



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

JANUARY 2022

From our Minister



*January is the quietest month in the garden...
But just because it looks quiet doesn't mean that nothing is happening.
~ Rosalie Muller Wright*

Here we are in a brand new year and I'm still thinking about "quiet". I guess I'm staying in the quiet lane because I feel the cold of winter in the air and the desire for some degree of hibernation in my bones! The beauty of the holiday season is over and the quiet beauty of winter is upon us: a bright red cardinal on a snowy bare branch, crackling logs with mesmerizing flames in the fireplace, hearty stew simmering on the stovetop, and peaceful ice-covered ponds suspended in time. We are entering the time of beginnings, slowing down, and settling in for a while. While we continue to celebrate milestones with each other and come together as long as it is safe to do so, I hope we can all embrace the quiet of January with a calmness that is much needed in this time of uncertainty and Covid concern.

As writer Rosalie Muller Wright says, "...just because it looks quiet doesn't mean that nothing is happening". There is life under that blanket of snow. And quiet solitude does not mean loneliness. It's a time for reflection, perhaps about what is best to leave behind as a new year begins. It's a time too for preparation; planting new ideas and planning for growth and joy in our lives. It's a time to reach out when the quiet is deafening; connecting and checking on one another. What a beautiful time of year and what incredible opportunities we have in front of us. Further in this newsletter you will find a challenge from me. It is a challenge for the new year that I hope you will accept. It is a challenge that will require some solitude, reflection, and a little courage.

Beyond the quiet months there will be major celebrations and gatherings like the anniversary of our congregation's founding. Our beloved community is now in its 200th year! Isn't that amazing? No matter what comes our way now, we face it together. We face it stronger because we take the time to recognize beauty, to reach out, to reflect, and to prepare.

With gratitude for a new year,
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 February Comment –
Friday, January 21st.

January Services – One Service at 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, January 2nd Beginning...Again: A Service of Meditation and Poetry for the New Year

This lay-led service with Deb Casey coordinating, will be filled with many wonderful voices from the congregation sharing beautiful poetry and thoughtful meditations, along with lovely music from Jerry Phelps.

Sunday, January 9th Life is a Paradox Rev. Dr. Kathleen A. Rudoff

A paradox can be defined as a seemingly absurd statement that when explained may prove to be true. Much of life can seem like a paradox! So what do we do when people are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered? We love them anyway. We do what we know to be true and good, even in the midst of paradox.

Sunday, January 16th Which King are We Celebrating in 2022? Rev. Qiyamah Rahman

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. grew and evolved over his lifetime. The man that delivered his first major speech at the Montgomery Bus Boycott on December 5, 1955, was not the same man that delivered his last speech on April 3, 1968. While the nation tends to focus on Dr. King’s earlier years, in later years he also spoke out against capitalism and militarism. Which King are we Unitarian Universalists celebrating in 2022? What would he have to say to us? What would Dr. King do in 2022?



Rev. Qiyamah resides in St. Croix, Virgin Islands, where she works with the Virgin Islands Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Council. She served as the first Black female District Executive with the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Southeast Region. She was ordained and fellowshiped in 2007. She has contributed to several UU anthologies published by Skinner House Books and is currently working on an anthology on the Presence of Black Clergy Women in UUism.

Sunday, January 23rd The Other U Rev. Dr. Kathleen A. Rudoff

This congregation was founded in 1822 as the First Universalist Society of Danbury. It was not Unitarian. We often forget about our Universalist heritage and the importance of that “other U”. Let’s rediscover it together.

Sunday, January 30th Restoring Faith, Restoring Justice Rev. Paul Langston

Restorative Practices are finding their way into popular culture and they can offer us solid tools and skills for addressing all kinds of conflict. We honor these practices, grounded in indigenous cultures, and explore how they have been adapted to address various kinds of harm or breaches of covenant. With restorative practices, we learn that when we place relationships at the center, a new way can be found.



Rev. Paul Langston-Daley was ordained as a Unitarian Universalist minister in 1997. He has served congregations in seven states; both large and small, as settled, interim, consulting and contract minister. He holds a Master’s Degree in Restorative Practices and Youth Counseling from the International Institute for Restorative Practices and an MDiv from Andover Newtown Theological School. He has a background in organizing, social justice work, and introducing restorative practices to congregations in conflict. Rev. Paul is a transgender man living in New Bedford Massachusetts.

A New Year Challenge from Rev. Kathleen – Will you take it?

