



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

APRIL 2019

From our Consulting Minister



Recently at one of our Path to Membership post-service conversations, we got into a discussion about what religion is *for*. Someone in our circle of chairs was reflecting on how their experience of religion up to this point had been that its purpose was "to indoctrinate," or "to codify." I shared that one of my mentor ministers from years ago, Rev. Marilyn Sewell in Portland, Oregon, taught instead that religion comes from the Latin root word "ligare," which is also at the root of the word "ligament" -- it means "to connect," and with the "re" in religion, "to connect back."

I am often surprised, as an atheist-leaning-agnostic myself, to find myself defending religion. More-and-more in our increasingly-secular culture, I find myself trying to explain the value I still find in intentional, multigenerational communities of people who share common values and strive towards shared goals. There is so much we can do, learn, experience, and feel together that we cannot create or tap into all by ourselves, or even through more focused practices such as going to yoga or meditation. So I find myself coming back to that root word "ligare." Other definitions of this Latin verb are: "to bind, tie, fasten, or unite."

In our increasingly splintered society, we need our faith communities (even those like our's that include many people who might not identify as "people of faith," but instead as religious humanists, for example) to help us unite together around a shared vision of what is still possible. It is still possible, even in all the pain and heartbreak of this world, to work towards being the best version of ourselves that we can be, with one another. It is still possible to start each day with renewed determination and commitment to bring some kindness and goodness into this world.

Obviously, I couldn't get through a day without the support of Unitarian Universalist communities, because serving as your Minister is my and my family's livelihood. But even if that weren't the case, I know that deep in my DNA is the lived, felt certainty that UU communities "see" and accept me as I am and will help me find my way. We all have days--or we will have--when we need such support, whether it is explicit or not. Some days I know I need a place just to go and sit and be reminded, by the proximity of others, that all is not lost.

May this be true for UUCD as this congregation approaches its 200th year, and may this be true for each and all of you--that UUCD is a community that helps you to feel more connected, part of a more unified whole, bound-tied-and-fastened (in a good way) to something larger than yourself, that sees and accepts you as you are, while challenging you to be your best self each day. May it be so.

As always, if any of these thoughts elicit something you're inspired about, would like to talk with me about, or that you'd be willing to share with me, I'd love to hear from you. You can reach *me* best by e-mail, cell phone, text, first-class U.S. mail, or Facebook Messenger for just a quick question or comment. I look forward to hearing from you in whatever way is best for you, and to continuing to get to know you. May these first tentative and determined weeks of spring be energizing and uplifting for you!

Warmly,

Rev Heather

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 May Comment –
Friday, April 19^h.

Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Inge Hill is the contact person for **April and May**.

Maredith Spector is the assistant.

If you have a need, please contact **Inge**.

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

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

Sunday, April 7th Creating Climate Justice Rev. Cindy Davidson
 What can we learn from the environmental justice movement and leaders to help us move beyond the trappings of environmentalism and become better climate justice activists? Cindy Davidson is the Minister, since August 2018, at Fourth Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Mohegan Lake. She was the ministerial intern at Community UU, White Plains, 2016-18. She has a Master of Divinity degree from the Meadville-Lombard Theological School. Cindy is a Board member of the UU Ministry for Earth and a GreenFaith Fellow. Before relocating to Westchester County, she had been an active lay leader of First Parish in Lexington, MA. She has worked in artist and non-profit management and earned a BMusic from the Mannes College of Music.

First Sunday Connections Group - 11:30 – 12:30 in the Conference Room

- Meet members of the Congregation
- Tell us about yourself
- Ask questions about UU Danbury

Childcare will be provided. This group is geared towards newcomers, however all are welcome.

Sunday, April 14th The Interdependent Web Team Green and Heather Burns
 The Interdependent Web - How recognizing and acknowledging the Interdependent Web in our everyday lives can provide the lens necessary to connect us spiritually to nature, and lead a sustainable life that protects and preserves our ecosystem for generations to come.

Sunday, April 21st There's A New World Coming Rev. Heather Rion Starr
 Inspired by the music of Sweet Honey in the Rock and the teachings of former, longtime Sweet Honey member Ysaye Barnwell, we will consider what it means today to dream of, work towards, and welcome a new world. On this Easter Sunday, may we all reflect upon how those who have died have charged us to carry forward their memory and their vision until a new world does indeed come.

Sunday, April 28th Celebrating Music in Our Lives Tony DiFabbio and Charlie Schott
 A celebration of music in our lives through poetry. A special acknowledgement will be given to those who have volunteered their talents and time to our music program.



