



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

OCTOBER 2020

From our Consulting Minister



Dear UUCD Members and Friends,

These times can feel truly surreal. It sometimes seems like a thought experiment we might have been assigned in some educational context, years ago: Imagine it's October, 2020. In the White House: _____; and the sudden death of a prominent, long-serving, feminist Supreme Court Justice, and a global Pandemic, and a major national and presidential election now in a matter of days, and the accumulated impact of years of not investing in our U.S. Postal Service or in truly-humane public health, and the increased awareness among the majority of the country about the impact of 400 years of racism and white supremacy culture, and social media that enables many people of all ages to share their every thought at the click of a few buttons, and, oh: climate change. What am I forgetting? A rollercoasting economy and uncertainty about how all of this will impact the lives of our loved ones. ...I'm sure there's more. Now, what do you do?

...It can be really hard to know what to do, say or write, these days. And, at the same time, I'm freshly grateful for our Unitarian Universalist congregations, communities, connections and commitments, precisely because of these times we are waking up to anew each morning. I turn to the leaders, mentors, and peers I admire in a way that I did not when things were a little more upbeat and mellow. I cherish moments with my two children in a way I might not have, were we able to do all the things we usually got to do without thinking, prior to March 2020. And I feel challenged to focus, to take better care of my health, to get off-screen and read poetry and other such things (meditate! do yoga! cook healthy food!), even more given what I realize may lay ahead. (It doesn't look to me like things are going to suddenly get dramatically easier anytime soon.)

I'm so curious to know what is sustaining *you*, these days. What helps you get going each morning? What energizes you to reach out to others in your lives who you might not otherwise be in touch with? What gives you hope for the months and years ahead? 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 email, 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. This time in our lives and in our world is not a thought experiment; this is what is really unfolding. May you, then, keep finding ways to tend to your spirit and connect with others during these complex days.

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 November Comment –
Friday, October 16th.**

Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Karen Gillotti is the contact person for **October & November**.

Janet Cory is the assistant.

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

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

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 with that request.

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

Sunday, October 4th Our Faith Calls Us To Act, To Vote, To Engage, To Care Rev. Heather Rion Starr
What is the role of our Unitarian Universalist faith during such polarized and tumultuous times? What alliances do we need to make and deepen in order to really have an impact on our local communities and, by extension, our shared, larger world?

Sunday, October 11th Wisdom from Contemporary Indigenous Leaders Rev. Heather Rion Starr
Native Americans are impacted by Covid19 at a much higher rate than white Americans. With that painful fact comes another reminder that the majority of us in the United States are long overdue in respecting and learning from indigenous lives and wisdom. Botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Robin Wall Kimmerer teaches that "the awakening of a wider ecological consciousness requires the acknowledgment and celebration of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world." Join us in honoring Indigenous People's Day and opening our hearts to pain of the past, calls of the present, and demands of the future.

Sunday, October 18th How strong is our faith with and without the 8th Principle? Paula Cole Jones
Perhaps the strength of Unitarian Universalism can be measured in the true transformative power of our Principles. It is the seven principles of Unitarian Universalism that bring us together. Momentum is growing around the country for the inclusion of an 8th Principle: It states: We, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by building a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions. Covenants can change a culture. They hold the potential to transform relationships, communities and institutions. The 8th Principal is our proposal to be in covenant with the Beloved Community. You are invited to join Paula Cole Jones on Sunday, October 18th to explore why we need an 8th Principle and why now?

Paula Cole Jones is a life-long Unitarian Universalist and a Management Consultant with over twenty years of experience in designing and facilitating workshops and dialogues for leaders and organizations. She is an innovator of institutional change. In 1999, Paula founded ADORE, A Dialogue on Race & Ethnicity. She has conducted hundreds of group discussions and workshops across the country for faith organizations, community groups and government agencies. Paula Cole Jones is the author of a UU World Magazine cover story, *Reconciliation as a Spiritual Discipline* and she is the editor of a Skinner House book, *Encounters: Poems about Race, Ethnicity and Identity*.

Sunday, October 25th The Virus and the Veil: Samhain in a Time of Plague Rev. Molly Brewer
In many Pagan and Neopagan traditions, Samhain--coinciding with the celebration of Halloween and All Souls--marks the end of the old year and the start of the new, and offers opportunity for us to honor those who have passed this year as well as our ancestors both of blood and spirit. Lore tells us that the veil separating the world of the living from the Otherworld is thin at this time of year; and in a year when over 200,000 lives have been lost to a preventable contagion, we must be more mindful than ever of our relationships and responsibilities both to those who have passed as well as to those who continue to live. Join us for an invitation into ritual, reflection, and remembrance, and let this time of profound loss influence our purpose.

Rev. Molly Brewer (fae/faer/faers) is the Youth Ministry Coordinator of the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, New York, and lives in Portland, Maine with faer spouse and two cats. Fae has served as ministerial intern of the First Universalist Church of Auburn, Maine and as a group facilitator with the Church of the Larger Fellowship. In addition to being a Unitarian Universalist, Rev. Molly also identifies as a Pagan polytheist, which deeply informs faer approach to worship and congregational life.