Have you ever attended a Coming Of Age (COA) service in a UU congregation? In my 15 years of professional ministry I have found that the Coming Of Age service is by far the most beloved service of the entire year in every single congregation I have served or known. It's not exactly the same in every congregation but, typically, high school youth in the congregation take part in a year-long program called Coming of Age. I encourage you to speak with our Director of Religious Education, Sierra-Marie, to get more details about the program! At the end of that time the youth work on a credo – a proclamation, a testimony of their truth.

My colleague, Rev. Sarah Gibb Millspaugh, has said, “A credo is a snapshot of your values, faith, identity, and belief at one point in time. As Unitarian Universalists, we understand that your religious ideas will evolve throughout your life. It is understood by all that your credo is simply an expression of where you are now and not for all time.” It is unbelievably inspiring to hear our youth share their truth. In some congregations I've heard people remark, “I know I couldn't have done that when I was their age.” I'm not sure I could have either but what about right now? Could you? Would you? What is **your** truth today in this moment? We love hearing our COA youth share their truth and we don't expect them all to say the same thing. We accept each young person, whatever their truth may be. It's a beautifully unique UU tradition but why expect only the youth to do such searching and sharing?

I want to encourage you to do something you may have never done before, between now and the end of January. I want to encourage you to listen within. To listen to your own heart to discern and discover your truth in this moment of your life. Remember Truth (from the 12/12/21 service)... *He lingers in the long pauses between the questions and the answers. Certainty and uncertainty are both welcome at his table.* And after listening, I challenge you to follow the same instructions that the COA youth are given when they write their credo. Tell the story of your truth - your *This I believe* statement. Take your belief out of the ether and ground it in the events of your life. Consider moments when your truth was formed or tested or changed. Think of your own experience, work, and family and write it down.

Lastly, as a part of this new year challenge, I want you to consider sharing that credo (whether you read it or someone reads it for you) in a 2022 service here at UUCD. I know it may sound intimidating but I'll help you along the way if you like. Why do this? Because this is part of the responsible search for truth and meaning that we affirm and promote in our fourth principle. And most importantly, I guarantee you that there is someone in this world that needs to hear your story. Your gospel. Your truth. No matter your age or stage in life, no matter where you have come from, mistakes you have made, or where you have been, there is someone that needs to hear your story. And there are stories that you need to hear. This challenge will require courage, deep listening and appreciation. You can do this! I look forward to hearing and learning from you.

Notes on Two Hundred Years (and More)

by Douglas H. Parkhurst

Two hundred years is a substantial period of time in human terms. Two centuries. Six or seven generations. What was happening in 1822, two hundred years ago?

In the United States the times were known as the Era of Good Feeling(s). James Monroe was President. The Declaration of Independence had been signed forty-six years before, an event still in living memory, and the War of 1812 was over for eight. The U.S. territory of Florida was organized. In Connecticut the Congregational Church had been disestablished only four years earlier. Fire insurance, whaling, and the fabrication of brass were growing industries in the state. Carey and Lea's 1822 Map of Connecticut was published. Danbury was largely an agricultural community with a growing commercial center. Hatting and comb-making were leading businesses. The population of Danbury was 3,900; a stagecoach ride to Norwalk took half-a-day and a rail connection was still thirty years in the future. The village area around what is now Main Street was incorporated as a borough in May of 1822. And later that year, on December 9th, a Universalist society was formed in Great Plain. This society is the present-day Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury (UUCD).

UUCD is primarily a Universalist-heritage congregation, though beginning in the 1960s Unitarians could claim a portion of the group's history. Universalism as a philosophy and a theology, with differing definitions and evolving interpretations, dates to ancient times. Elements of universalistic thinking which later were adopted in western traditions can be found in the preaching of the Hebrew prophets, in the writings of Zoroaster, in the teachings of Christian church fathers Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa and in the universal person of Jesus of Nazareth. In the 400s and 500s of the Common Era universalism was condemned as heretical by Christian authorities and largely lost for the next thousand years.

During the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, with the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, universalist thinking re-emerged in central and western Europe. It was found, with varying interpretations, among Anabaptists, Pietists, German mystics, Deists, and English Protestants. When Europeans began crossing the Atlantic and settling along the east coast of North America some brought their "heretical" ideas with them. Prominent among these settlers was George de Benneville who came in 1741. John Murray arrived in 1770. There were American-born universalists, too, including Caleb Rich, Charles Chauncy, and Elhanan Winchester. It was from such forebears and their spiritual confreres and descendants that denominational Universalism, one-half of today's Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, came to be.

