



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

MARCH 2021

From our Consulting Minister



Dear UUCD Members and Friends,

As I write this, it's snowing. And there's more snow in the forecast. Honestly, having lived in Connecticut for seven winters now, I must say that I really like and appreciate the snow--a cold, gray winter with no snow is just no fun at all!

Simultaneously, this Pandemic, and this long winter in particular, have underscored for me the importance of regular, scheduled commitments (commitments that can thankfully continue even during snowstorms): daily routines of getting the children off to school (in-person or online), fed, and to bed in the evenings, weekly conversations and check-ins that help me be grounded and present to the congregations I serve; Sunday services that hold sacred time for connection, reflection, and renewal; monthly meetings that help me stay connected with so many aspects of congregational and collegial life; seasonal rituals that help ground me in the natural rhythms of our shared world that transcend even this global pandemic.

I want to take this opportunity this transitional month, from winter to spring, to say thank you, UUCDr's!, and to share how much I appreciate working with and knowing you all. I continue to be so impressed by the vitality and positive energy of this congregation. At this time of our July-through-June congregational year, there is always some annual transition and some need to identify fresh leadership. I hope you'll think about if there are ways *you* can step up in your engagement with the congregation, or if it might be time for you to step back, take a little respite, and encourage someone else. Who have you enjoyed getting to know who you might encourage to think of themselves as more of a UUCD leader?

There can be a tendency sometimes for individuals to think "everyone else is more involved than I am"--but I have noticed that that is rarely, actually, the case. We are all, for the most part, juggling multiple responsibilities and commitments--is there a way that you can include a little more engagement with UUCD in your life in a way that is meaningful for you and supportive of the congregation?

In the weeks and months ahead, we'll be discussing moving forward and planning for 2021-22. What are *your* hopes and dreams for UUCD in the year ahead? What can you not just wish for, but help to make happen?

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 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.

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 April Comment –
Friday, March 19th.

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.

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

Sunday, March 7th

Side with Love Sunday

Together with our UUCD service leaders, we will soak in the wisdom, insights and music put together by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA)'s Side with Love campaign. In 2021, the annual [30 Days of Love](#) celebration centers 4 themes from [Widening the Circle of Concern](#), a report from the Commission on Institutional Change, a UUA Board-commissioned group charged with researching, reporting, and making recommendations for transforming white supremacy and other oppressions in the institutional history and practices of the UUA and its 1,000+ congregations and covenanted communities. This **Side With Love Sunday** worship service lifts up those themes: Living our values, Hospitality & inclusion, Educating for Liberation, and Restoration and Reparations. What if to "side with love" meant making bold, faith-full choices? What if it were even a little bit scary? This worship service brings together worship leaders and musicians from across the country to offer hopeful, moving, challenging reminders about what we, as Unitarian Universalists, are called to do, and BE, in the world.

Sunday, March 14th

The Neshoma Project: Illuminating Memory

Leora Tec and Suze Shaner

Ninety percent of Poland's 3.3 million Jews were murdered during World War II. Over the last two years, Leora Tec has travelled all over Poland having conversations with non-Jews who, in different ways, are remembering the Jews who used to be their neighbors. Those interviewed, working to heal historical wounds, come from many different fields including: scholarship, teaching, guiding, grassroots activities, museum work and the arts. This work gives us hope for humanity.

Some of you met Leora Tec, Director of Bridge to Poland, last summer when she led a sermon introducing a few of these people to us before [The Neshoma Project](#) launched. Join Leora, in conversation with our own Suze Shaner, as she explains the background of the project and introduces us to more of the amazing people in Poland whom she calls, *Rescuers of Memory*.

Sunday, March 21st

Music Sunday

Jerry Phelps

Music and nature are inextricably intertwined. Join us for this year's music service as we focus on rebirth and the long-anticipated beauty and joy of spring, light, and warmth through music and spoken word by the gifted musicians and artists of UUCD.

