Making This Recording: The music of the winter holidays always has a special appeal — perhaps because we hear it for such a short time — perhaps because it brings such feelings of goodwill. At the North Parish, a bounty of musical talent and leadership makes the holidays especially bright. By capturing these talents in a recording, we hope to share the music with the community as well as honor the upcoming 350th anniversary of the North Parish.

As the excitement of producing a recording grew, however, the reality of the hard work involved began to sink in. While our New England neighbors prepared for spring, we set aside three months of evenings and weekends selecting, rehearsing and recording music of Christmas and Hanukkah.

The pieces on this recording, like our Unitarian-Universalist faith, draw inspiration from many religions and cultures. Here are a few historical tidbits about some of our selections... "The Night Before Christmas" was written by Clement C. Moore, a Unitarian minister; Franz Gruber sang "Silent Night" accompanying himself on acoustic guitar; "O Little Town of Bethelem" was written by Bishop Philip Brooks, a local summer resident whose statue faces the North Parish from the Olde Common. Participation in our music program is open to all and everyone brings unique talents and abilities. The efforts of individuals and groups — and the music they create — is what inspired this recording. As the North Parish prepares to celebrate 350 years of history, this recording celebrates the joy we have all shared in making and listening to music!

Our Thanks: To you for purchasing this recording — we hope you enjoy our effort! To the North Parish for being the reason and purpose behind our effort.

Thanks also to the Town of North Andover, friends of the North Parish who participated in the congregational singalong, Manuel Arista for crafting the flute that Sarah plays, Jerry Hall, the "barricade brigade", Jon Chase & Chase Productions, Claudia Wyllie.

Special thanks to Matt Johnson for his talent and drive; to Fred Glore for his faith that our musical enthusiasism could be captured on a recording; to Debb Putnam whose enthusiasism and support kept us on track; to Barry Low who always answered the call.

About the North Parish: The "Church at Andover" was organized October 24, 1645, by a group of ten freeholders, the number required by Massachusetts law to constitute a church. Although its exact construction date and location are not known, the building which served as the First Meetinghouse and Church was near the "Old North Burying Ground" on Academy Road. Among the first buildings in town, it stood only until 1669.

Activity in the settlement then known as Andover centered around the church of the North Parish. This activity took on a disturbing focus in the 1690's when the furor of the Salem witch trials reached the Andovers. Reverend Dane, who served as minister of the North Parish for many years, played a key role by appealing to the state legislature to stop the hysteria and end the witchcraft trials.

The present, and fifth structure, was built in 1836 at about the time the organization became a Unitarian church. Overlooking the Olde Common, the bell tower houses a Paul Revere bell cast in 1803 (you can hear the bell in the closing piece of the recording). The current minister, Reverend David Blanchard, is the 16th to serve the congregation during its 350 year history.

Through the years, the North Parish has continued to focus as a center of community activity and involvement. Politically and socially active, many church members organize or volunteer in activities that reach out to the community: People's Pantry, the North Andover Thrift Shop, Amelia Reeve Social Action Youth Award, Crossroads Coffeehouse, Habitat for Humanity. The building itself serves as home for many other community activities: Merrimack Valley People for Peace, Merrimack Valley Psi Symposium, Al-Anon.

The photo for the cover looks east across the Olde Town Common to the North Parish Church. Selections for this compilation of holiday music were recorded in the church sanctuary during April–May 1995.

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