

# About the Danbury UU's



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury  
1822 – 2020

*Welcoming all in a spirit of compassion,  
inquiry and service.*

## **Welcome!**

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury (UUCD) is a religious community of approximately 135 adult members and friends, and another 40 children from infants to high-schoolers. Our community encompasses people from newborns to those in their 90s, offering the opportunity for many intergenerational interactions. We are a geographically diverse group as well, covering the greater Danbury, CT area. We stretch east-west from Southbury, CT to Putnam, NY and north-south from New Milford to Ridgefield, CT. In addition to one Sunday Service, we offer religious education experiences for adults and youths throughout the year, as well as special events that bring our church congregation together.

The Congregation is a direct descendant of the First Universalist Society of Danbury which was organized in 1822. There has been an active Unitarian Universalist (UU) presence in northern Fairfield County since that time. This makes us the second oldest UU society in the metropolitan New York district. We celebrated our 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1997.

This booklet will help you learn more about us. Of course, the best source of insight is to talk with members. See us at Sunday Services; call us; talk with us at potluck dinners; call our Minister.

Welcome! We hope you will return often.

## **UU Principles**

(From the Principles and Purposes  
of the Unitarian Universalist Association)  
Adopted 1985, Amended 1995

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

<b><u>1</u></b>	The inherent worth and dignity of every person
<b><u>2</u></b>	Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
<b><u>3</u></b>	Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
<b><u>4</u></b>	A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
<b><u>5</u></b>	The right of conscience & the use of the democratic process within our congregations & in society at large
<b><u>6</u></b>	The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
<b><u>7</u></b>	Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part

**The Sources of our Faith**  
(From the Principles and Purposes  
of the Unitarian Universalist Association)

The living tradition we share draws from many sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love
- Wisdom from the worlds' religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit
- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

## **The Wider Unitarian Universalist Community**

Although Unitarian Universalists are not bound by a religious doctrine, a number of philosophies pervade the thinking of many Unitarian Universalists (UUs). The Reverend David O. Rankin has articulated beliefs with which many UUs are comfortable.

### **What Do Unitarian Universalists Believe?**

1. We believe in the freedom of religious expression. All individuals should be encouraged to develop their own personal theology, and to present openly their religious opinions without fear of censure or reprisal.
2. We believe in the toleration of religious ideas. All religions, in every age and culture, possess not only an intrinsic merit, but also a potential value for those who have learned the art of listening.
3. We believe in the authority of reason and conscience. The ultimate arbiter in religion is not a church, or a document, or an official, but the personal choice and decision of the individual.
4. We believe in the never-ending search for Truth. If the mind and heart are truly free and open, the revelations which appear to the human spirit are infinitely numerous, eternally fruitful, and wondrously exciting.
5. We believe in the unity of experience. There is no fundamental conflict between faith and knowledge, religion and the world, the sacred and the secular, since they all have their source in the same reality.
6. We believe in the worth and dignity of each human being. All people on earth have an equal claim to life, liberty, and justice --- and no idea, ideal, or philosophy is superior to a single human life.
7. We believe in the ethical application of religion. Good works are the natural product of a good faith, the evidence of an inner grace that finds completion in social and community involvement.
8. We believe in the motive force of love. The governing principle in human relationships is the principle of love, which always seeks the welfare of others and never seeks to hurt or destroy.
9. We believe in the necessity of the democratic process. Records are open to scrutiny, elections are open to members, and ideas are open to criticism --- so that people might govern themselves.
10. We believe in the importance of a religious community. The validation of experience requires the confirmation of peers, who provide a critical platform along with a network of mutual support.

## **Mission**

Unitarian Universalists (UUs) are bound together by their Principles and Purposes, and belief that each individual has the right to find her/his own spiritual way in the world. There is no UU creed. However, members of our Congregation share a common commitment, adopted March 6, 2000:

### **Our Mission Statement**

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury is an open religious community that welcomes a diversity of people, ideas and beliefs. We celebrate together that which is good in life, and offer comfort and care in times of need. With others, we work to create a just society and a sustainable Earth. We stand as a beacon for independent thought, and encourage lifelong spiritual and intellectual exploration.