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

Need Help With Your Fall Yard Work?

If you need assistance with fall yard work due to age, illness, mobility challenges, disability, responsibilities while caring for someone who is ill, etc., there are some kids in the congregation who might like to volunteer to help. Our Director of Religious Education, Sierra-Marie Gerfao, is compiling a list of people in the congregation who need help with jobs that kids of varying ages can do.

The list will be distributed to children in late October. Please put yourself on the list by filling out [this form](#), or calling Sierra-Marie at 203-815-1115. Note that in order to maintain social distancing, these jobs should involve tasks that kids can do by themselves while you are inside. They should not be jobs that require greater levels of supervision (or heavy amounts of parental assistance, as we want the kids to be able to be successful in this work).

Upcoming In Religious Education (RE):

Parents, please see the monthly calendar emailed to you for details regarding the following.

- **Sunday, October 4th:** Classes and Youth Group
- **Sunday, October 11th:** Kickoff of Weekly Coffee Hour Sharing Circles and a September-October Drive-Through Birthday Celebration
- **Sunday, October 18th:** Community Mural Project
- **Sunday, October 25th:** Raking Leaves and Other Yardwork for Congregants
- **Thursday, October 29th:** Parents of Preschoolers Meeting

Also on a date to be determined, our parent covenant group will meet. And, depending on the plans that cities develop for Halloween, the REMT is considering hosting a socially distanced or drive-through Halloween event on Saturday, October 31st. We will keep you posted.

Don't Forget To Register Children For Religious Education

If you have not yet registered your children for religious education, please do so at your earliest convenience. Click [here](#) to register. Your children are an important part of the community! Even if you are not sure if they will participate during this continued "remote" period, please register them so we can stay in touch and include them if we send home anything, such as birthday cards or books.

From Our Director of Religious Education For Children and Youth:

Dear Congregation,

One question that arose during the September 15th Town Hall meeting about the proposed 8th principle is what the adoption of the principle would mean for how we educate our children, as families and as a community.

In a group I belong to for people who grew up in the Unitarian Universalist tradition, someone recently asked a related question: what had younger members of the group learned during childhood about what came to be called the 1960s Black Empowerment Movement within the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and the white backlash that followed?

Based on the responses, I am guessing that many of you may not be particularly familiar with this history. One resource on the topic is the Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed's book, *Revisiting the Empowerment Controversy*, which is available from the UUA bookstore. There is also a [video](#) about the topic on YouTube.

With the exception of people who had learned about this part of our history from family members who had lived it, the most common response was that group members didn't hear anything about it until adulthood, some after they had gone to seminary to study for Unitarian Universalist ministry. There were people in select areas of the country who experienced racial justice as a fundamental part of their religious education and did remember learning about the movement, but these were the least common responses.

When I was a youth in the 1990s, and when I began my career as a religious educator in the very early 2000s, there were a number of white Unitarian Universalists across the country who worried that we had become "overly focused on racial justice," particularly in religious education programs. These group responses illustrate that white discomfort with attention paid to racial justice issues has little to do with the degree to which we attend to racial justice issues.

I have been sharing with you over the last six months about the various forms of religious education that take place not just in explicit curricula, such as in classrooms, but in implicit curricula, such as in congregational policies and procedures, and null curricula, which is all that we teach by what we don't teach. All these forms of religious education influence the religious development not just of children and youth, but adults too.

Racial justice is so counter-cultural in our society that we must teach it or we miseducate our community through its null curricula. And because it is so counter-cultural, we must go deeper than being a community of good people who gather together and covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person as well as justice and equity in human relations. In fact, Unitarian Universalist congregations too often are unjust places that harm Unitarian Universalists of color and perpetuate societal structures of systemic racism.

There are many great resources available to congregations that want to do this work, including classroom curricula for children and youth. I am glad this is a congregation that is struggling toward a better set of multigenerational congregational curricula, even when the work is imperfect and difficult, and even when repair work is necessary because harm can be experienced in that struggle. I promise to support these efforts in the family ministry I offer and in the religious education I plan for children and youth. As a white religious educator, I also promise to be accountable to Unitarian Universalists who are Black, indigenous, and people of color when I learn I have caused harm in my imperfect efforts.

Warmly,
Sierra-Marie

From the Board of Trustees

by Melody Levy, President

Connecting well with others is part of what makes most of us feel deeply and truly alive. It's part of what gives this community meaning. Last week the Board gathered online for an annual retreat facilitated for the second consecutive year by our UUA regional representative, Evin Carvill Ziemer. While we enjoyed one another, our attention and conversations were guided to areas of focus for this church year.

As a Board we've agreed to develop a plan in order to transition to hybrid (online and in-person) services. Sourcing, installing and operating the equipment to include participation at our physical property and from home is concurrent with imagining our future community. We hope we can be at Fellowship Hall, while also reaching members, friends and all-comers who choose to log in from offsite by July, 2021.