From the Board of Trustees

by Debra Oria



Happy New Year one and all!

A new year brings renewed hope and a fresh outlook.

There were many crossroads and discussions about COVID-19 and the challenges that Mother Nature presented us with last year. Among the nuts and bolts there have also been several jewels for which to be grateful. Not the least of these is our new minister, Rev. Kathleen, whom I am very happy to work with and to have as UUCD’s spiritual guide. We have a strong BOT, who works together in the best interest of our congregation. We have many dedicated leaders throughout our congregation who generously lend their time and voice in support of what we hold dear. There has been re-emergence of some “normalcy” in returning to in-person

services and lifting our voices in song. I was moved by how many of us were in attendance on Membership Sunday last month, and to see the in-person return of our children!

At the Board Retreat in 2021, the theme of growing our congregation, including outreach and improved marketing, emerged. To that end the UUCD website is under construction for a redesign. Meanwhile we continue to roll with what arises to meet the ever-changing circumstances that have become our new reality. I believe we have good things to look forward to in this new year.

Please don’t hesitate to come to any of us on the Board with any suggestions you may have. On a monthly basis each of us hosts a breakout room after Sunday service to take your questions and suggestions. I will be your host in January. We wish you all a happy new year!

Ongoing Covid Measures

by Margaret Henderson, BOT Co-President

As I write this the Omicron variant is spreading throughout the United States. No one can predict exactly what the next few weeks will bring, but the Board of Trustees wants you to know that we are closely monitoring the situation. We are looking at the data and responding as things change. Changes to our protocols for gathering in person, if and when needed, may happen quickly but we will keep you informed.

Any changes that relate to the Religious Education programs for children and youth will be communicated directly to families by our Director of Religious Education, Sierra-Marie Gerfao. In any case we will all continue to co-create a warm, supportive community for each other however we can, no matter what happens.



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

Upcoming In Children and Youth Religious Education (RE):

On Sundays, children and youth are invited to the upper level of the Fellowship Hall to attend the first part of the service with the adults. After the story portion of the service, children go downstairs to meet with their Religious Education groups. Youth go to their meeting room in the cottage, which has been prepared specially for them with an air filter and room heater.

- **January 2:** No Religious Education - last day of winter break
- **January 9:** No special notes - regular Religious Education programming
- **January 16:** We will do a social action project or special event in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- **January 23:** No special notes - regular Religious Education programming
- **January 30:** Potential first session of Our Whole Lives (OWL), high school level - details TBA as soon as they are available

A Note About Our Whole Lives (OWL)

[OWL](#) is a comprehensive sexuality education program that dismantles stereotypes and assumptions, builds self-acceptance and self-esteem, fosters healthy relationships, and improves decision making. There is an OWL curriculum for each of the following age groups:

- early elementary
- upper elementary
- junior high
- high school
- young adult
- adult
- older adult.

Our congregation has a long history of offering OWL at the (1) upper elementary, (2) junior high, and (3) high school levels, and our Director of Religious Education is interested in expanding OWL programming into other age groups for which there are curricula. However, the pandemic disrupted OWL programming in congregations across the country, and our first task is to re-establish our existing programs.

Unfortunately, some levels of OWL will take longer to re-launch than we had hoped, as a special facilitator training program is required, but facilitator trainings are not yet being offered and may be further delayed by omicron. We know that OWL is a vital program and a priority for families. We will move as quickly as circumstances permit to get each of these programs back in place.

From Our Director of Religious Education For Children and Youth

Dear Congregation,

I want to speak frankly about a difficult topic, and I want to give you advance notice that my message here includes discussion of threats of school shootings. Please take care of yourself in the way that makes sense for you. The purposes of writing about these things here are both to acknowledge some ways these threats are impacting kids and school staff and to reflect on how kids are doing and what this means for our ministries.

In December, two very young teens at the high school one of my children attends, separately posted threats online of mass violence at the school. As a result, the school went into lockdown on both occasions, and both kids were arrested within a few days for what was determined a “hoax” with the goal of missing school. On each of these days, I heard about the same kinds of things happening not only in other schools in Connecticut, but in other states altogether.

