



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

JUNE 2020

From our Consulting Minister



Every now-and-then these days, I forget about the coronavirus. Has this been happening for any of you? (I've been looking at the headlines a little less often, or maybe it's that the news no longer seems to be changing all that much from day-to-day, at least here in Connecticut.) I will be doing something like cleaning off the table from a kids' craft activity and trying to move us towards dinner and realize that another day has rolled right along and within our home, things have mostly settled into A New Ordinary. Meanwhile, there is still a pandemic outside, there is still the economic fallout from a system that has for far too many Americans been based on month-to-month, even week-to-week income, there are still so many unknowns.

When I am able to take a minute to ponder our lives now, I find myself with even more questions. To use a word that's been used quite a lot without an enormous amount of clarity, what is *essential*? As we imagine what our rising 3rd-grader might experience if and when school starts up in the fall, we ask ourselves: What *is* school? How much have I deeply associated elementary school in my lifetime with cavorting with friends on the playground, working out the social dynamics of lunch in the cafeteria, and whispering into friend's ears while the teacher isn't looking? If none of these things--playgrounds, cafeterias, proximity to other students--are permitted in the fall, is that school?

And of course this ultimately leads me to consider: what is church? What is at the heart of our congregational life? What binds us together? When I turn to the UUCD Mission Statement*, I am relieved to be reminded that there is so much this congregation has identified as our core purpose and reason for being that does not necessitate being in-person, simultaneously, as a large group: "*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.*" (*This is an excerpt. You can find the full Mission Statement just below this letter.)

Just one phrase that I pause upon right now is that "we work to create a just society." By staying home and following social distancing guidelines, we are trying to create a society in which fewer people are exposed to grave illness. Though it can be strange to think of our "absence" as a way of creating a more just society, this still seems to be one of the things that is clear: as we sing on Sunday mornings, "Everywhere I do not go, I'm gonna send my light."

(continued)

As always, even and especially during this surreal time, it is our relationships with one another that form the strong interdependent web of this community. If there is anything you 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 if you just have a quick question or comment. I look forward to hearing from you in whatever way is best for you. May you keep finding ways to tend to your spirit and connect with others in new ways during this time.

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 July/August Comment –
Friday, June 19th.

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

Share our Services!

We have expanded our ZOOM capabilities and can now host up to 300 devices. Feel free to invite friends and family to our service. We will continue to share the link on Sunday mornings for security reasons. Anyone can also add themselves to our UUCD e-list to receive the link directly on Sunday morning by emailing Sherry at officemanager@uudanbury.org with that request.

Sunday, June 7th Creating Ritual in an Uncertain Time Rev. Heather Rion Starr
 For many of us, summer has typically been a time of travel and special warm-weather outings. Some of those annual traditions are still possible and many are up-in-the-air. How can we rekindle our enthusiasm for summertime even during all this ongoing uncertainty? What place might ritual have in our lives during This Unusual Summer?

Sunday, June 14th Who Knows? Rev. Carol Wolff
 Not knowing is sometimes more stressful than having the answers.

Rev. Carol Wolff was ordained in 1998 by the First Unitarian Church of St Louis where she served for 13 years prior to attending seminary as the Religious Education Administrator. She then served UU congregations in IL, CT, and NY. She loves reading, crosswords puzzles, and her 2 cats – Escher and Monay (resident artists).

Sunday, June 21st Religious Education Ministry Team & Rev. Heather Rion Starr
Multigenerational Flower Communion Service
 We each make a mark in our way. Whatever bit of kindness we can share in this world matters.

Sunday, June 28th What May Rise Rev. Julie-Ann Silberman-Bunn
 We will be thinking about why we want to return to normal. How may we shift the paradigm for being apart and starting things again in this strange time of Pandemic?

The Rev. Julie-Ann Silberman-Bunn is a life-long Unitarian Universalist who was ordained in 1992. Julie-Ann has served as a minister at small, medium and large congregations, as a hospice and now as a hospital chaplain. In September of 2019 Julie-Ann and her husband Ken moved to what had been a family summer cabin in Western Massachusetts and are busily working to make their forever home more practical for year round and long-term. Julie-Ann is currently working as a chaplain at Mercy Medical Center in Springfield, Massachusetts.

**Call for the Annual Meeting of UU Danbury
JUNE 7, 2020
following the 10:00 a.m. service via Zoom**

Every May, or the first 10 days of June, as specified in the By-Laws, we hold the Annual Meeting of UU Danbury. The purpose of the Annual Meeting is to “hear reports of officers, committees, and staff, to elect new officers and trustees, to adopt an annual budget, and to transact any other business that may properly come before the Congregation.”

SLATE OF CANDIDATES FOR ELECTION 2020-2021

The Nominating Team, Meredith Spector, John Miglietta, and Yvonne Ruddy-Stein, offer the following slate of Officers and new Trustees for the Board of Trustees, to be voted upon at the Annual Meeting on June 7, 2020. Persons to be elected are in **bold** type.

