened, this story is always true. Rejoice!

A blessed Christmas Season to all of you!

Rev. Bert

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bert".

From Music Director, MARY MILKEY-MAY

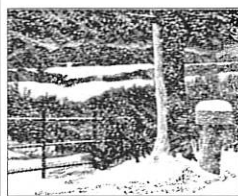
MUSIC NOTES

December was a busy and full month for music folks at Centre. Thanks to a donation from Stephanie Cary, we were able to hire a wonderful trumpeter, Brooks Holmes, for the second Sunday of Advent. Brooks is an outstanding musician and a terrific colleague with whom to work. Thanks, Stephanie, for making it possible!

On the third Sunday of Advent, several choir folks delivered Christmas cheer to Virginia Knuebel and Don Webster. I'm pretty certain they enjoyed having us sing and I know we all enjoyed spending time with them. We talked about going to some nursing homes and decided we'd make a commitment to do that in the spring when places tend not to have as many groups coming. We will definitely follow through on this goal and will keep you posted in case you'd like to join us.

We have had a few non-regular choir members join us for various services during the season and have greatly appreciated the extra voices. A special thank you goes out to Haley Marcil for sharing her wonderful voice on Christmas Eve! Remember, you are always welcome to sing.....even just for a Sunday or two!

I look to sharing more music with Centre Church folks as we enter 2018!



"Winter is the time for comfort, for good food and warmth, for the touch of a friendly hand and for a talk beside the fire: it is the time for home." — *Edith Sitwell*

CENTRE BELLS

The Newsletter of
Centre Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ
January 2018

From Acting Council Chair, MARGO NEALE

Greetings from Council and Happy New Year to all!

Matt Kennedy has found it necessary to take a leave of absence for the next few months from the responsibility of Council Chair. His workload is extremely heavy and he finds it almost impossible to give the position of Council Chair the time it requires. He provided solid leadership as long as he was able and we thank him earnestly for the work that he has done.

There are very good things happening at Centre Church. Starting in the basement, I would cite Loaves and Fishes, which is serving upwards of 400 meals a week. Carry Me Home, a small group of young women, gathers gently used clothing for refugees and has, over time, shipped 5.5 tons of good used clothing to refugees languishing in Greece. The Centre for Children is now serving 36 children, many of whom live in the downtown area and are on public assistance of one kind or another.

In addition, there are seven Alcoholic Anonymous groups meeting weekly at Centre Church. There are two book study groups, each with 6-10 members, and a newly welcomed Bridge Group under the tutelage of Dennis Newman. Our choir seems to be growing steadily under the direction of Mary Milkey-May.

However, at the very heart of our congregation there are matters that are quite challenging. Our esteemed pastor, Reverend Bert Marshall, will be leaving at the end of February. We are working to find a replacement for him until we can call a settled pastor. Our pledge drive, even with many congregants increasing their pledges, has met with modest success. Attendance at church has been lower than last year. Our church school, while holding at 4-6 children each week, needs our loving support, encouragement, and some innovative thinking.

Churches all over the country are experiencing approximately what we are experiencing. We need to take pride in what we are doing well and to begin, with God's help, to fashion a new way of "being church" in the world. I pray that, by working together, we will be able to find our way.

BOARD of DEACONS

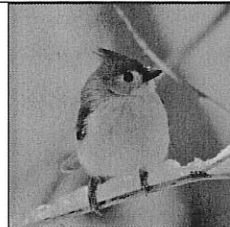
Deacons' Doings

The Deacons will be hosting a chili luncheon on **January 28th** directly following church. This is a tradition that we have done for many years. Please let one of the Deacons know if you can make homemade Chili, cornbread, dessert or bring a beverage. The Deacons are Joy Everett, Wendy Randall, Heidi Mario, and Bill and Carlene McCarty.

A subcommittee has been formed with Bill McCarty from the Deacons, Margo Neale from Council and Dart Everett to find an interim minister for March 2018 if a minister hasn't been hired by that time.

Deacon of the Month duties are being shared by all the Deacons in January, February and March due to vacations in warmer weather.

~Carlene McCarty, Chair



"What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness." John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley, In Search of America*

Board for Member Care

Position open: Individual willing to be a part of the Member Care Board.

Qualifications:

- *A desire to help members of the Centre Church family in times of illness
- *Participate in planning for times of celebration such as Silver Bells Sunday, the All-church Picnic, etc.
- *Correspondent for special occasions
- *Attend monthly board meetings.

Equal opportunity volunteer opportunity!

Please contact Chair Marion Daley at (802)387-5822 or MEDaley2@myfairpoint.net.

