



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

DECEMBER 2021

From our Minister



The quieter you become the more you can hear. ~ Ram Dass

Quiet is not a common occurrence in the season of holidays. And, yet, what an opportune time for reflection as a calendar year comes to a close, we are surrounded by the beauty of lights and music, holy days, and connections with those we love! I want to encourage you, as I encourage myself, to not become overwhelmed this month by the glitz of the holiday season, unrealistic expectations, and being mind-full rather than mindful. Consider not only the words of American spiritual teacher Ram Dass, but the words of one of my favorite UU hymns of reflection: *Voice Still and Small*.

Voice still and small, deep inside all,

I hear you call, singing.

In storm and rain, sorrow and pain,

Still we'll remain singing.

Calming my fears, quenching my tears,

Through all the years, singing.

As we gather in person and online this month for group meetings, a holiday concert, Sunday services, religious education, Christmas Eve service, and a holiday lunch with me, let's celebrate the abundance of joy and love in our community while also remembering to give ourselves the gift of quiet. Quiet in order to hear more from each other, and from that still small voice within. An important part of being in beloved community is the quiet part, the listening part. I wish each and all a month of hope, peace, and love.

With gratitude for quiet reflection and a season of joy,

Rev. Kathleen

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

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury is a UUA designated “Welcoming Congregation.” Our congregation is welcoming to people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. The Welcoming Congregation program is consistent with our first UU principle in which we covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We welcome all – regardless of age, race, disability, ethnicity, immigration status, sexual orientation, religious background, or political affiliation – factors that can separate people in our larger culture.

**Deadline for the January Comment –
Friday, December 17th.**

December Services – One Service at 10:00 a.m.**Sunday, December 5th**Answering Prayer

Rev. Fred L Hammond

Not all prayers are requests to a deity for divine interventions. Some prayers are of the kind that we, mere mortals, can answer best. Might we be of service in answering these prayers?



Fred L Hammond currently serves the Manatee Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Bradenton, FL as Developmental Minister. Prior to this he served congregations in Mississippi and Alabama. In 2007, he received his Master of Divinity from Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago and was ordained by the Danbury UU Congregation. His Master of Science in Counselor Education from Western CT State University was received in 1983. He was the co-founder and Executive Director of the Interfaith AIDS Ministry in Danbury, CT. He was the co-founder of Druid City Pride, a non-profit agency addressing LGBTQ+ rights in Tuscaloosa, AL; a co-founder of the grassroots organization Somos Tuscaloosa addressing immigration issues; and is a co-founder of Stronger Together Reaching Equality Across Manatee (STREAM), an interfaith grassroots organization addressing justice issues in Manatee County. He

writes poetry, short stories, enjoys photographing nature, and tracing his genealogical roots. One of his poems was published in the Skinner House Book, *The Spirit that Moves* edited by Rev. Barbara Child.

Sunday, December 12thThis I Believe – Membership Sunday

Rev. Dr. Kathleen Rudoff and the Membership Team

Invite a friend to sit with you in person, or on Zoom, as we celebrate the membership milestones of those who have been a part of this community for 5-50 years! Honoring the gift of each other is a beautiful way to introduce your friends to UUCD.

Sunday, December 19thThe Gift of Imperfection

Rev. Dr. Kathleen Rudoff

The one gift we rarely embrace, most especially during the holidays, is imperfection. Yes, it is a gift! Let's fully embrace our humanness, love our incompleteness, cherish the unwanted, and treasure the unfulfilled.

December 24th – Christmas Eve Service – 5:00 p.m. - in person and onlineHope, Peace, and Love

Rev. Dr. Kathleen Rudoff, DRE Sierra-Marie Gerfao, Jerry Phelps

This year's Christmas Eve service will be filled with stories and songs to celebrate Christmas. All ages will enjoy this very special time together. In person and online! Please join us and watch for the sign up link if you plan to attend in person.

Sunday, December 26thWorthy Now

AN ONLINE SERVICE ONLY – WE WILL NOT MEET IN PERSON

Worthy Now Prison Ministry comes from Church of the Larger Fellowship: A Unitarian Universalist Congregation Without Walls. This meaningful service will connect us with the over 1,300 incarcerated members of this important congregation.

Holiday Brown Bag Lunch Invitation from Rev. Kathleen



Please join me on Wednesday, December 22nd, from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall for a time of simply celebrating being together! You are encouraged to bring your own lunch and I will provide holiday goodies. We might share a few stories about our favorite holiday tradition or gift given/received, and we might just sing a few holiday songs (while masked, of course)!

Space is limited and masks will be required. Please email me at minister@uudanbury.org to reserve your spot. I'm looking forward to being with you.