Sunday, March 28th

For All That Is...

Rev. Heather Rion Starr

On this Sunday we will be coming to the end of a month of remembering "a year ago this day" in so many aspects of our lives and our country. As we continue to ground ourselves in gratitude for all that we have endured together, let us also reflect on what we have learned during all the Seasons of this Pandemic and the importance of every one of us and our parts in this collective endeavor.



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

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

After sharing the total of my ordination offering in the “This Week” email, a couple more donations came in. We gathered “our collective economic power to build the world we dream about” (Rev. Soto) and together with all who attended the ordination service gave \$1793.01 to Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism. If you missed the offering but would still like to contribute to Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism, you can make a donation at blacklivesuu.org.

With love and gratitude,
Rev. Sierra-Marie

Upcoming In Children and Youth Religious Education (RE)

- **CLASSES Sunday, March 7th:** Classes and youth group
- **Friday, March 12th:** Youth Movie Night - Netflix Party
- **CONNECTIONS Sunday, March 14th:** “Mystery Buddy” reveal and closing celebration
- **Thursday, March 18th:** Family meeting
- **CREATIVITY Sunday, March 21st:** Community art or construction project; Family meeting
- **CARING Sunday, March 28th:** Making care packages for college students and young adults
- **On Dates to Be Announced:**
 - Parents of Preschoolers (POP) Group
 - Parent Covenant Group

Family Meetings

Our Director of Religious Education, Sierra-Marie, and the Religious Education Ministry Team (REMT) invite **all parents of children and youth** to either of the two **family meetings** scheduled in March on Zoom. Zoom links will be sent to families the day of the meetings. Children and youth who wish to participate in the meetings are also welcome. The meeting agendas are identical for each of the two meetings, so come to whichever works for your schedule: either **Thursday, March 18th at 7:00PM** or **Sunday, March 21st at 4:00PM**. We’ll be discussing the 2021-2022 Religious Education year. RSVP by emailing Sierra-Marie at dre@uudanbury.org.

From Our Director of Religious Education For Children and Youth

Dear Congregation,

I remember the day that the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury Board shared the decision to “go remote” due to the pandemic. It was Thursday, March 12th. I remember it well because I was in my second week working with you just ten hours per week, preparing to come on more fully in the summer as your half-time Director of Religious Education for Children and Youth. It was also just my second in-office day, and after the Board finished meeting, I worked late to gather materials I might need to bring home with me and to prepare a video message to send out to the youth of the congregation.

I left the building in the dark near midnight, my mind turning the situation over in my head as I drove back to New Haven. Having a background in public health (the subject of my Bachelor of Science degree), I feared we were in for a long period of being “remote,” much longer than we could imagine at that point. I did not have much hope that we would only need to stay at home for a few weeks to flatten the curve, though I kept my fingers crossed and made an effort not to close out any possibilities in my mind so that I could remain flexible and ready for any event. I remember thinking a lot about how I could best support you, and especially your young people, while I was still working just ten hours weekly and had not yet met many of you in person.

What a year it has been! We have lived the year we could not really imagine last March. Though the anniversary of my first day working with the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury feels joyful, it is accompanied by all the other feelings of our pandemic anniversary. Beloveds, we have really been through a lot, and we are probably going to have some feelings about it this month. It is possible that some of these feelings will not seem attached to anything in particular, but that doesn’t mean that our sadness, irritation, dread, low frustration tolerance, bodily discomforts, or other signs of grief and trauma are not indeed grief or trauma. Even babies and toddlers who have experienced grief or trauma can carry it in their bodies before it is attached to cognitive awareness.

This pandemic anniversary is a difficult one. This is especially the case as we look toward another spring and early summer in pandemic mode (again, for example, our high school seniors will miss out on a traditional graduation ceremony). This is especially the case for those who have experienced deaths of loved ones due to Covid, or who could not visit ill, injured, or dying loved ones in the hospital this year due to Covid. And this is especially the case for those anxiously awaiting vaccines that haven’t yet been made available to them. The grief is real. Your grief is real. Our grief is real. Let’s practice some extra care and some extra gentleness in our relationships right now.