SLATE OF CANDIDATES FOR ELECTION 2020-21

To Be Elected to The Board of Trustees

President:	Melody Levy	1 year term until June 30, 2021
Vice President:	Samantha McCoy	1 year term until June 30, 2021
Secretary:	Debra Oria	1 year term until June 30, 2021
Treasurer:	Marie Dupree	2 year term until June 30, 2022
Trustee:	Joe Gillotti	3 year term until June 30, 2023
Trustee:	John Miglietta	1 year term until June 30, 2021

Remaining on the Board of Trustees

Trustee:	Peter Horton	2 nd year of 3 year term until June 30, 2022
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To be Elected to the Nominating Team

Member	Jane Leff	3 year term until June 30, 2023
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Remaining on the Nominating Team

Chair	Meredith Spector	3 rd year of 3 year term until June 30, 2021
Member	Yvonne Ruddy-Stein	2 nd year of 3 year term until June 30, 2022

Roberts Rules of Order prevail at all Congregational Meetings. Our bylaws also state that there must be a quorum of at least 15% of the membership. At an official membership of 137, this means there must be at least 21 members present at the June 7th meeting for the meeting to proceed.

Article 111, Section 1. from our by-laws state: General: Any person, at least 18 years of age, who is in sympathy with its purpose and program, signs the Membership Book, and makes an annual financial commitment, may become a voting member of this Congregation.

Voting rights extend only to those who have been members for at least 60 days, which, for this year’s meeting, means anyone who signed the membership book prior to **April 7, 2020**. Absentee ballots are allowed. Absentee ballots are to be requested and returned to **Melody Levy** by **June 6, 2020**.

Notes from the Board of Trustees

by Melody Levy, President

It's June now and what was significant in January hardly seems to matter, but there are reasons to be cheerful. Most of us are lucky. We've stayed healthy. Although plans have been sidelined, we're adjusting and also wondering what our new normal will be. We are living in a time of accelerated change and challenge. Our opportunities and obligations will demand relentless evaluation before we take our next steps forward.

We cannot bring all our interactions online but while we are restricted, we can bring the best to each other as we have done time and again. The perspective and peace that is felt inside Fellowship Hall is a sanctuary within every one of us. If we can't go to the place that reminds us of our beliefs, let's bring them to the people we do interact with, even and especially with the ones who make it the hardest.

Creativity is even more important today in the coronavirus age. David Brooks in his New York Times op-ed piece, *The Creative Monopoly* notes: "Creative people don't follow the crowds; they seek out the blank spots on the map. Creative people wander through far away and forgotten traditions and then integrate marginal perspectives back to the mainstream. Instead of being fastest around the tracks everybody knows, creative people move adaptively through wildernesses nobody knows."

There is hope. New paradigms will emerge. We will try new ways of doing things and the pendulum will swing from "oh no" to "ah yes." During this in between time of what was and hasn't been yet, let's thank one another for forfeiting some freedoms. The cancellations and postponements will make for full hearted story telling around the tables we share at another time. For anyone without a safety net, please reach out. Let someone reach back to you and lend a hand. We are here for each other.

Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Bob Bollinger is the contact person for **June and July**.

Joan Campbell is the assistant.

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

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

Moving Forward Under COVID 19

By Peter Horton, Board of Trustees

As if Burt Bacharach and Hal Leonard anticipated the angst of what it means to lose one's community they wrote:

A room is still a room
Even when there's nothin' there but gloom
But a room is not a house
And a house is not a home
When the two of us are far apart.

So it seems that we all feel the “gloom” of not being together and with each other in our spiritual home.

Earlier in May the UUA sent out guidelines to UU leaders regarding future congregational planning in the time of COVID. One of the key recommendations is that UU leaders should begin to anticipate that we may not get back to live services until May 2021. What processes and community behaviors would that effect if we couldn't be in Fellowship Hall for another year? Of course, each UU congregation makes their own decisions and circumstances are still very fluid. Guidelines and planning may very well change over the months to come.

The UUCD Board of Trustees has been in formal and informal discussions as to how we should be planning for our near-term and long-term future specifically in regard to the COVID pandemic. Can we have small group gatherings? Can we have a live service if we partake of COVID related precautions. If we aren't together how do we adapt our fundraising efforts? Our membership is diverse, we need to consider the needs of our youth and RE programs, the comfort of our staff, and the impact on our budget.