On the day I am writing this, December 16th, districts in every state have issued statements about online rumors of mass violence in schools throughout the United States that would allegedly take place on December 17th. Though an investigation indicated there was not a credible threat, some school districts are closing schools or activating precautionary security measures (and teachers in some places have noted that disparities prevent their schools from taking the security measures other schools are taking). Afraid and tired of being placed in harm’s way, some teachers and staff are calling out. Some students are staying home. For all impacted by these frightening messages and rumors, I am so deeply sorry. This is very hard, and families are already under stress from the pandemic.

The worst possible outcome is actual violence, directly related to these threats or otherwise. But if the best case scenario is that kids are terrorizing one another, even and perhaps especially if they are doing so in order to get some relief from the school environment (as happened at my own kid’s school earlier in the month), we have reason to be concerned about how kids are doing at the beginning of 2022. Behavior is communication, and there are far too many kids everywhere who are traumatized and struggling.

What healing balm can we offer young people right now? I have been thinking about how needed and life-giving, even life-saving Unitarian Universalist ministry can be for children and wondering if there are ways to share this ministry more broadly. Whereas our larger society emphasizes an unhealthy level of individualism and “everybody in it for themselves” that produces anxiety, isolation, loneliness, and fear, we are trying to learn to build the Beloved Community and reminding one another of our interconnectedness. Whereas in school and even in many extracurricular activities children often worry that they are unworthy if they are challenged or unproductive, we teach that our worth is inherent.

I wonder if you too have been thinking about this, and what ideas and hopes you might have.

Warmly,
Sierra-Marie

Comments Welcomed on the New and Improved Website

by Margaret Henderson

We're putting the finishing touches on our new UUCD website before it goes live in late January! When that happens, you'll see an all-new page at www.uudanbury.org.

Before then we're looking for a few people to go through all the content and let us know if something doesn't look right. Many, many thanks are due to **Nancy Cullen** who has gone above and beyond to set it all up, and to **Carl Tichler** for wrestling with the software behind the scenes. For a sneak peek at the new website right now, you can go to www.uudanbury-dev.org and enter the password: 24crr.

If you can help us proofread and check the links, please contact **Margaret Henderson** or **Nancy Cullen**.

Ministry/Team News

From the *Caring Circle Ministry*

Our Caring Circle is Available

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



Joan Stapleton is the contact person for 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 *Social Action Council*

The 8th Principle Action Group Wants Your Input!

The now-forming **8th Principle Action Group** will be putting together recommendations for the Board about how our congregation can live out the 8th Principle. The board would like to get a representative cross section of the congregation and is **especially looking for input from younger members, including Youth**. This is a great opportunity to help dismantle White Supremacy and other oppressions in our society.

Join us on Zoom at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 4th. Email **Margaret Henderson** for the link.

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker



On Saturday, January 1st, some members of Soup Kitchen Team #3 (Team Leader **Lynn Taborsak, Bob Taborsak, Jim Wruck, Julie Gordon, Diane Purvis and Laura Reynolds**) 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 ddhsandwiches@gmail.com. We can all be an important part of the fight to end hunger in our community!

From *Team Green*

We know we're a few months away from thinking about your landscape, but if you want to attract Monarch butterflies to your landscape, we have saved a few pods and lots of seeds for you. You can find them at UUCD at the Fellowship Hall, between the compost bin and the foundation wall.

Thanks to all who have contributed your food scraps to the compost bin. The accumulation of food scraps and organic material keeps our worm population warm enough to snack away all winter!

Watch for announcements next month about ways to apply for special deals from CT Green Bank for home battery back-up possibilities. Happy Holidays!

Upcoming Events



UUCD Men Conversing over Coffee meets on the second Wednesday of each month. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, January 12th 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. January meeting dates are the 11th and 25th. 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? I hope to get many members of the congregation involved in making a 200th Anniversary quilt. You do not have to know how to quilt in order to help. I do however need hand sewers because part of the quilt will be appliqued. I have been gathering some ideas from the book that was written 25 years ago and need some more ideas from some of the people who might want to be involved in making the quilt. Once we get a design together, members of the congregation will be asked to donate from a list of items that we need. If you are interested please contact me by phone at 203-267-7884 or by email at mamabrooker7@gmail.com. I helped on the quilt that now hangs in the Fellowship Hall and have been excited thinking about what can be done for the 200th Anniversary of this wonderful congregation. So, reach out and volunteer to help. More information when I get a list of names. Thanks in advance we never have too many people to help!

Marcia Brooker