If you have attended services in pre-pandemic times and haven't logged in, let us know. We will put our best foot forward and help with your connectivity or equipment challenges. Please don't wait in the wings for a better day. The change in seasons will be here soon enough – the fields are drying up and the birds are flying south. We need each other now, just as we always will.

Have you ever dreamed of being a millionaire like my Aunt Marge...because she's dreaming too! In other words, we need to get real and be very clear. According to our By-Laws, "a member is obligated to pledge and fulfill their pledge every year." Under *Article III Membership* (last amended in 2010) "members of the Congregation accept the financial and personal stewardship which is inherent to membership" – and "each member provides part of the financial base of this Congregation by determining a personally meaningful monetary pledge and fulfilling that pledge." Why work towards anything less than what we are capable of?

Just like October, the Board will shift patterns and make an effort with members from Stewardship, Religious Education, Membership and Ministry to refresh our understanding, and to commit to the fiscal well-being of this place we love. As we continue to grapple with which events to lend our time, remember to UU the VOTE and to commit to anti-racist work. While Covid-19 is undermining life as usual, it's given us a dose of civic-mindedness and caring for much more than our own. While we aspire to be our better selves, let's keep our footing and dare one another into becoming part of something bigger.

From our Music Director, Jerry Phelps



Let's continue the Friday fun with the upcoming events:
Zoom play reading on October 23rd, directed by Tony DiFabbio
and another installation of **Open Mic: Halloween Edition** on October 30th! Costumes, candy, and spooky music are encouraged.

Contact Jerry at musicdirector@uudanbury.org for more information.

Ministry/Team News

From *Adult Programming*

by Joe Gillotti

Now is Your Chance to Take Action and Share Your Skills and Ideas with other UUCD Members and Friends

We are inviting all UUCD members to get creative in considering new Adult Education Programs for the upcoming year. In the past, members have offered Chalice Circles (discussions on a whole range of topics). We have had open form meetings, day trips, and group meetings on how to learn new skills. Please be willing to come forward and volunteer for a program of your choice. With the advent of the Zoom Technology, it has become so much easier to set-up and deliver virtual adult activities. Volunteers will be provided all the help and support needed to create interesting and informative programs. Please contact **Joe Gillotti**.

From the *Social Action Council*

Racial Justice Discussion Group

by Sam McCoy

As part of UUCD's efforts to explore adoption of the 8th Principle, the Racial Justice Forum is launching a monthly reading and discussion series. **Sam McCoy** will facilitate the group using a curriculum titled *Black Voices of the 20th Century and Beyond*. This series is intended to help participants examine both the history of the United States and contemporary viewpoints on race through the voices of Black Americans. While a participant doesn't necessarily need to attend all seven sessions, some level of continuity in participation would be helpful. Readings and viewings are designed to be completed in advance of a given night's discussion and should take the average person anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes to complete. The group will meet on the first Monday evening of each month and sessions will begin at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom. The first session will take place on Monday, October 5th. To sign up and receive the syllabus, please email Sam by Friday, October 2nd.

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On Saturday, October 3rd, some members of Soup Kitchen Team #4 (Team Leader **Michele Cousens** will be joined by **Rik & Drew Cousens, Joanne Davidson, Michael Stengle, David & Gia Parr, Bruni Edwards, Yvonne Ruddy-Stein & Serena Stein, Leah & Kelsey Hall**) will be returning to the Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen on Spring Street to help serve bagged sandwiches. Unfortunately, we are not yet able to serve the clients 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 St – entrance off Terrace Place). Donations are accepted on Mondays between 11am and 2pm and Fridays between 8:30am and 11:30am. **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!

Upcoming Events



UUCD Men Conversing over Coffee will be meeting via Zoom on Monday, October 12th at 9:30 am. Any UUCD men who would like to join, please contact **Jim Russell**.

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 Tuesday at 4:00 p.m. October dates are the 6th and 20th. 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.



On Thursday, October 8th at 7:00 p.m. we will be discussing Ta-Nehisi Coates book *We Were Eight Years in Power*. This book is a series of essays including the landmark essay "The Case for Reparations". In this New York Times bestseller Coates reflects on race, Barack Obama's presidency and its jarring aftermath. This book also examines the new voices, ideas and movements for justice that emerged over this period. *We Were Eight Years in Power* was the lament of the reconstruction-era black politicians as the experiment in multi-racial democracy ended with the return of white supremacist rule in the South. Award winning author Coates explores the tragic echoes of that history in our time.

On Thursday, November 12th at 7:00 p.m. we will be discussing *The Yellow House* by Susan Broom. This book is also a New York Times bestseller and was winner of the 2019 National Book Award for Nonfiction. Broom tells the story of 100 years of her family and their relationship to New Orleans and to a yellow house. Her mother bought the house in New Orleans East before Broom was born and struggled to maintain it after. The house was destroyed during Hurricane Katrina. The book explores the enduring drive of clan, pride and familial love to resist erasure.

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

