



# Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

JULY/AUGUST 2020

## From our Consulting Minister



Dear UUUCD Members and Friends,

George Floyd was killed on Monday, May 25, just days after I had written my June column for this newsletter. In the five weeks since, so much more has happened: so many protests, rallies, and calls to action, nationwide; so many teach-ins and so much learning, conversation, and increasing understanding within and between ourselves and our communities.

Unitarian Universalism is and has long been a majority-white denomination with a Protestant history. And we are also committed to being a living tradition, an evolving faith, grounded in how we *covenant* together: how we are with each other.

This convergence of the national uprising centering Black lives and decades of wrestling with anti-racism work within Unitarian Universalism is making this year's General Assembly (GA), our annual national denominational conference, all the more profound.

Every workshop I attend has more racially diverse leadership and participation than I have experienced at GAs in the past. There is an increasing understanding that we must be--and are committed to being--a collectively learning community. *All* of us, always: life-long learners.

Simultaneously, we UUs are, for the most part, notoriously well-educated, and can sometimes remain forever-and-only in the "learning" stage. We must both learn *and* act, as daily spiritual practice, as the only way to be engaged in the now. As Rev. Theresa Ines Soto shared during the Thursday morning GA worship service: "We don't need any more insight to keep our word in the world."

I invite you, every day this summer, to ask yourself, as a (non-UU) Chaplain colleague of mine once shared as his daily morning question of himself: "What will I learn today?" And then to follow that, right away, with the additional question of: "And what will I *do* today about what I already know of injustice in our country?" As you already know well, we are in quite possibly the most pivotal election year in our country's recent history. How are you engaging with that fact and stretching yourself to be more loving, more positive, more productive, more active, extending yourself in new ways that challenge you and bring you into more meaningful connection with others? Another wonderful quote I have taken in deeply this week at GA is this one, words by Alice Walker: "Look closely at the present you are constructing; it should look like the future you are dreaming."

May your summer be one of both learning and acting, both listening and constructing your and our futures. May your summer be especially memorable and transformative, this year. And as always, even and especially during this unique summer, 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

**Share our Services!**

Feel free to invite friends and family to our service. We will 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](mailto:officemanager@uudanbury.org) with that request.

**July/August Services – One Service at 10:00 a.m.**

**Sunday, July 5<sup>th</sup>** Declaration Revs. Carolyn Patierno & Caitlin O'Brien  
 UUCD will attend, as a congregation, this All Souls-UU New London service. Poet Tracy K. Smith took apart the Declaration of Independence in a way that considers the founding document through the lens of the African American reality. It's a timely lens this year. The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury and the Unitarian Society of Hartford will be joining All Souls for this service. Welcome, Friends!  
 The link to All Souls' YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMI9JyRbOAA>.  
 The service space will be open/"live" at 9:30am. The chat is open and there is robust greeting up until the service begins at 10:00 a.m.

**Sunday, July 12<sup>th</sup>** The Many Faces of Truth Gale Alexander  
 What is truth? Do you know? Do you think there are absolute truths? Is the Truth always factual? Come explore that illusive concept we call truth.

**Sunday, July 19<sup>th</sup>** Spiritually Speaking - Fear, Seer and Practice Joe Gillotti  
 This talk is intended to help people understand that we can all learn something new. Joe will be talking about the origins of fear and the way out. He will be covering the power of becoming a "Spiritual Seer" and what that means. Finally, what are some of the simple, no cost practices we all can begin to learn right now to help us move further up the spiritual ladder at our own pace.

**Sunday, July 26<sup>th</sup>** Courage, Compassion and the Coronavirus Suze Shaner  
 This sermon will explore how courage **and** compassion are being activated during this time of great unrest and uncertainty in our country. What is being called forth from us as individuals and as a collective liberal religious community?

**Sunday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>** Seeking our Roots: A Desire for Connection Rik Cousens and Joanne Davidson  
 Our separate unplanned quest to find our biological parents: its surprising genesis, navigating pitfalls, serendipitous results, unexpected success and anticipation of warm and wonderful new relationships.

**Sunday, August 9<sup>th</sup>** Reflections: Building your own Theology Margaret Henderson  
 The April - June 2020 participants in the Building Your Own Theologies (BYOT) class led by Rev. Heather will co-create this service and share their reflections with you. Participants: Jody Bonansinga, Eva DeFranco, Lisa Greene, Margaret Henderson, Lisa Horton, Anne Krieg, Melody Levy, Debra Oria, and Annie Senol. Join us!





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

Dear Congregation,

I continue to be excited about our upcoming year in Religious Education. As overused as the word “unprecedented” is right now, it is really a descriptive word for our situation. What I want to say is that we have an unprecedented *opportunity* to both lean into the strengths of this congregation *and* try new ways of ministering to children, youth, and families. Possibilities may unfold of which we never dreamed.