Calling all SUMMER SUNDAY PRESENTERS!

We wish to invite you to connect with any one of our Seven Principles as a central theme. We encourage you to sign up for a topic of your choice for one of the following dates this summer:

June 28th July 7th, 21st, 28th August 11th, 25th September 1st.

Please contact **Tony DiFabbio** or **Michael Stengle**, co-chairs of the Sunday Services Ministry Team, if you would like to present.

Notes from the Board of Trustees

by Brad Greene, President

Perspective

Recently I spent the better part of a day in the Denver International Airport. A Bomb Cyclone Blizzard had passed through the area, several flights were cancelled or delayed, and the airport was filled beyond capacity with people trying to get to their destination.

Not the way I wanted to spend a Thursday. There were places I was supposed to be that I wasn't going to make. Lunch AND dinner choices didn't range much beyond McDonald's and Chick-fil-A. And I faced the prospect, once I did land, of a late drive home in the wee hours.

It could have been a very frustrating day. But I noticed others around me had blankets and clearly hadn't spent the night in a comfortable hotel room as I had. The road to the airport was littered with abandoned and wrecked cars, which would likely take days for their owners to sort out. One family lost a loved one who was hit while trying to help a stranded motorist.

I made the choice to make the best of the day; get a little work done with the free wi-fi; treat myself to a frozen yogurt; watch the sparrows that seem to live in the airport; and laugh at a little girl drawing tattoos on her brother's arm with a pen.

It got me thinking about two recent conversations I had with members at UU Danbury. In both cases I was sharing the news that we had just hired a music director. The reaction of one member was, "Wow, that's great! We just keep winning." The reaction from the other member was, "Good! It has felt like this place was circling the drain." Same information. Same congregation. Very different reactions.

We have beautiful, additional space; an energetic new minister...and now a music director; many new faces among us; the front of the church has more kids each Sunday than in many years; a vibrant Social Action Team working on many fronts etc., etc. And it's true we still have money challenges, a part-time staff, resource challenges, volunteer challenges, etc.

Are we winning...or circling the drain? Are we Monty Python's "Always look on the bright side of life" or Eeyore's "if it *is* a good morning, which I doubt"? The good news is that we get to choose. We have the choice to focus on what is positive in a situation or what is negative. Optimistic. Or Pessimistic. Glass half-empty. Or glass half-full.

And our choice of how we perceive our community doesn't just affect our own attitude and mood. I'll admit when the one member said we were circling the drain, it took the wind out of my sails. Our choices are contagious. There is momentum in both positive and negative energy that can lift communities or hold them down.

There is much wrong with the world. And much that is very, very right. The same is true of our UU community. We have so much for which to be grateful. And still more work to be done.

I think I'll treat myself to a frozen yogurt.

Communications Update from the Board of Trustees

by Christine Creter, Board Member

Progress continues on the Communications Initiative that has been a focal-point for the Board this year.

Internal Communications

The Internal Communications Processes and Procedures were put in place at the end of 2018. Thank you to those that are following the processes that were outlined. Many of you may have noticed improvements that have been made to the website, the calendar, how services are listed, etc. We are asking all Ministries and Teams to please ensure their content is up to date and “fresh” on the website. You may contact the Office Manager with direction on what to update regarding your content.

We also now have a section of our weekly email and Order of Service called “Help Requested”. This is a place where ministries and teams may request help with specific tasks that other congregants may have skills, energy, or time to support, even though they are not able to commit to the ongoing ministry. This section is for UU Danbury tasks only, not personal. Please send your requests for help to the Office Manager by the OOS and weekly email deadline including the brief ask, contact name and contact info. Your request may run for up to two weeks.

Zoom meetings continue to help teams, or individuals on teams, by allowing virtual participation. Zoom meeting time must be requested through the Office Manager in advance to make sure it does not get double booked.

Mailboxes will be installed in the Fellowship Hall foyer above the credenza. This will be a way to communicate between ministries/teams and will also serve as a visible representation of the many incredible ministries/teams doing work in the Congregation for new members and friends to see. Please use these mailboxes moving forward to communicate with Rev. Heather, the Office Manager, Director of RE, the Board, and among your own team rather than leaving information on the desk in the Cottage House.

External Communications

An External Communications task force was established to inform the creation of External Communications Policies and Procedures for UU Danbury. Thank you to Nancy Cullen, Margaret Henderson and Sally Mandler for joining Chris Creter on this important work.