BOARD FOR MISSION & SERVICE

The **Second Sunday Offering for January** will be the Luz del Mundo scholarship that assists with school expenses for the children of our sister parish in El Salvador. Here in the US we are accustomed to a free public education, but in El Salvador obtaining an education faces numerous obstacles. Public schools are often poorly funded and of poor quality, with overcrowded classrooms, underpaid teachers, and shortages of materials. Students are expected to pay for their own uniforms and school supplies, and may face long unsafe walks and bus rides every day, sometimes through gang territories. The majority of the Pre-K through 9th grade students at Cristo Redentor apply for tuition funding to attend the neighborhood Lutheran school instead, because it is safer and closer to home. The high school students are more mature in order to deal with the bus rides and resist gang recruitment efforts. For them, we help with general school supplies and uniforms.

Meet some of our Luz del Mundo Scholarship Students...

MERCEDES had a baby girl (Zahory) last year and left school, because culturally in El Salvador pregnant girls and young mothers don't stay in school. But she stayed active in the church and very much wanted to continue her education. She was accepted to a new El Salvador national program for teens who are parents and/or working, in which she takes classes online and attends in-person sessions on Saturdays. In February she will have final exams, leading to the Salvadoran equivalent of a GED.

JORGE was already the first person in his family to graduate from 9th grade, and is now aiming to be the first person in his family to graduate from high school! He is in the technical school, taking accounting classes. His mother Maria Celia (who sells bread from a huge basket she carries on her head) had 15 children, 10 are living. His older siblings left school in 5th or 6th grade, some due to learning disabilities, and his sister decided not to go to high school in order to work to help support the family.

ANDREA was a Luz del Mundo scholarship student for many years, but she attended high school in another town while living with relatives, after having been briefly kidnapped in downtown Apopa (and released unharmed, but not surprisingly she felt safer living elsewhere for a while). She received a scholarship from the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod to attend beautician school and is now working hard at resurrecting Cristo Redentor's neighborhood beautician shop. On top of that, she advocated tirelessly for 3 neighbor siblings who moved in with her family when they lost housing, and was able to get all 3 enrolled in school and onto the scholarship program (they're now in 10th, 7th and Kindergarten). Her older sister Jenny Carolina attends the University, majoring in Business Administration with an emphasis on English, and her younger brother Wilber is also a scholarship student; they all live with their grandmother. They were 9, 6 and 1 when their mother left for the US to seek a better living; she now lives in Washington, takes care of a handicapped uncle, stays in touch with the family and sends a little money when she can. Her father has been living in California for many years; they have had no communication in 2 years.

“Snow was falling,
so much like stars
filling the dark trees
that one could easily imagine
its reason for being was nothing more
than prettiness.”

— **Mary Oliver**





CHURCH LIFE

The 9:00 a.m. **Sunday morning book group** is reading "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind" by Yuval Noah Harari. From the back cover: "In



Sapiens, Harari delves deep into our history as a species to help us understand who we are and what made us this way. An engrossing

read." We agreed to read ahead to better understand the book as there is so much offered in its pages. All are welcome to explore with us. We meet in the library on the main level. If the door is closed it is because the noise in the hall is distracting, so please come in.

WOMEN'S SPIRIT . . .

WOMEN'S SPIRIT group decided to use Viktor Frankl's book **MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING** as a kickoff to the new year.



The group meets every Thursday at 4:30 in the church library. Everyone is welcome and you do not need to own the book to come.

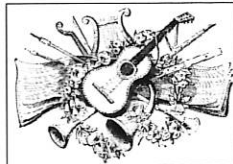
Brown Bag Lunch Group

The first Wednesday of the month is **January 3** and that's when the small but vibrant lunch group meets to share lunch and conversation. The only thing that could stand in the way of meeting would be the weather. Everyone is welcome for noontime chatting.

Everyone is invited to the **MOMENT for PEACE**

Friday, January 5
5:30-6:00PM

Centre Church Parlor
Everyone is welcome.

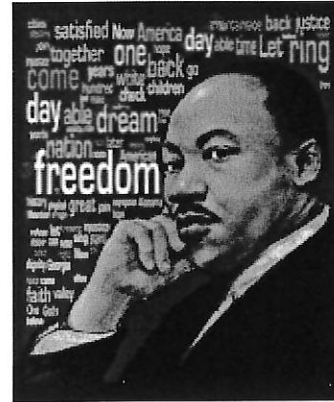


Classical guitarist Steve Procter will offer a selection of music by Renaissance and Baroque composers, traditional English tunes and Irish airs, and some original compositions for our time of meditation.

Annual

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CELEBRATION

January 15, 2017 • 5:30 PM
Centre Congregational Church, UCC



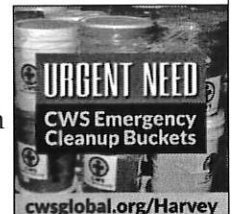
sponsored by the
Brattleboro Area Interfaith Leadership Alliance
Let us be those creative dissenters who will call our beloved nation to a higher destiny. To a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humanness.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The January meeting of the Fundraising Committee will be on **January 10** in the library at 3:30 p.m.

