



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

FEBRUARY 2021

From our Consulting Minister



Dear UUCD Members and Friends,

As February begins, there is, once again, so much in our shared world clamoring for our attention. (Who's getting The Vaccine? Who's having trouble getting it? Who's questioning getting it? Is there something we should be doing regarding all of that? What's President Biden doing today? Are we both cautious and prepared enough for the eventual transition back to more in-person life? etc.!)

In light of all that is swirling around and within us, I am particularly grateful that the UUA's Side with Love program has reenergized the Thirty Days of Love offerings this year. (Thirty Days of Love has annually been a time, from roughly Martin Luther King Day through Valentine's Day, to engage more deeply in our justice-and-faith work and the relationship between them.)

As we enter into February, we also enter into Week Three of these Thirty Days of Love, and especially if you haven't already, I encourage you to click on this link and join me in being inspired, energized, educated and nourished by these great resources: <https://sidewithlove.org/week-three-january-31-february-6-2021>.

We all need new ways of thinking and approaching longstanding topics (racial justice, public health, education policy, transformative change), especially as this Pandemic does drag on. Open yourself up to new voices, perspectives, stories and ideas--you might even consider inviting some new perspective into your life as a daily or weekly spiritual practice. A Catholic Chaplain I once worked with in the hospital used to start each day by asking: "What will I learn today?"

If there's something, particularly in these Thirty Days of Love materials, that especially speaks to you, informs or annoys you, I'd love to hear more about that. As always, if there is anything you would like to talk with me about, or that you'd be willing to share with me, I'm always glad 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 this last full month of the Pandemic Winter of 2020-21 be one that you can look back on as a time of growth and restoration.

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 March Comment –
Friday, February 19th.**



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

A Note of Thanks from the Rev. Sierra-Marie Gerfao

Thank you, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury, for ordaining me. Thank you for blessing me in the completion of the stage of ministerial development that is marked primarily by formation so that I can move into a stage of ministerial development that -- while always including continued learning and growth -- will be marked primarily by the unfolding of an active ministry. It is a true gift to receive your blessings, and I am both grateful and humbled by your generosity in offering these blessings.

Upcoming In Children and Youth Religious Education (RE)

- **CLASSES Sunday, February 7th:** Classes and youth group
- **CONNECTIONS Sunday, February 14th:** Launch of “mystery buddy” clue exchange
- **CREATIVITY Sunday, February 21st:** Creating a “tree of loving messages”
- **CARING Sunday, February 28th:** Project TBA, possibly for the Poor People’s Campaign
- **On Dates to Be Announced:**
 - Parents of Preschoolers (POP) Group
 - Parent Covenant Group
 - Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month Class on Healthy Relationships for High Schoolers (through the Women’s Center of Greater Danbury)

From Our Director of Religious Education For Children and Youth

Dear Congregation,

I wrote an initial version of the note below in early January. When it came time to submit the note by the deadline on January 15th, I hesitated. The deadline arrived just before the transition of presidential power and during a time of violent extremists making threats around the country. I wondered if there might be something else you would need when you read my note in February. But at the core, this note is about the value of discerning what kind of spiritual nourishment is needed in our lives and communities, and that is something that is even more important to do in a crisis. So, here it is:

During the pandemic, I have been asking for RSVPs to Religious Education programs and events. I find this helpful in at least a half a dozen ways. It helps me track attendance in a time when not all events are visible to me, for example, and it helps me plan for events (and when needed, get supplies). When numbers are low, I can do outreach to make it more fun for the kids by inviting their friends to join. When numbers are high, I can make decisions about forming two groups or giving extra time to sharing. Especially because more of our offerings now are multi-age, RSVPs help me gear plans toward the ages of children who will be present. The RSVPs have been so successful that there is a part of me that wants to keep collecting them when we get back to in-person.

Families sometimes say that they feel badly when they RSVP for events or programs that they don't end up attending. I want families to know that I *get it!* Pandemic family life can be very "up and down," and I ask for RSVPs on a monthly basis. A lot can change from day to day (certainly our kids' moods can!), let alone month to month. Though accurate RSVPs are incredibly helpful, I never want anyone to feel they are under pressure to get it all exactly right and to show up no matter what, even when something else is calling.