The Board of Trustees is now working on a set of guidelines that will help our UUCD community decide how we can gather as a community. Some of the Board's considerations are:

- Small group meetings – can small groups meet on UUCD property? Many details need to be worked out before committing to any gathering including understanding liabilities and cleaning of facilities. Parking lot meetings seem to offer some risk mitigation but detailed guidelines need to be established before such meetings could be allowed.
- Cleaning – cleaning to COVID standards is very different than what we have done in the past. When would the extra cleaning need to be done? How much more would the cost add to our budget?
- Hybrid services – this would be a combination of live and Zoom streaming of our services. The Board feels this is the right direction to move in. On the plus side, it allows for the greatest number of congregants and guests to participate and accommodates the many needs of our community. It also requires that our staff feel comfortable with entering our buildings and performing services. There is also an associated cost that is not currently in the budget, i.e. additional equipment, as well as ongoing production planning.

Most importantly, we will continue to recognize that in the time of COVID we can continue to be a creative and spiritual community. A house may not be a home but our community has proven thus far to thrive inside and outside our buildings walls.



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

Dear Congregation,

My wife and I were foster parents over a number of years. In foster care, “the unknown” is a way of life, for all the adults involved, but most especially for the kids.* Human beings have coping mechanisms that help us maintain some homeostasis when the shape of our futures is especially uncertain.

One of the mechanisms that some kids in foster care take up is to rush toward every unknown as if it is a big gift. Moving to a new home? Great! Maybe this time there will be other kids there to play with! Changing schools? Perfect! New friendships are sure to be waiting. This mechanism can serve kids well in times of frequent change, but if the mechanism kicks back in after it is not needed -- once things become more settled and certain -- it can cause a child to feel unhappy with all that is stable and seek change when it isn't helpful.

At another point on the spectrum of responses, some kids become disinterested in or resentful of the unknown, either not investing themselves in any possibilities or resisting the effects of change by depersonalizing its meaning and downplaying its transformative potential. These kids protect themselves from disappointments and hurt, and they maintain a strong sense of identity. They lose out, however, when changes present positive opportunities or develop into longer-term circumstances. When their experiences do in fact transform them, their sense of identity can lose some coherence, or become less integrated.

Whatever experiences you and your family members have been having with the unknown during this time, I hope that there are coping mechanisms that have served you well, and that when they are not serving you, you are able to put them aside for a different time when they can again be useful.

Among the unknowns in our lives are questions related to the timing, pace, and shape of opening UUCD facilities. As I write this, little is known about those questions. By the time you read these words, more will be known, but I suspect there will still be many questions to answer and decisions to make together. Though it means some planning for next year has been on hold, I am grateful that we are taking these decisions slowly, ever mindful that our first and seventh principles call us to care for every life.

That doesn't mean, though, that I am not excited about some of the possibilities that the unknown offers. The more I think of the vast array of possibilities, the more excited I get. Here is a mantra I have been saying in my daily meditation and prayers: “May my heart be open while we make these decisions, may my heart be open when our decisions are made, may my heart be open while we live into our decisions.”

Warmly in faith,
Sierra-Marie

*My heart is with kids in foster care right now. Quarantine has compounded so much heartache. Please keep these kids in your hearts during this time.

Upcoming In Religious Education

June 7th:

- No Classes Pre-K-8th Grade due to the Congregational Meeting
- Senior High Youth Group will meet on Zoom at 5PM

June 14th:

- 11:30AM RE For Families (prek-5th grade) Final Class/Celebration on Zoom
- 5:00PM 6th-8th Grade Final Class/Celebration on Zoom
- 5:00PM Senior High Youth Group Final Meeting/Celebration on Zoom

Our Religious Education programs for the 2020-2021 program year come to a close on Religious Education and Bridging Sunday, June 21st. We will then take a summer break to plan for fall 2020.

Ministry/Team News

From *Adult Programming*

by Joe Gillotti

Spiritually Speaking Group

The Spiritually Speaking Group will start up again online via Zoom. The main objective of this workshop is to work together in creating a form for Greater Understanding of Spirituality. We will work toward coming together to understand the deeper essence of Spirituality. These types of groups can help people work to create an environment whereby people can learn from one another and develop a stronger and better skill set to take more control over their lives.

This format is why so many of the Spiritually Speaking groups have gotten so popular. Over the past 3 to 4 years, tens of millions of Americans have become so distraught over the current political chaos we see almost daily, government un-predictability at levels like we have never seen before, and now most currently a worldwide pandemic. You may want to attend this group in order to be able to get a clearer view of the world's troubles, how they affect you, and what you can do in your own thinking process to perhaps mitigate some of the personal tension and confusion. The group will begin to meet for 8 weeks starting Tuesday June 9th, from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. the Zoom room. NOTE: This group will be limited to the first eight 8 participants who sign up. **Joe Gillotti** will be facilitating the group. For questions contact Joe.