From the Board of Trustees

by Diane Purvis



Your Board of Trustees met on Thursday, November 11 -- a marathon meeting that lasted until 10:00 p.m., as we wrestled with the difficult decisions that have faced us all fall. Who should wear a mask? Should we require vaccinations? Can we sing? How many folks can be safely present in Fellowship Hall? And many, many more as we try to navigate this once-in-a-hundred years global pandemic.

I want to say once again that we have tried to balance safe practices with community-building and inclusiveness. Being together in person is important, but so is the health of every single member! "Back to normal" is perhaps far in the future, if ever. But, still, we can take baby steps that bring us closer to that time. Meanwhile, our fabulous new technology enables some of us to stay home if that makes sense.

As we enter the holiday season we have much to celebrate. We are able to be together in Fellowship Hall, even if the numbers are reduced. Our annual auction was a resounding success, and we can be proud that it included an attempt to live our 8th Principle. We are coming to know and love our new minister, Rev. Kathleen, who consistently reminds us to take care of ourselves even as we figure out how to manage the "new normal."

Please come to any of us on the Board with your suggestions. Once a month one of us will host a breakout room after the Sunday service to answer your questions. (It's my turn this month.) And from all of us: have a wonderful, love-filled holiday season, however you celebrate!

From our Music Director, Jerry Phelps



Jerry is delighted to inform you we will be having a **Holiday Concert on Sunday, December 19th at 3:00 p.m.**, streamed virtually through Zoom. Jerry is looking for singers and musicians to share their gifts during what will be a lovely holiday-filled afternoon. You can pre-record a performance OR perform live via Zoom. Please email Jerry (musicdirector@uudanbury.org) to express interest in participating.

While musicians and singers will be streamed through Zoom, the concert can be viewed in the Fellowship Hall with Jerry, Rev. Kathleen, and Sierra-Marie in attendance. Mark your calendar and watch for the sign-up coming soon!

All videos must be submitted to Jerry by December 12th; late submissions will not be included in the concert.



by Sierra-Marie Gerfao, Director of Religious Education for Children and Youth

Upcoming In Children and Youth Religious Education (RE):

Great news! Religious Education groups now meet concurrently with Sunday services again! While we wait for children ages five to eleven to have an opportunity for full vaccination against Covid, children and youth are going straight to Religious Education programs on arrival at 10AM. On Sunday, December 12th, we will begin to have children and youth in the fellowship hall for the first portion of the service each Sunday. They will go to Religious Education after the story.

There will be the following special events this month:

- **Sunday, December 5th:** Senior High Youth Group will help with the soup kitchen
- **Sunday, December 12th:** Final mitten tree gift collection day
- **Sunday, December 19th:** Senior High Youth Group will go ice skating
- **Friday, December 24th:** Christmas Eve service

We will have a winter break from Christmas through the New Year. There will be no in-person religious education programming on Sunday, December 26th and Sunday, January 2nd. As always, children and youth are of course welcome to attend service.

From Our Director of Religious Education For Children and Youth



Dear Congregation,

In Christian texts, there are stories in which children try to come to Jesus and adults try to get them to go away. The message they convey is, “This is an adult thing. Go away and stop bothering us.” But Jesus says, “let the children come to me.” In fact, he tells adults that the Kingdom belongs to children and those who are like children. Even for Unitarian Universalists who are not Christian, I think there is something to appreciate in a story that reminds us that children should have a central place in religious community.

On Sunday, December 12th, children and youth will again begin to regularly attend the first part of Sunday services in the fellowship hall. The reason for the timing is that by that point, all children over the age of five will have had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated.

I want to acknowledge how important this date is. Families have waited a long time for this. We have all waited a long time for this. It is not likely that there will be a large number of children and youth. For [many reasons](#), children and youth will be making a slow return to in-person activities. But there will be children and youth present, and this will be a milestone for them, and for all of us, as a congregation.

Aside from the joy of reuniting together as a community of all ages, in person, having children and youth in the fellowship hall for service is good religious education for all of us. For example, children and youth learn to create a space for reflection in their lives by being part of a community that prioritizes reflective time. Likewise, adults often get back in touch with the needs of their hearts and bodies when present with children. We learn to repress much awareness regarding our hearts and bodies in adulthood, and being around children can help us become more fully embodied again, more present and alert. It is a spiritual practice.

We will come up with some ways to together express our enthusiasm for having the children in the service without showering them with an overwhelming amount of attention. I would like to ask for your help as well in welcoming children simply by making space for them, by re-acclimating to their movement and noise, and by being patient as we re-learn to be together as a multigenerational community again. It will take practice for all of us, and it will be worth it. After all, at least one great teacher has said that the Kingdom belongs to children.