BOARD FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Thank you to the wonderful Faith in Action volunteers who have done so much with the church's children this Fall. Priscilla Svec organized a lemon-aid stand, which the children used to raise funds for hurricane victims around the world—and they received a matching grant! The money was used to make cleanup buckets, which we then blessed as a congregation before sending out. This project spanned several Sundays' worth of Faith in Action. We also had several volunteers with one-day projects, which were also wonderful! We are looking now for more Faith in Action volunteers for the rest of winter and Spring. The sign-up sheet is in the parlor, or see Logan Lefebvre or James Cera.



SEARCH COMMITTEE

Early in December our Search Committee met with Lynn Bujnak from the Vermont UCC Conference. With our Church Profile complete she hand-delivered 4 fulltime ministerial candidate profiles! By the end of that week she emailed us two more candidate profiles. This is where the confidentiality comes in to play with our committee. We are happy to tell you the number of profiles we are reviewing and how it's going, but we are not going to tell you who sent us profiles.

At this meeting we also went over the next steps in our search. We are sent ministerial profiles that the conference has determined meet standards for the VT UCC conference. Then I send them a letter that we received their profile. Together, after reviewing our Church Profile, we developed a Candidate Rating Worksheet. Individually we read and rate each profile. Then our Search Committee will get together and discuss our ratings of each profile. Profiles that we agree have many strengths, we will ask for a tape/video of one of their sermons, look at their church's blog, etc. At this point we will send No Thank You letters, ask for more information or put their profile in a holding pattern. When candidates continue to intrigue us we will call their references. Each profile will also have 3 letters of reference attached. The next step forward is to Skype or Zoom with the candidate.

After this we have to make more decisions. Do we ask for more references, ask for more sermons to review, have a candidate preach at a neutral site? I'm getting so excited just thinking about all this!

Our Vermont UCC Conference has been and continues to be very supportive in our Search for a Settled Minister. Your Search Committee of 8 church members has become good friends. The bonds we are making will surely last our lifetimes. Thank you for allowing us to lead our church on this path.

We hope you had a special Christmas and will have a Happy New Year!
~Anne Fecto

Copies of the **Centre Church Profile** are available. If you would like a PDF copy, please contact Jim Bedard at jbedaoak@comcast.net or stop by the church office for a printed copy.

PEOPLE



A word of good cheer would be warmly received by members and friends of our church who are in nursing homes, assisted living centers, or are housebound as of December 27.

DON WEBSTER

50 Highlawn Road
Brattleboro, VT 05301 257-1434

FRAN BURROWS

66 Green Meadow
Brattleboro, VT 05301 254-4934

JEANNE RUETER

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Brattleboro, VT 05301 254-4977

NANCY CLARKE

Holton Home, 158 Western Ave.,
Brattleboro, VT 05301 254-5005

WANDA GODFREY

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Ames, IA 50014 (515)337-1956

JANE REED

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Townshend, VT 05353 (802)221-4213

KAREN GETTY PETER

Langdon Place, 136 Arch Street, Room 152
Keene, NH 03431 (603)357-3902

ROGER KETCHAM

c/o 8 Williams Court
Weymouth, MA 02188

Please let Hilary know if we've missed someone.

BRATTLEBORO CENTRE FOR CHILDREN



The families for Centre for Children want to thank the generous church members who participated in the Giving Tree this year. Your anonymous purchases enabled many children to have a brighter Christmas than their families alone could provide. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