From the *Social Action Council*

Social Action Update

by Lynn Taborsak

UU the VOTE is underway and Co-Chairs **Sally Mandler** and **Gary Mummert** are predicting that there will be opportunities for Reclaim Our Vote postcards, phone banking and text banking to people of color in voter suppression states. Please let them know if you are interested in training for these new voter mobilization tools. 500 active voters in Richmond County, Georgia, got postcards from our volunteers urging them to return their absentee ballots in time for the June 9th primary election. Stay tuned for a “Commit to Vote” weekend in October where we will offer a variety of options for you to mobilize voters in our congregation, our extended family network and our community with both “boots on the ground” and virtual connections.

Unfortunately, the Connecticut General Assembly had to close mid-session and was not able to finish work on bills supporting our principles of justice, equity, and compassion. Bills that had been voted out of committee included: a public option for health care; capping the cost of insulin; fair work week scheduling; easing post-prison barriers to housing; and expanded health care coverage for substance abuse services. In addition, public hearings were held or scheduled for bills to allow compassionate choice aid-in-dying; erasure of certain criminal records; equal pay for equal work; protecting the rights of immigrants through strengthening the TRUST Act; furthering gun safety; legalizing adult marijuana use; improvements to waste management and bottle redemption programs; and support of clean energy.

A special session in June will be primarily devoted to budget issues. However, it will also seek a permanent change in absentee voting that will allow anyone to vote by absentee ballot this November. Governor Lamont will use his executive powers to temporarily broaden the use of absentee ballots as necessary to protect public health for our August 11th primary. All registered voters will be receiving absentee ballot applications by mail. We will send out more information and sample letters to local legislators in support of unrestricted absentee voting.

UU The Vote and Common Cause CT

by Sally Mandler

We are working to ensure safe, secure elections, both in the CT primary (August 11) and the general election (Nov. 3). Please know and let others know that they have the option to vote by mail in August. All registered voters in Connecticut will receive an **application** for an absentee ballot for the primary. Complete and return the application so that you will get a ballot and can vote by mail. Also, please contact your state legislators and ask them to pass legislation *expanding mail-in voting through the general election*. To find them, go to www.cga.ct.gov. Finally, anyone who will be turning 18 by November 3 is eligible to vote. Please help our RE seniors and others who are 17, soon to be 18, to register (voterregistration.ct.gov)!

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

Dorothy Day is operating with two or three volunteers who package sandwiches, fruit, and a snack into “Grab and Go” bags to distribute from 3:00 to 4:30 at the Soup Kitchen. **UUCD teams are welcome to provide sandwiches on their day.** Contact Lynn Taborsak at ddhhsandwiches@gmail.com if you are interested in doing this. Non-perishable food can be donated to the Daily Bread Food Pantry on Terrace Place behind St. James’ Episcopal Church. Donations are accepted from 10:00 to 1:00 on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Please call the Daily Bread office at [203-748-3561](tel:203-748-3561) if no one is in the pantry to receive your donation.

From the *Sunday Services Ministry Team*

by Tony DiFabbio

Attention: Volunteers Welcome! **Please consider joining our Sunday Service Ministry Team.** We are in need of Coordinators to assist in our services. Please contact **Tony DiFabbio** or **Michael Stengle**.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday Afternoon Online Gathering

Paula Hopewell and Margaret Henderson will continue to lead our weekly Covid19 Check-In and Spoken Milestones (via Zoom). We will be meeting at 4:00 pm. Enjoy some reflection time with one another, listen to some short readings, take a break from the news, and ground ourselves in our UUCD community. All are welcome. The Zoom links will be sent out on Tuesday mornings.



UUCD Men Conversing over Coffee will be meeting via Zoom on Monday, June 8th at 9:30 am. Any UUCD men who would like to join, please contact **Jim Russell**.



The Book **Conversation Group** will be meeting on Thursday, June 11th at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom. The books we will be discussing are: **You Never Forget Your First** by *Alexis Coe*, which is an irreverent biography of George Washington, and **Martha Washington** by *Patricia Brady*. Two books about two people who lived, loved and worked together. One is well known, the other almost forgotten. You will never view the beginnings of our country in quite the same way. You do not have to have read the books to participate in the conversation.

Future books we plan to read are: **The Soul of an Octopus** by Sy Montgomery and **The Second Mountain** by David Brooks.

You do not need to read the book to attend. For more information please contact **Mary Ann Kulla**.

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 will meet in the UUCD Zoom Room on the 2nd and 4th Friday at 4:00 p.m. June dates are the 12th and 26th. 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.



The UU **General Assembly** is June 24th - 28th, 2020. The registration cost is \$150 and financial assistance is available. Please check <https://www.uua.org/ga> for up to date information. Instructions for accessing the participation portal will be distributed in early June. In addition, the UUA is looking for volunteers to moderate or assist with hosting in various zoom rooms. Our UUCD delegates will be **Jim Russell, Gina Cassetta and Mary Ann Kulla**. Many thanks to each of you, in advance.