Of course, it is good to have a family routine that "on Sunday we do stuff with our congregation." This is one of the factors that Katie Covey (then Katie Tweedie) found correlated with lifelong religious involvement when she wrote the book *Full Circle: Fifteen Ways to Grow Lifelong UUs*. But many parents have been telling me recently that one of the challenges of the pandemic is that life's deeper needs -- the need for community, to have places to celebrate and grieve milestones, to gather with others in the work for justice, and the need to make meaning -- are more present than ever, but it is much harder to attend to these needs. Just getting through daily pandemic life can feel overwhelming and exhausting.

At the start of this school-year, I created Individualized Family Education Plans (FEPs) with and for each of our families in which there are children and youth of school age. These were created because we knew that there would be deep and varying needs during this school-year. The FEPs assisted us in our planning, and they will continue to assist in our evaluation of programming. All this is in service of one greater core purpose, however: to help us minister to the best of our ability to all the children, youth, and families of our congregation.

Ministry needs are not static. What will nourish our souls is not just a developmental question, but a question of our lived experiences. If those lived experiences feel unpredictable right now, perhaps it is at least partly because we are living in unpredictable times, both in big and small ways. Even basic, foundational structures of life (such as school) for many families have become a new unknown (when will we be in-person?).

We can take the skill of discernment that we used in order to evaluate needs when we created the FEPs and apply this skill all the time as we ask ourselves, "what do our hearts need right now?" Children, youth, and families do not exist for the programs we create for them. It is the other way around. My goal is not to get a certain number of kids in a room, even a Zoom room. My goal is to meet young people and their families with meaningful ministry that nourishes their hearts and spirits and contributes to their meaning-making and growth. We can do that in thousands of different ways. I trust you and your partnership in this ongoing discernment.

Warmly,
Sierra-Marie

From the Board of Trustees

by Melody Levy, President

The last few months have deepened my appreciation of the breadth and depth of the people in this congregation and all that we have to offer each other. The trials behind and before us have strengthened our core and a remarkable resilience has shown through it. Our Staff, Members and Friends continue to step up and provide all the components of an inspirational and welcoming faith home. We are roused to bring our gifts of love and service to this community.

The Annual Pledge Drive will soon begin. Stewardship volunteers will ask us to be generous with giving. Investing in the values and the mission of our congregation is an excellent reason to pledge. Expressing gratitude through giving is another. Our present reality is dramatically different from 2 months or 2 years ago, but our mission remains unchanged. "You often say, I would give, but only to the deserving. The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture. They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish"- (Kahlil Gibran). Research has found the more generous we are, the more happiness, health, and purpose in life we enjoy. Plentiful practices actually cause enhanced personal well-being. I don't know who was behind hanging the picture on the wall in a room I shared with my sister when we were kids. It said, "It is Better to Give Than Receive." I'm telling you, I looked at that framed picture for a good ten years!

The Board of Trustees is managing many tasks and responsibilities involved in maintaining a vibrant community. Yet, to move towards fulfilling our mission, there is much to do. The Black Lives of UU (BLUU) Organizing Collective encourages all Unitarian Universalists to advocate for the formal adoption of an 8th principle, articulating a commitment to the dismantling of white supremacy, within the stated principles of our faith. UU Danbury is encouraged to take this opportunity to declare our commitment to achieve justice and end racism and other oppressions within and beyond our congregations.

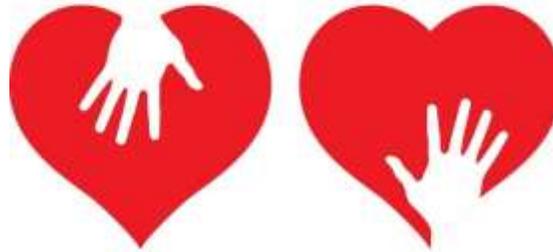
Disasters are disruptive; an example is COVID-19. As we strive to restore a sense of normalcy, we're reminded that when the pandemic comes to an end, our familiar references may be very different. While we can't predict what's coming with certainty, we can develop plans to live into. An exciting aspect of our future will be modeled to blend online and in-person offerings. As a new normal is being created, we will keep you apprised of our progress. For now, let's hope the newest wave of infection is mitigated. As the weeks pile up and boundaries slip (home is the office, school time is work time, pajamas are work clothes), we have a unique ability to come together with empathy and great care, ensuring our resilience. Together, as a community, we'll remain attuned to the facts and committed to the wholehearted work of connecting with love.