When I came on board at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury, I heard about the many wonderful things you have done for your children and youth. I learned, for example, that your kids grow with strong religious identities as Unitarian Universalists and that they are involved in social action projects they find meaningful.

I learned that a number of kids are friends and get together even outside of the congregational walls, despite coming from various towns and school districts. And I learned that your Religious Education volunteers represent not just parents of program participants, but a swath of congregational membership. These are robust signs of health in your ministries for children and youth and, as examples, only begin to scratch the surface of all you have built.

At the same time, I learned that a number of volunteers have been doing this work for many years and are feeling a tiredness and desire for rest, time off, and new ways to participate in the congregation. I learned that some of you worry about attendance -- about engagement in Religious Education, particularly in the younger age groups - - and that you have canceled classes at various times due to a lack of attendance.

The pandemic has introduced new challenges at the same time it has brought into greater focus pre-existing challenges. When we moved to Zoom classes as a temporary measure to maintain routine and continuity for the children and youth this spring, not all children and youth enjoyed the online format, especially when they were required to do the same thing for school. Further, for kids who haven't enjoyed Religious Education classes in general, being required to invest in these classes in the virtual world highlighted that lack of desire to participate.

Part of what makes me excited about the year ahead is the opportunity we have to experiment with methodologies that draw on the strengths of who you are as a community while addressing challenges, new and old, that we now face together. I am looking forward to thinking creatively about what it means to minister to children and youth in these times. During the summer months, I will be spending time reaching out to families. Parents, I hope that if we have not already, we will have a chance to connect soon.

I know that if there are young people in your home who are not eager class-attenders, you may be considering setting aside your efforts to get them engaged in Religious Education while we are still “remote.” I understand that families are balancing a variety of priorities right now, and that each of our families is making major adjustments in family life related to the care and education of our children. As a result, when I reach out, I may fall low on the list of people with whom you will be prioritizing a conversation.

What I want you to know is that it is important to me that we minister to all the children, youth, and families of the congregation, and that I am not attached to us doing this work with all children in a class setting, online or otherwise. I am reaching out because I want to understand how it is we can serve *your* particular children and *your* family. I hope that our conversations will result in something we will all be excited about.

Warmly in faith,  
Sierra-Marie

## **The Timeline for Religious Education Program Development**

Because we are in unusual times, we have had to make adjustments to the normal cycle of Religious Education planning. Here is a little more information about what you can expect. From late June through early July, the Director of Religious Education (DRE) and Religious Education Ministry Team (REMT) will host two or three meetings with families to help us in the planning process for next year. Volunteer recruitment will take place as programs develop.

In mid-July, the DRE will begin meeting with individual families to ensure family needs are met. Please note that the DRE will also be taking some time off between mid and late July. In early August, it is likely that initial plans will be finalized. Once initial plans are finalized, the DRE will communicate program information and begin the registration process with families.

### **From the RE Ministry Team**

by Kristen Papucci, Chair

Wow - what a year it's been! As our congregation rapidly switched from in-person services to Zoom services, the REMT has also had to find ways to 'go with the flow". Discussions more recently have begun to address what RE is going to look like next year. The team asked all RE parents to provide us with input on Tuesday June 23rd via Zoom to help us plan for the church year ahead. Stay tuned for other such sessions.

We say Farewell and Thank You to longtime REMT volunteers Allison DiPinto and Ali Haffner. Their many roles within Religious Education and on the Ministry Team have helped keep things moving forward, especially this year. **We are actively seeking new volunteers for this ministry and you may be called upon to serve.** Please consider joining us!

This year the REMT has participated in the following events:

- Christmas Service
- Auction Raffle Basket
- AIDS Mitten Tree
- Tree Trim Multi-Generational Service
- REMT – led Spring Service

# Ministry/Team News

From *Adult Programming*

## Spiritually Speaking Group

by Joe Gillotti

The Spiritually Speaking Group continues in July. 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 meet Tuesdays in July 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.

## Back by popular demand - Chalice Circles!

by Margaret Henderson

In response to requests, several individuals have found a way for us to do Chalice Circles online this summer. A Chalice Circle is a group of 8-10 people who meet weekly with a facilitator to build community, learn to practice shared ministry, and nurture their spiritual lives. Further description is available at <https://www.uua.org/small-group>. Watch for specific details coming in "This Week at UUCD."

Two separate 6-week sessions will start in early July. They will meet online in the UUCD Zoom rooms:

- The **Morning Session** will be led by **Gina Cassetta** and meet on **Wednesdays at 9:30 a.m., beginning July 8th and ending August 12th.**
- The **Evening Session** will be led by **Michele Cousens** and meet on **Tuesdays at 7 p.m., beginning July 14th through August 18th.**

**To register for either session**, please contact **Margaret Henderson**, the new Chair of Adult Education. Registration will be first-come, first-served so we can keep the groups to a manageable size. Note: The sessions are free, but those who sign up should plan to attend all 6 meetings if possible. Also, if you think you might be interested in joining a Chalice Circle later this year, please drop Margaret a line and let her know.