Warmly,
Sierra-Marie

Ministry/Team News

Highlights of Common Council Meeting

by Margaret Henderson

The Common Council met in November. Our ministry teams have been working hard behind the scenes to help "create a just society and a sustainable Earth." Here are some highlights from their reports:

- **Sunday Services Team** has been figuring out the logistics of safe, multi-platform services
- **Team Green** continues to add energy-efficient improvements to our buildings, including special heaters in the Cottage House offices and a new range top in the kitchen in Fellowship Hall. They are considering creating a labyrinth or a memorial garden.
- Thanks to Deb Oria for managing our organic vegetable garden this year
- **Caring Circle** continues to take care of all of us when needed
- **Buildings & Grounds** asks that if you notice something broken or out of place, please let Sherry know promptly
- **B&G** and **Safe Congregations** have trained 2 new operators for the lift - look for signs with their pictures on them
- Also look for an updated, less ableist message on the handicapped parking signs
- **RE Ministry Team** has also been working hard on how kids can gather safely, as well as on this year's Mitten Tree with gifts for the less privileged
- **RE** needs more help from the congregation. Please contact Sierra-Marie to see how you can help
- **Membership Team** has focused lately on training greeters for the new multi-platform services, and on keeping us all in relationship through these difficult days

The teams were also asked how they can address the 8th principle in their work. Answers included:

- **Sunday Services** has added land acknowledgement to the Welcome and is looking for more presenters of color
- The **Finance Team** makes sure our investments are in socially conscious companies
- The **Conversations Book Group** has read a lot of books about black experiences and also about new (or rather, old) environmental practices

If you'd like to get involved in any of these groups, please reach out! Or if you find you can't volunteer right now, just say "thank you" to those who work to keep UUCD going.

From the *Auction Team*



UUDanbury 2021 Auction: It Takes a Village...

2021 UU Danbury Auction Matching Donations

Heartfelt thanks to these folks who either matched a percentage of the auction proceeds OR donated a flat sum of money toward the effort. It is the matching effort of many that put our auction funds over our \$20,000 goal, and we are deeply grateful.

Our percentage donors together raised an additional **29.5%** of the auction proceeds, while our flat money donors together contributed over **\$4,000**, bringing the matching fund total to **\$8,137** of the **\$22,000+** money earned!

Bob Bollinger	Elise Jaeger	Jenn & Matt McPartlin
Valerie Cochrane	Anne Krieg	John Miglietta
Ginny Cook	Judy Lacker	Deb Oria
Chris Creter	Donna Lawrence	Kristen Papucci
Eva DeFranco	Jane Leff	Brad & Diane Purvis
Marian & Tony DiFabbio	Melody Levy	Renee Simon
Keith & Marie Dupree	Alex Makai	Joan Stapleton & Carl Dwyer
Cheryl Edelen	Sally Mandler	Rich & Lola Strilowich
Karen & Joe Gillotti	Sue Maynard	Heidi Winslow
Chris Halfar	Chris McCartney	Anonymous
Jenna & Matt Halse	Sam McCoy	Anonymous

The 2021 UUDanbury Auction was a tremendous success, raising over **\$22,000** for our Operating Expenses. Besides our many bidders (thank you!), we had a generous cadre of folks who donated items, dinners, door prizes, and their precious time.

HUGE thanks to these **donors** and **team members**:

Lisa Austin Smith	Cheryl Edelen	Debbie Musumeci
Marcia Brooker	Brad & Lisa Greene	Barbara Myers
Joan Campbell	Jenna Halse	Deb Oria
Jessica & Ryan Canuelle	Margaret Henderson	Jerry Phelps
Gina Cassetta	Lisa & Peter Horton	Brad & Diane Purvis
Deb Casey	Anne Krieg	Joanna Ribisi
Valerie Cochrane	Sherry Kyriacou	Melene Rose
Ginny Cook	Judy Lacker	Rev. Kathleen & Phil Rudoff
Michele & Rik Cousens	Melody Levy	Suze Shaner
Chris Creter & Tim O'Donnell	Sally Mandler	Heather & Chris Smith
Eva DeFranco & John Bonansinga	Alex Makai	Truus Teeuwissen
John DiFabbio	Jenn McPartlin	Uncle Matt's Bakery
Carl Dwyer & Joan Stapleton	John Miglietta	Sue Walsh
UU Danbury Board of Trustees		

This is the first year UUDanbury has also sponsored a **“Living Our 8th Principle”** donation in tandem with our Goods and Services Auction. These contributions are NOT included in the auction proceeds, but will go directly to the two sponsored organizations.

Heartfelt thanks to our Blessed Community for raising these contributions:

- **\$1,170** for the Connecticut Workers Coalition to buy office furniture, and
- **\$1,610** for the NAACP to underwrite “Getting a Fresh Start,” a Re-Entry Program for formerly incarcerated men and women.