At the March Common Council meeting we rolled out the External Communications Policies and Procedures. This document will evolve in time as we begin to look to different channels in which to communicate with the public as well as evolve how to use our existing channels. There are many factors to consider when communicating with the public, and consulting all individuals and teams that may be impacted by a public flyer, News Release, or Facebook post is necessary. You can find this document on the website under the Member Portal/ Policies and Procedures/Communication, or in the foyer of the Fellowship Hall printed and posted on the Bulletin Board.

We also now have a new roadside sign! This sign allows for a laminated poster to be dropped in. If you would like to advertise your UU Danbury program or event, your team may request the template for the poster and create a laminated version for insertion to the sign. This template will maintain the UU Danbury Service time, but leaves space for you to put your event information. Your team must budget and manage the printing and laminating of the sign. You can request the availability of the roadside sign for advertising your event, as well as the template (in PowerPoint), from the Office Manager. You may also drop the completed sign with the Office Manager so we can safely remove our regular sign and post yours for the allocated period of time.

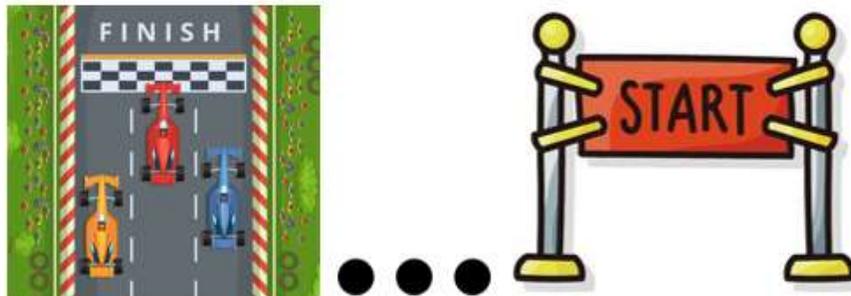
If you wish to ask a question, make a comment, or join the Communications team, please contact **Chris Creter**.



Roots & Wings

... what's happening in Religious Education

by Darlene Anderson-Alexander, Director of Religious Education



Spring time is VERY busy in the Land of Religious Education! We are finishing up one year and – believe it or not, even in April – getting ready to begin the next! The Religious Education Ministry Team is doing a lot of behind-the-scenes work for 2019-2020 before the snow is even fully melted from this winter. Team members are:

- Assessing satisfaction with the current programming schedule (*THANK YOU* to those parents and volunteers who participated in the recent survey!)
- Making decisions about the type of programming schedule for next year
- Assessing projections based on this year's attendance
- Determining age groupings for next year
- Looking at curricular options for all of the groups for next year's "UU Identity" year
- Choosing a curriculum for each group from prek-8th grade
- Planning the components of Coming of Age (9th-11th graders) and Bridging (12th graders)

And then will come **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION RECRUITMENT** to fill all of the **wonderful opportunities to serve** created by the above planning! I read a fabulous article recently entitled, "Your Church Does Not Need Volunteers" from Progressive Christian newsletter columnist Erin Wathen:

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/irreverin/2017/04/church-not-need-volunteers/?fbclid=IwAR0-ZHWYWfdl-PSlcDG9JvoTfJcmtq0j8AxF45VcsLyRN18gp7U8wxHVIfs>. Wathen expresses frustration with folks who say, "Is your husband home babysitting" when she doesn't have her children with her. No, she thinks, because "you can't babysit your own dang kids". Paraphrasing, you cannot *volunteer* at your own congregation in the same way you cannot babysit your own kid. The congregation belongs to you in the same way your family does. It's your own place, your own people. So of course you help take care of it. Of course you do all of the important things folks do around UU Danbury – **including teach, assist, mentor, etc. in Religious Education** - for the home and the people that you love. THAT is when volunteering becomes truly a ministry.

So ... when you see one of the **REMT members** – Sam McCoy, Kathleen Granger, Alison DiPinto, Jan Malin, and Ali Haffner – give them a big high five for working hard to finish up this year and gear up for the next. And consider chatting with them for a bit about **how YOU might become part of the RE Family!**



As you hopefully know, we are hosting the final **Metro NY Senior High Youth Con** of the year at the end of March! Thank you to Co-Deans Sage and Kelsey and ALL of the youth (supported by their amazing advisors Jim Wruck, Heather Smith, Chris Smith, and Sam McCoy) for working hard to make this an AMAZING Con experience! We are expecting about 80 youth and 20 registered adults to be here for the weekend.