~Nan Mann, Director

JANUARY 2018

*Holy Communion
celebrated

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 OFFICE CLOSED New Year's Day	2 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes 6 ⁰⁰ Church Council 7 ³⁰ AA Meeting	3 12 ⁰⁰ Brown Bag 12 ⁰⁰ ACA	4 1 ³⁰ Quilting Ministry 4 ³⁰ Women's Spirit 7 ⁰⁰ Choir Rehearsal	5 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes 3 ³⁰ Charter for Compassion 5 ³⁰ Moment for Peace 7 ³⁰ AA Meeting	6 9 ⁰⁰ Private Party 1 ⁰⁰ AAUW Tea Party
7 9 ⁰⁰ Book Study 10 ⁰⁰ Worship* 10 ⁰⁰ AA Meeting 2 ⁰⁰ Reed Service 6 ⁰⁰ AA Meeting	8 1 ⁰⁰ Prayer Shawl 7 ³⁰ AA District 8	9 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes 7 ³⁰ AA Meeting	10 12 ⁰⁰ ACA 3 ³⁰ Fundraising Committee	11 1 ³⁰ Quilting Ministry 4 ³⁰ Women's Spirit 7 ⁰⁰ Choir Rehearsal	12 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes 12 ³⁰ Centre Bells deadline 7 ³⁰ AA Meeting	13
14 9 ⁰⁰ Book Study 10 ⁰⁰ Worship/FIA 12 ⁰⁰ Meetings 10 ⁰⁰ AA Meeting 6 ⁰⁰ AA Meeting	15 OFFICE CLOSED MLK Day 1 ⁰⁰ Prayer Shawl 5 ³⁰ MLK Service	16 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes 7 ³⁰ AA Meeting	17 12 ⁰⁰ ACA 12 ³⁰ BAIL	18 1 ³⁰ Quilting Ministry 4 ³⁰ Women's Spirit 7 ⁰⁰ Choir Rehearsal	19 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes 7 ³⁰ AA Meeting	20 7 ⁰⁰ Rock Voices
21 9 ⁰⁰ Book Study 10 ⁰⁰ Worship/FIA 10 ⁰⁰ AA Meeting 6 ⁰⁰ AA Meeting	22 1 ⁰⁰ Prayer Shawl 7 ⁰⁰ Spiritual Conversations	23 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes 6 ⁰⁰ Church Council 7 ³⁰ AA Meeting	24 Centre Bells mailed 12 ⁰⁰ ACA	25 1 ³⁰ Quilting Ministry 4 ³⁰ Women's Spirit 7 ⁰⁰ Choir Rehearsal	26 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes 7 ³⁰ AA Meeting	27
28 9 ⁰⁰ Book Study 10 ⁰⁰ Worship/FIA 10 ⁰⁰ AA Meeting 6 ⁰⁰ AA Meeting	29 1 ⁰⁰ Prayer Shawl	30 11 ³⁰ Loaves & Fishes 7 ³⁰ AA Meeting	31 12 ⁰⁰ ACA			

Happy New Year!

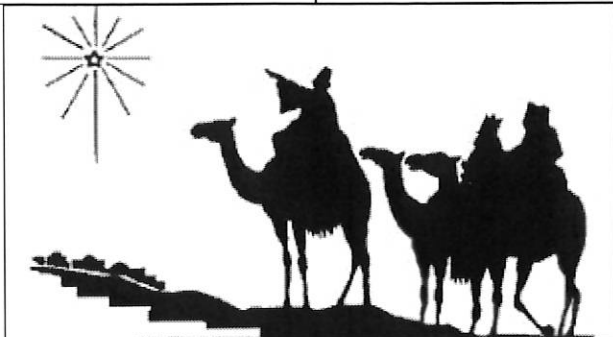
BIRTHDAYS

4 Rene LaPlante
5 Torin Kindopp
6 Terrance Slate
7 Marielle Holbrook
11 Marion Daley
13 Kathryn Kindopp
Adelaide Minott
Nancy Wittler
14 Katherine Maisner

15 Christina Goodwin
Joanne MacLean
16 Levi Healey
17 William McCarty
18 Dorothy Vander
Meulen
21 Bert Marshall
25 Ron Svec
26 Rennie Washburn
30 Holly Kennedy
Tyler Momaney

January Lectionary Texts:

1 Eccl 3:1-13 • Ps 8 • Rev 21:1-6a •
Matt 25:31-46
6 Isa 60:1-6 • Ps 72:1-7, 10-14 • 2 Eph 3:1-12 •
Matt 2:1-12
7 Gen 1:1-5 • Ps 29 • Acts 19:1-7 • Mark 1:4-11
14 1 Sam 3:1-10, (11-20) • Ps 139:1-6, 13-18 •
1 Cor 6:12-20 • John 1:43-51
21 Jonah 3:1-5, 10 • Ps 62:5-12 • 1 Cor 7:29-31 •
Mark 1:14-20
28 Deut 18:15-20 • Ps 111 • 1 Cor 8:1-13 •
Mark 1:21-28



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News items and articles, address changes, or requests to be added or removed from the *Centre Bells* mailing list should be submitted to the administrative assistant at: 802-254-4730/
centrechurch@centrechurchvt.org



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Facebook: [Centre Congregational Church-Brattleboro, VT](https://www.facebook.com/Centre-Congregational-Church-Brattleboro-VT)

CHURCH STAFF AND LEADERSHIP

Interim Minister
Music Director
Administrative Assistant
Sextons
Financial Secretary

Rev. Bert Marshall: revbert@centrechurchvt.org
Mary Milkey-May: music@centrechurchvt.org
Hilary Farquhar: hilary@centrechurchvt.org
Gary and Paul Smith
Christine Yost: finance@centrechurchvt.org

Acting Council Chair
Treasurer / Clerk

Margo Neale
Holly Kennedy / Constance Bresnahan

2 0 1 8



JANUARY

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