Ministry/Team News

From the *Financial Stewardship Team*

by Peter Horton, Stewardship Lead

Loving Hearts and Helping Hands: UUCD 2021 Stewardship Campaign



Welcome to UUCD's 2021 Stewardship Campaign. How will we express our stewardship to UUCD in a time of COVID-19, political and social uncertainty, and economic turmoil...and in a virtual world? Many UU congregations are asking those questions. UUCD seems to be better equipped to answer these uncertain times than others because of our strong and consistent foundation of generosity. So we have chosen "loving hearts and helping hands," straight from our Children's Affirmation, as our point of focus. Our foundation of generosity has been built by many loving hearts and many helping hands.

This year Stewardship Sunday will be April 18th. We'll have a number of activities and communications leading up to that date. Mark your calendars and stay tuned for details.

We could use some help! This year's campaign has been broken up into a number of small components, i.e. communications coordination, creating our pledge packet, leadership pledging, data collection, and the April 18th Stewardship Sunday. Is there a component you can help with? If so, please contact us at pledge@uudanbury.org. These aren't big commitments but they are important. Remember, "helping hands...."

Finally, a thought to ponder about adjusting your pledge commitment. Suppose that every day you collected the loose change you had; it probably comes to about a dollar on most days. If you were to add that loose change to your pledge, it would add up to a very welcome \$365 annual increase. If everyone who pledges at UUCD did the same, we would find ourselves with over \$36,000 in new resources. That eliminates our budget deficit. That is the power of working together and of making best use of even small amounts of "pocket change." Loving hearts and helping hands.

In the spirit of generosity.

Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Valerie Cochrane is the contact person for **February and March**.

Karen Gillotti is the assistant.

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

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

From the *Social Action Council***Beloved Conversations: Virtual**

by Margaret Henderson

Since September I have been taking an online course for UU's who seek to embody racial justice as a spiritual practice, called "Beloved Conversations: Virtual." It has truly changed my worldview, and also provided me unexpected emotional support through this chaotic fall. Thanks to this course I am more flexible and resilient than I was in September. And as my need to be in control has decreased, my ability to listen to and understand others has grown.

Over 1,000 UU's from the US and Canada signed up. The course covers 6 broad lesson topics spread over 4 months. It is led by a team of 4 ministers, who lead about 300 of us at a time in a "meaning-making" worship service about once a month. Each lesson has individual study resources that include poems, musical performances, articles to read and videos to watch. You are encouraged to identify a Critical Friend who knows you well, who can help you decide what changes you want to make as you absorb all this new information.

But my favorite part by far is my Learning Pod. The Learning Pod is a group of 4 or 5 people who meet every couple of weeks to discuss and process the learning we've all been doing. You can sign up with people from your own congregation, or be randomly assigned to a group. My Learning Pod is composed of 5 individuals from different congregations up and down the East Coast. We meet every week and we have literally fallen in love with each other. Getting love and support from individuals who are on the same path as me but outside of my daily connections has been invaluable to my racial equity education.

"Beloved Conversations: Virtual" is being rolled out in 3 phases: this year they're offering *Within* (the individual, inner work), next year *Among* (institutional change for our congregations), and the following year *Beyond*, (reaching out into your community in an intentional, informed way). For *Within* the course is divided into racial caucuses, so that White people and BIPoC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) can study and learn what they each need to separately in safe spaces.

The goal of "Beloved Conversations: Virtual" is to heal the impact of racism on all of our lives, so that we can all get free together. If you're interested in joining, there's another *Within* course that will start from the beginning in mid-March. Feel free to contact me if you have questions, and stay tuned for details about how to register.

As we all work to undo the damage done by racism and white supremacy, I found this course to be an invaluable place to start.

Racial Justice Forum Update

by Chris Halfar

The RJF continues to provide programming to help our UUCD community educate ourselves and evaluate our work toward adopting the proposed 8th Principle. Sam McCoy's outstanding workshop on **Black Voices of the 20th Century** will continue to run on the first Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. (the next meeting is February 1st) and you can still email Sam if you'd like to sign up to receive the readings and join the group. Look for notices of additional workshops and classes in the weekly newsletter and the Sunday Order of Service.

On February 7th, the RJF will lead the Sunday Service.