From *Buildings and Grounds*

by Gary Mummert

Seeking a Volunteer B&G Coordinator

The Board of Directors and the Buildings and Grounds team are hoping that someone from within the congregation will step forward in a new role. In the past, the team has organized to handle both coordination tasks and actual projects for repair or enhancement. In the future, a volunteer coordinator would work with Sherry as issues arise, but qualified contractors would be vetted and scheduled to handle the projects. To discuss this new role, please contact **Debra Oria**.

Our Caring Circle is Available

Our 'Care Coordinator' receives requests and answers questions for the Caring Circle.



Joan Stapleton is the contact person for December and January.

Joan Campbell is the assistant.

If you have a need, please contact **Joan Stapleton**.

Please note that your call will be returned as quickly as possible but it may be at the end of the day.

From the *Finance Team*

Sign up for SimpleGive



If you set up a recurring donation to UUCD on SimpleGive before December 31 as a new customer, \$50 will be donated to our congregation. You must set up more than one installment, and the first recurring gift has to be transacted by December 31, 2021.

To get started, go to www.simplegive.com or download the SimpleGive app for your phone or tablet. If you have any questions, please contact Sherry at officemanager@uudanbury.org or Margaret.

From the *Social Action Council*

"We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse and multicultural Beloved Community by **our actions that accountably dismantle racism** and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions."

How Do We Live Out These Words?

What does UUCD need to do now to live out the 8th Principle? What if anything do we need to change?

You're invited to join the newly forming 8th Principle Action Group where we'll identify these "actions." If you have ideas about what the 8th Principle looks like in practice, this is the place for you. We'll put structures in place so we don't lose sight of this important social justice goal. Too often UU's have failed our fellow citizens of color. Let's make sure this pattern stops now.

The 8th Principle Action Group will meet monthly beginning in January. If you're interested in becoming a member, please contact any Board member.

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker



On Saturday, December 4th, some members of Soup Kitchen Team #2 (Team Leader **Carl Tramontana, Rose Schlemmer, Chris Halfar, Darlene Anderson-Alexander, Suze Shaner, Nicole & Sean Paris, Deb Casey and Lisa Deldin**) will be returning to the Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen on Spring Street to help serve take-out meals that were cooked in volunteers' homes as well as bagged sandwiches for lunches and breakfasts, (to be delivered to the Super 8 homeless shelter), also prepared in volunteers' homes as well as through donations. Unfortunately, we are not yet able to serve the guests a meal inside because of the Covid pandemic.

You can also help feed our neighbors with a gift card in any amount from any local supermarket. In addition, you can still continue to make food donations to the Daily Bread Food Pantry (25 West Street - entrance off Terrace Place). Donations are accepted on Mondays between 11 am and 2 pm and on Fridays between 8:30 am and 11:30 am. **Lynn Taborsak** has also been scheduling the sandwich donations so we have just the right amount each day at Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen. If you are interested in making sandwiches, please email her at ddhhsandwiches@gmail.com. We can all be an important part of the fight to end hunger in our community!

Upcoming Events



UUCD Men Conversing over Coffee meets on the second Wednesday of each month. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, December 8th at 9:30 a.m. at UUCD in the Fellowship Hall Lower Level. For more information contact **Gary Mummert** or **Joe Gillotti**.

Women On Our Own

This group is for women who are living on their own. Our circumstances will be similar, but different, and we will be talking about what works well, what is lacking, and so on. We meet on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays at 3:00 p.m. December meeting dates are the 14th and 28th. All those who identify as women, are UUCD members or friends, and are living on your own are welcome to join us. We hope to see you. Bring your ideas. Contact **Jane Leff** for more information and the Zoom links.



It's coming! UUCD will celebrate our 200th birthday in 2022.

If you'd like to be part of planning and have ideas as to how we can celebrate and spread the word about UUCD, come and join the 200th Anniversary Ministry. Contact **Gale Alexander**.

Do you want to work on a quilt for the 200th anniversary? We need people who can embroider, use a sewing machine, hand sew, and would like to become part of a special way to celebrate 200 years of this congregation. All together we can use a core of people who will commit to meeting once a week or so beginning in January during the day. We will have one meeting after a Sunday service to introduce my vision of a quilt and to get some input from each of the attendees. That date will be forthcoming before the end of the new year. I am SEW excited. To make this quilt a truly congregational effort, I will be asking for contributions of embroidery floss, fabric, batting for the quilt, and someone to volunteer to make a quilt hanger for one of the walls similar or like the one that has the quilt from 25 years ago. If you are interested, please email **Marcia Brooker**.

I look forward to hearing from everyone, thanks!
Marcia Brooker