YAC (the Youth Adult Community) who actually runs the Cons is very clear about maintaining a **CLOSED CAMPUS** for the duration of the Con. Therefore, *we are asking all congregants to refrain from coming to UU Danbury from Friday, March 29th at 5:00 p.m. THROUGH Sunday, March 31st at 8:30 a.m.* Of course, that excludes the wonderful folks who have offered to come by to make and serve food! We also have some other UU Danbury volunteers who are registered for the Con and therefore can be on grounds. THANK YOU for helping us to create the safest Con space possible – just as other hosting congregations do for our youth! Please contact Darlene (darlene.dre.uucd@gmail.com) if you have any questions.



In other CON news ... the next **JUNIOR HIGH CON** (6th-8th graders) will be in nearby White Plains from April 6th-7th! Find additional information and a registration link here: <https://www.uua.org/central-east/events/youth/mny-spring-junior-retreat-419>. If your child has never attended a Con and is hesitant, let me know and I will connect you with someone who has! We are sending three youth already and Chris McCartney will be our adult chaperone. There is room for additional youth, but hurry and register today!

Ministry/Team News

From the *Membership Team*

by Nancy Tramontana

Many thanks to all who participated in UU Danbury's second Open Mic night, both performers and audience. Musicians, story tellers and poetry readers shared their talents. A special shout out to Sequoia Lowe who was our MC, Lou Liotta and daughter Kiah, who along with Sequoia performed as well as encouraged lots of participation of our talented youth and young adults.

From the *Social Action Council*

Social Action Update

by Lynn Taborsak

United Way launches the ALICE Saves Program. In January, the Social Action Council invited United Way to offer a presentation on employed ALICE households in our community who are struggling to make ends meet. On March 19th, the United Way kicked off a new program to reward ALICE households for saving at least \$20 a month. Savers who enroll will earn \$10 every month that they save \$20 for the potential to earn \$60. Hats off to the United Way of Northern Fairfield County for this innovative program.

New Sanctuary CT Traveling Photo Exhibit

On Saturday, April 13th, First and Summerfield United Methodist Church at 425 College Street in New Haven, will host the opening of a traveling photo exhibit to publicize the harm and suffering that occurs when a family member is ordered to be deported.

First and Summerfield offered sanctuary to Marco Reyes Alvarez in July of 2017. After 105 days in sanctuary, he was granted a stay of deportation. His place was taken that November by Nelson Piños, a New Haven father of three who had been in the U.S. for decades. Both Nelson and Sujitno Sajuti who is at the UU Church in Meriden with his wife Dahlia, have been in sanctuary for over 500 days to avoid being deported.

The exhibit will feature family photos and photos of community events, rallies, press conferences, and vigils that were organized to bring attention to the harm these deportations cause in every community in our state.

The exhibit will then go to 9 other sanctuary congregations in Connecticut; eight churches and one synagogue, in an effort to draw attention to the suffering of immigrant families caught up in the latest round of hostile immigration enforcement. UU Danbury will host the exhibit in the Fall.

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On Saturday, April 6th, Soup Kitchen Team #2 will serve up a hot, delicious meal at the Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen on Spring Street. Team Leader **Sharon Stram** will be joined by **Carl Tramontana, Chris Halfar, Darlene Anderson-Alexander, Suze Shaner, Nicole and Sean Paris, Rose Schlemmer and Bob Garavel**. Please remember that if you are not able to help on your scheduled day, you must find a substitute from the alternates list which you can access from the member's page of our website – uudanbury.org. The show must go on!

You can also help us feed our neighbors with a gift card in any amount from any local supermarket. In addition, please continue to bring in your weekly food offering so that we can stock the food pantry at ARC. We need you to include size 4 and 5 disposable diapers in the food offering if possible. We can all be an important part of the fight to end hunger in our community!

From the *Women's Retreat Planning Team*

CHEERS FOR 20 YEARS 2019 WOMEN'S RETREAT - APRIL 27-28, 2019 CALLING ALL COMMUTERS!

The 2019 Women's Retreat is almost here and there are still plenty of spots for commuters. So please join us at The Guest House in Chester for this memorable celebration. We honor 20 years of Wonderful Women coming together to celebrate our similarities and our differences, our common bond through UU Danbury, our memories, our joys, our sorrows. And laughter—lots of laughter. So to new friends and old, come and be a part of all of this. You can email **Barb Myers** for registration information. If you would like to know about scholarships, contact **Melody Levy**.