Adopted by this congregation May 16, 2008

### **A Welcoming Congregation**

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury is a “Welcoming Congregation.” This means that we have participated in a special denominational program to help us be more welcoming to people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. This program is part of our general ideal to welcome all – regardless of age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious background, or political affiliation – factors that can separate people in the larger culture.

## **Governance**

The UU system of governance is based not on ecclesiastical authority, but democracy. All “big” decisions are vested in the congregation as a whole.

Our Congregation is governed by by-laws which establish a group of nine members, the Board of Trustees, and a number of standing and other committees to conduct business in their designated areas of interest. Our group is characterized by active lay participation in all areas.

We participate in the wider UU community through our membership in the UUA New York Metropolitan District (914) 373-0193, and the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108 ([www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org)) and 617-742-2100.

## **Groups Chartered by the Congregation's By-Laws**

### **Board of Trustees**

The Board of Trustees provides day-to-day direction of our Congregation's property, employees, calendar, and business affairs.

### **Executive Team**

Plans Board of Trustees agenda and also considers administrative items that do not require the attention of the full Board.

### **STANDING COMMITTEES**

Buildings and Grounds Team  
Membership Team  
Nominating Team  
Religious Education Ministry Team  
Stewardship Team

### **SPECIAL COMMITTEES/ACTIVITIES**

Aesthetics Team  
Adult Programming  
Archivist  
Caring Ministry  
    Caring Circle  
    Right to Flourish  
Common Council  
Communications Team  
Denominational Affairs Team  
Music Ministry and UUCD Choir  
Social Action Team  
    Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen  
    Dorothy Day Hospitality House Shelter  
    Gun Violence Prevention Group  
    Immigrant Justice Team  
    Racial Justice Forum  
    Team Green  
Safe Congregation Team  
Sunday Services Ministry  
Women's Retreat Planning Team

## **Activities**

Book Conversations  
Chalice Circles  
Knitting Ministry  
Men Conversing over Coffee  
Movies with a Message  
Spiritually Speaking  
Women on Our Own  
Young Adults of UUCD

## **Religious Education**

We believe Religious Education is a lifelong process in which we are encouraged to continually grow by evaluating ourselves and our beliefs, keeping what is relevant and good, and changing what needs to be changed.

The purpose of our program for children and youth is to provide an environment with a sense of belonging to their religious community and the greater community. We strive to help them:

- know and respect themselves and all people,
- explore the interconnected web of life,
- understand the Jewish and Christian heritage we share as Unitarian Universalists, as well as many other rich religious traditions.

The curricula, chosen by the Religious Education Ministry Team and the Director of Religious Education, are taught by volunteers from the Congregation. Over a three-year cycle, our children and youth learn and experience at an age appropriate level:

- World Religions
- Unitarian Universalist Identity
- Jewish & Christian Heritage (and for our middle and high school youth, human sexuality & values curricula).

Every year we also work together on Social Action Projects. The Religious Education Ministry Team is always happy to welcome new volunteers who wish to participate in the program.

## **Unitarian Universalist Readings**

Compiled by Doug Parkhurst

*The following books are especially good for introducing people to Unitarian Universalism.*

A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism, John Buehrens & F Forrester Church  
What is UUism all about? This introduction to the faith is presented in ten chapters and features a useful chronology of Unitarian Universalist history.

Being Liberal in an Illiberal Age: Why I Am a Unitarian Universalist, by Jack Mendelsohn  
Personal statement about the power of liberalism in our changing society and fascinating history of Unitarian Universalism's influence.

Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide, edited by William F. Schulz  
A compact UU guide which contains concise summaries of Unitarian Universalist beliefs, practices and history. Includes information on the history and structure of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

*These additional books provide a comprehensive view of Unitarian Universalist history and ideas.*

The Unitarians and the Universalists, by David Robinson  
The story of two faiths that were finally united. Contains thorough biographical dictionary.

Prophetic Sisterhood: Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier 1880-1930, by Cynthia Grant Tucker

The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History, by Conrad Wright  
Unitarianism developed and flourished in America. The Liberal Christians explores this phenomenon.

The Larger Faith: A Short History of American Universalism, by Charles Howe  
This colorful history traces the struggles and evolution of the Universalist denomination.

The Larger Hope, 2 volumes, by Russell E. Miller  
Surveys the Universalist evolution over a period of 200 years. The most comprehensive history of the American Universalist Church.

The Premise and the Promise: The Story of Unitarian Universalist Association, by Warren E Ross

Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History, by David E. Bumbaugh

The Eye of Unitarianism: Original Writings from the History of Liberal Religion, by David B Parke

## **Other Resources**

UUCD Directory (updated in the fall and spring)

“Opportunities for Enrichment, Service, and Fun”

The *Comment* newsletter (published monthly, available on our website and by email)

Websites:

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury, [www.uudanbury.org](http://www.uudanbury.org)

Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org)

UUA Bookstore, [www.uua.org/bookstore](http://www.uua.org/bookstore)

## History

- Dec. 9, 1822 The First Universalist Society of Danbury was organized.
- 1824 The Society engaged its first minister, the Reverend Thomas Farrington King.
- 1833 The Society moved into its first building at the northwest corner of Main and Wooster Streets in Danbury. (Today's site of Bishop Curtis Home, the former St. Peter's Convent.) During these years P. T. Barnum was a prominent member who served as Clerk or Secretary-Treasurer. He earned his international reputation after leaving this area.
- 1838 Denominational records indicate the existence of a Sunday School associated with the Society.
- 1852 The Society moved to a building on the north side of Liberty Street in Danbury, about 50 - 75 yards east of Main Street.
- 1871 - 1881 Pastorate of the Reverend Dwight M. Hodge, who served the second longest tenure in the Society's history.
- 1891 The Danbury Union of the Young People's Christian Union (Y.P.C.U.), a Universalist youth organization, was formed.
- 1893 The Society moved to its third and final building in Danbury at 347 Main Street where it remained until 1966.
- 1897 Adelaide Grabert began her tenure as the Society's Organist / Choir Director. She held this position until 1961 (for 64 years!) when she was named Organist Emeritus.
- 1918 Laura Scott Fanton died. For many years Mrs. Fanton was Superintendent of the Society's Sunday School. She was a generous benefactor to the cause of Universalism as well as to local charitable and community endeavors.
- 1922 The Society celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a four-day observance in early December.
- 1930 - 1948 Pastorate of the Reverend Harry Adams Hersey. Dr. Hersey served the longest ministerial tenure in the Society's history.
- 1941 The Danbury Union of the Young People's Christian Union (Y.P.C.U.) celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
- 1953 The North Salem (NY) Universalist Church, dormant for many years, officially disbanded. The Danbury Society inherited the North Salem Society's portion of an ancient trust, the Jeremiah Smith Trust. The interest from this trust has helped support general expenses ever since.
- 1960 The Society changed its name, becoming the First Universalist-Unitarian Church of Danbury.
- 1961 Universalists and Unitarians merged on a nationwide basis, forming the Unitarian Universalist Association. A Danbury alumnus, the Reverend Raymond C. Hopkins, served as the new denomination's first Executive Vice President.
- June 21, 1964 The Unitarian Fellowship of Ridgefield held its first service at the Ridgefield Community Center. June and George Volckhausen provided the driving energy for the founding of this group.