For a chance to learn about the bold, courageous actions that UU's are taking for intersectional racial justice, we invite you to check out **Thirty Days of Love**, the annual celebration that runs approximately from Martin Luther King, Jr. Day through Valentine's Day. For each week there is a theme with an extensive menu of thoughtfully-chosen do-it-yourself activities for all ages of readings, videos, discussions, music, workshops, and worship.

<https://sidewithlove.org/thirty-days-of-love>.

The United Way of Western CT sponsors occasional **Neighbor Nights** through its DanburyWORKS collaborative which works "to improve equity and the quality of life in our city." A recent Neighbor Night invited participants to join in "dialogue about advancing our commitments to dismantling racism in 2021." A number of UUCD members have participated and report that it is a valuable opportunity to engage with a broad cross-section of greater Danbury-area residents as well as local officials. For information on registering for the next Neighbor Night (date TBD) email sandra.ferreira@uwwesternct.org or you may contact **Chris Halfar**.

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On Saturday, February 6th, some members of Soup Kitchen Team #4 (Team Leader **Michele Cousens, Joanne Davidson, Michael Stengle, David & Gia Parr, Bruni Edwards, Yvonne Ruddy-Stein & Serena Stein, Rik Cousens, and the Bonansinga/Twombly Family**) will be returning to the Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen on Spring Street to help serve take-out meals that were cooked in volunteers' homes as well as bagged sandwiches, also prepared in volunteers' homes as well as through donations. 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 donation to the Daily Bread Food Pantry (25 West Street - entrance off Terrace Place). Donations are accepted on Mondays between 11 am and 2 pm and on Fridays between 8:30 am and 11:30 am. Lynn Taborsak has also been scheduling the sandwich donations so we have just the right amount each day at Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen. If you are interested in making sandwiches, please email her at ddhsandwiches@gmail.com. We can all be an important part of the fight to end hunger in our community!



Join a continent of UUs as we explore next steps in creating Beloved UU Communities!

On Your Own:

Watch compelling video TED-talk style testimonials from selected congregations around the continent sharing their learnings, hopes and next steps in their quest for racial equity in their congregations.

Together on February 27, 2021

- Worship ~ Workshops ~ Caucusing
- *With plenty of breaks*
- 9a-6p PT/10a-7p MT/11a-8p CT/12n-9p ET

Register Now: <https://uua.wufoo.com/forms/mf5qtv1163h30/>

Do note that youth need to have permission forms signed before they can attend.

Cost will be a sliding scale fee of your choosing: \$20/30/40/50. Registration fees are on a sliding scale, based on your assessment of your ability to pay. Those who pay at the two highest levels are making a donation to help those in financial need for this event. Please remember that for a sliding scale to work, we need the same number of people with means to generously pay more to balance the needs of those who can afford less. (This is one way we try to build the Beloved Community!) *If you are part of a congregational team of three or more, please pay the lowest fee.*

Brought to you by the Unitarian Universalist Association.

From the *Sunday Services Ministry Team*

by Nancy Hershatter

On behalf of the Sunday Services Ministry Team, I am asking you to take a few moments to reflect upon the many diverse and stimulating services we have had in our Zoom room since September. Which presenters moved you? Which did you especially enjoy? Whom would you like to see return (or not) and why?

As we plan for 2021, we know that the first few months at least will continue to be online, which enables us to invite guest presenters from all over the country, and even outside the continental US. Later in the year, whenever we are able to return to in-person services, there is a very good chance that at least some of our services will continue to be available to those who cannot physically be with us on Clapboard Ridge.

So, we would like to hear from as many of you as we can about how you feel this online experience has felt to you and what/whom you would like to see/hear from, going forward. Please email me by February 15th with your comments. I will compile them and share them with the rest of the Sunday Services Committee.

Upcoming Events



UUCD Men Conversing over Coffee will meet via Zoom on Monday, February 8th at 9:30 a.m. 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. February dates are the 9th and 23rd. 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, February 18th, the **Book Conversations group** will be meeting at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom, to discuss former President Obama's new book A Promised Land. To be more exact, we'll be covering the first 400 pages of this 800 page behemoth. Cheryl Edelen will be the moderator. It is not required that you have read the book for you to attend. For more information and the Zoom link, please contact **Mary Ann Kulla**.



FEBRUARY