You will be receiving an email soon regarding carpools. For those interested, **Sharon Stram** will be compiling a carpool list for both overnighters and commuters which will be based on geography. She will then send out contact information to each carpool so participants can contact each other to arrange driving, times etc.

We are looking forward to spending time together in April.

Upcoming Events



by Keith Dupree

Courage is being scared to death – and saddling up anyway.
John Wayne, American actor (1907 – 1979)

Growing up in the Episcopal Church and attending a Methodist Sunday school, somewhere along the way I was taught some sort of creed, part of which was, “I believe in all things visible and invisible, ...” Of course, I didn't, but the creed did lead me to wonder, what is the true nature of reality.

7:00 p.m. – *The Eleven O'Clock* – Our short film for this month offers a humorous response to the reality question. A respected psychiatrist arrives to treat a delusional patient, who believes he is actually the psychiatrist.

7:20 p.m. – *My First Miracle* – In our feature film this month, courage takes the form of a 16-year-old girl who suffers from a rare form of cancer and who just hopes to live a normal life. Not much of a story here, right? What mischief could she possibly get into?

9:10 – 9:30 p.m. – Time for wrap-up and discussion.

We believe that good experiences are even more fulfilling when shared with others. To this end, our objective each month is to present films of substance in a living room setting and to provide an opportunity to discuss with friends. Please join us on Friday, April 12th, at 7:00 p.m. in the Conference Room. All are welcome. Pizza will be provided. Popcorn optional! Contributions will be gratefully accepted, all of which will go to UU Danbury. **(For more information on these films and on the service from which we make our selections, please check the website at www.SpiritualCinemaCircle.com.)**



Men Conversing over Coffee

by Gary Mummert

We are now seven men meeting once a month on the 2nd Monday. Join us when you can. Next Date: Monday, April 8th at 9:30 a.m. at Dunkin Donuts, 407 Main Street, Danbury (near North Street.)

Star Island is a UU/UCC Conference center located just off the coast of Portsmouth, NH. If anyone would be interested is having some material about the spring, summer, fall conferences held on the island, **Jane Leff** will be happy to speak with you, and to show you the conference schedules.



Dear Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury,

We would like to thank you for your gift of \$250.5 on 1/14/2019. Your generous donation will be used to help engage, educate, and empower youths and adults with our *Know The Signs* violence prevention programs. These proven programs help identify and intervene upon at-risk individuals BEFORE they hurt themselves or others.

Since program inception, we have trained more than 5.5 million youths and adults in all 50 states. Multiple school shooting, suicide, gun, and other violence threats have been intervened upon and stopped. The training has also helped to reduce bullying and get mental health assistance for hundreds of youths.

In the months ahead, we will provide you with updates on our progress and how your donation is making a difference in preventing gun violence and saving lives. Please visit sandyhookpromise.org, and follow Sandy Hook Promise on Facebook and @sandyhook on Twitter for updates on our efforts and success stories. Thank you again for your generous contribution and support.

Sincerely,

Nicole Hockley (Dylan's Mom)

Mark Barden (Daniel's Dad)

Managing Directors at Sandy Hook Promise



On behalf of Interfaith, I would like to thank you for donating to the Adopt a Family program this past holiday season. Because of your generosity and kindness we were able to bring such joy to our clients during this very special time of year. The donations we received from you were so kind. Our clients have expressed their gratitude on how these donations made their day brighter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Theresa Barbara", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Theresa Barbara
Director of Operations
iamtheresab@yahoo.com



Dear Friends,

I would like to convey my deepest thanks for supporting the work of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee with the Guest at Your Table gifts we received.

With more than 70 grassroots organizations in 35 countries around the world, you and UUSC are building a world free from oppression by putting local voices and values first. Whether we are offering protections for families fleeing violence in Central America, empowering grassroots efforts to respond to discriminatory policies in the United States protecting the rights of communities displaced by climate change, or working with refugees fleeing war and violence, your support creates lasting change across the globe for people under siege. Together, we are promoting the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Thank you for your contribution and for joining us as we uphold global human rights. Your faith and commitment make our success possible and inspire us all.

With much gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Katherine Morn", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rev. Mary Katherine Morn
President and CEO

**Save the Date
Annual Meeting of the
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury
Sunday, June 2, 2019
following the 10:00 a.m. service**



**Unitarian Universalist
Congregation of Danbury
24 Clapboard Ridge Road
Danbury, CT 06811**

FIRST CLASS MAIL