- 1966 The First Universalist-Unitarian Church of Danbury and the Unitarian Fellowship of Ridgefield merged to create The Unitarian Universalist Society of Northern Fairfield County. The Rev. Ralph C. Bailey was the first minister of the newly named Society, serving through 1970.
- 1966 Our Society left the building at 347 Main Street in Danbury and occupied rented quarters for the next four years. The old church building was sold the following year.
- 1970 Our Society moved to its West Redding, CT, property. Renovation and remodeling adjusted the facilities to meet the Society's needs.
- 1981 - 1983 After 12 years of lay leadership, the Society entered the Extension Ministry Program through denominational headquarters, leading to the call of the Reverend Stephen H. Furrer in early 1983 as the current Society's second minister.
- 1983 A fire in the religious education building, caused heavy damage. The religious education program and the minister's office were temporarily moved into the Barn.
- 1984 A redesigned and rebuilt religious education building was dedicated.
- 1987 - 1988 The Reverend Jean Gilpatrick served as interim minister of our Society.
- 1988 The Reverend Barbara J. Pescan joined the current Society as its third minister. She served as minister for seven years.
- 1991 A permanent endowment fund was established by our Society for the purpose of helping to assure the Society's future financial growth and stability.
- 1992 We adopted a statement of Promise and Vision to articulate our Society's commitment, mission, and common values.
- 1992 The religious education building was re-dedicated as Founders House.
- 1995 - 1996 The Reverend Linda Hart served as interim minister of our Society.
- 1996 The Reverend Daniel Simer Ó Connell became the fourth permanent minister of our present-day Society, being ordained and installed on October 20 at the Barn.
- 1996-1997 A five year planning and growth process called "Task Force 2001" was launched. In September 1997, a regular schedule of two Sunday morning services and two children's religious education programs began.
- 1997 A book The Story of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Northern Fairfield County 1822-1995, written by Reverdy Whitlock, was published.
- 1997 On December 9 our Society celebrated its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
- 1999-2000 The Society formed a Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC) to make an in-depth study of issues relating to our programs, existing facilities, and prospects for future growth.
- 2000-2001 After reviewing the report and recommendations of the CPC the Society began the planning necessary to move to Danbury and build new facilities there.
- 2002 The West Redding property was sold. The Society made arrangements to continue using the property through the 2003 church year.
- 2002-2003 The Rev. Shirley Ranck served as interim minister of our Society/Congregation.
- 2003 In March the Unitarian Universalist Society of Northern Fairfield County changed its name to The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury (UUCD).

- 2003 The UUCD purchased a house and two acre lot at 24 Clapboard Ridge Road in Danbury. During the summer the house was remodeled to accommodate church offices.
- 2003 On September 14 the UUCD held its last services and religious education classes at 9 Picketts Ridge Road in West Redding. The Barn and Founders House there were our Congregation's religious home for 33 years.
- 2003 September 21 marked the resumption of regularly scheduled Unitarian Universalist services and religious education classes in Danbury for the first time since 1970. The Congregation rented space on Sunday mornings at Alumni Hall and the Student Center on the downtown campus of Western Connecticut State University.
- 2003 In November The Rev. Dr. Linda M. Hansen, who had begun in August, was formally installed as the new settled minister of the UUCD. She served until 2008.
- 2005 In November the congregation moved into their new Fellowship Hall at 24 Clapboard Ridge Road in Danbury.
- 2008 The Congregation joined the New Sanctuary Movement (justice for immigrants).
- 2008 The Rev. Suzanne Spencer came to serve as Interim Minister.
- 2011 The Rev. Barbara G. Fast was installed as the new settle Minister.
- 2016 The Rev. Nancy O. Arnold came to serve as Interim Minister.
- 2018 The Rev. Heather Rion Starr came to serve as Consulting Minister.

(This historical perspective has been prepared from the combined research of the Reverend Furrer and Doug Parkhurst, our Congregation's Archivist.)

Changes/Additions/Corrections for this Book?

Please send or call them to:

[officemanager@uudanbury.org](mailto:officemanager@uudanbury.org)

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