## From the *Social Action Council*

by Margaret Henderson

UU the VOTE is moving right along. Co-Chairs **Sally Mandler and Gary Mummert** have been coordinating efforts to contact potential voters in Georgia by phone and/or text and encourage them to vote in the primary election.

**Lynn Taborsak** has coordinated getting a bunch of UUCD folks to write bunches of postcards to folks in Georgia and Mississippi who may have been removed from the voter rolls, encouraging them to re-register.

The **Immigrant Justice Team** has continued to follow developments in the struggle to support immigrants during the pandemic. **Margaret Henderson** drove to Hartford in early June to participate in a "protest caravan" of 100 cars driving around the state capitol building, honking and displaying signs asking Governor Lamont for relief for undocumented immigrants. Since then the governor has set aside \$2.5 million for housing assistance, but because no immigrant organizations were included in the task force that came up with this program, renters would have to "out" themselves to their landlord as undocumented in order for the landlord to apply for these funds. This is not a feasible solution. In addition to this money a private philanthropic organization, 4-CT, has offered \$1 million in grants for the 120,000 or so undocumented immigrants in the state. That amount is far short of the \$150 million that organizers have asked for; negotiations are ongoing.

Please remember to vote in **Connecticut's primary election on August 11th**. You must have been registered *and designated your party of choice* 90 days beforehand to be eligible to vote in the primary.

SAC members and others have been actively involved in the protest movement over the unmerited deaths of black people like George Floyd at the hands of police. Some UUCD'ers attended a street-corner protest in Westbury where we held signs, and others went to a protest on Main Street in Danbury on June 13th. **Sam McCoy and Rev. Heather** co-facilitated a Zoom sessions on June 15th and June 23rd to explore what UUCD's institutional response will be to the push to dismantle racism in the U.S.; stay tuned for further discussion on this issue.

## Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

Because of Covid-19, Dorothy Day Teams have not been able to volunteer in the way we have in the past. However, people are still being served grab-and-go sandwich bags (containing sandwiches, fruit, cookies, snacks and a water bottle) from the door of the kitchen from 3:00 - 4:30 p.m. and bags are also being delivered to people who are sheltered at the Super 8 Motel. Because of increased need, **we need donations of BOTTLED WATER, FRUIT (APPLES, BANANAS) COOKIES AND SNACKS**. These items can be dropped off at Dorothy Day Hospitality House on Spring Street. **Lynn Taborsak** has also been scheduling sandwich donations so we have just the right amount each day. If you are interested in making sandwiches, please email her at [ddhhsandwiches@gmail.com](mailto:ddhhsandwiches@gmail.com). Since we are likely not to need non-perishable food donations (ex. soup) for a while, we are directing people to the Daily Bread Food Pantry (25 West St – entrance off Terrace Place). Donations are accepted on Mondays between 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. and Fridays between 8:30 – 11:30 a.m. (Adapted from Joe Simons)

This month, some members of Team 1, whose regularly scheduled date is July 4th, will be preparing sandwiches in their own homes and dropping them off for distribution by other volunteers at the Soup Kitchen. Way to go **John Miglietta, Jane Leff, Sally Mandler, Inge Hill, Rose Schlemmer and Judy Lacker!**

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**.

From *Team Green*

by Barbara Myers



**Help the UUCD Garden Over the Summer!**

Green Team has been tending the UUCD organic veggie garden this year, and harvested produce to take to the Faith Food pantry in Newtown for two Tuesdays in June. We are tending and harvesting over the summer, and **volunteers are needed!** If you would like to help in this effort (socially distanced, of course), contact **Barbara Myers** or **Gary Mummert**. The garden is a small one, so only a small amount of time is needed for each volunteer. And... Garden coaching is available!

# Upcoming Events



**UUCD Men Conversing over Coffee** will be meeting via Zoom on **Monday, July 13<sup>th</sup> and August 10 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, July 9th at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom. The book we will be discussing is **The Soul of an Octopus** by Sy Montgomery. This is a beautifully written exploration of inter-species communication and consciousness.

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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Friday at 4:00 p.m.

July dates are the 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>

August dates are the 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>

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.

### Upcoming Open Mic Events!



Looking for something to do this summer? Have a poem or story to recite? A song to share? **Join us for two virtual coffee house/open mic events on Friday, July 24th and Friday, August 21st at 7:00 p.m.** All you have to do is log in and be prepared to share or simply observe and soak up the lovely artistic offerings of our UUCD community and beyond. ALL are welcome. Invite your friends and fellow artists. We'll see you there! Contact **Jerry Phelps** at [musicdirector@uudanbury.org](mailto:musicdirector@uudanbury.org) for more information.