Warmly,
Sierra-Marie

From the Board of Trustees

by Melody Levy, President

As you know, UU Danbury relies on the generosity of many extraordinary people, from our dedicated volunteers and staff to our members and friends. More than ever, now is the time when creativity and collaboration must not subside. We are re-culturing our conversations (for example, about handshakes and hugs) and making an effort to behave so as to contain, not transmit, COVID-19. We're developing new habits to adapt and thrive, and as the world shifts around us, we will move forward. "It is not enough to weep for our lost landscapes; we have to put our hands in the earth to make ourselves whole again" - Robin Wall Kimmerer. Though this year has been bizarre and dislocating, it hasn't been without unexpected pleasures. I've been reminded that enforced stillness, sometimes called boredom, turns creativity on.

In light of continuing developments, the most prominent being the vaccine roll-out, our attention is incrementally turning toward a hybrid future when people will choose to be in community both on and off-site. Two COVID-19 Reintegration Task Forces have formed; one for Hygiene and one for Technology. Much will depend on the vaccine efficacy data, but debates and conversations are already underway about lifting restrictions. Our current intention is to equip all of the buildings with state of the art technology in order to provide hybrid Sunday Services, Religious Education Programs and Committee Meetings. Both task forces will be similarly at work to prepare for a soft reentry, no sooner than this summer. It was Heller Keller who said, "The world is moved along not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but by the aggregate of tiny pushes by each honest worker." We can feel dismayed by the scale of change we're contemplating, but by thinking in terms of small steps and gradual alterations, we will get there. Our attention will be geared to CDC and UUA guidelines and recommendations, as well as local, county and state health departments. This pandemic stresses our inherent and interconnected fragility and dependence on Nature and one another. This is a time of pause and rewrite, of shifting values and resetting what is most precious in our lives.

Our mission isn't a mission because it's grand, but because it is precise. It centers around what others need; and the intrinsic worth of authentic and purposeful action. It is a target that requires focus. As financial fiduciaries, the Board of Trustees and the Finance and Stewardship Team extend their purview not only to the oversight of budgeting, tracking, and allocating funds; but also to gathering financial resources. The Stewardship Team is fully formed and ready to lead our Annual Pledge Campaign. Please take some time to review your contributions. I encourage you to honestly evaluate your part in moving us forward. Everyone's donation has a stake in our history. We do, indeed, all make a difference.

Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Valerie Cochrane is the contact person for **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.

A Statement from the Board of Trustees Regarding the Work Toward the 8th Principle

by Sam McCoy, Vice-President

It was disturbing for all of us connected with UUCD to learn that the Black Lives Matter banner displayed roadside on our property had been stolen on the 24th of January. While we were relieved to discover its surprise return a day or two later, the entire incident was a reminder that stating the affirmation that Black lives do indeed matter is not always easily or warmly received by the wider community. It is also a reminder of why our congregation is doing the necessary internal work this year to consider formal adoption of the proposed 8th Principle of Unitarian Universalism: *“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.”*

The Board of Trustees believes it is important that each of you knows that the current Board members unanimously support adoption of the 8th Principle. More than 30 UU congregations across the United States have given their individual approval to the 8th Principle thus far - four of them within the past month - and the movement to have more congregations continue to voice their support is an important step toward having the UUA as a whole take up the issue formally in the future. The Racial Justice Forum will continue to offer a variety of workshops and discussion-based learning this spring to help each of us educate ourselves on the need for examining racism and other oppressions in our wider community, as well as within Unitarian Universalism. The current plan is to hold a vote on adopting the 8th Principle at this year’s Annual Meeting and the hope is that the action will pass upon the approval of at least 75% of the voters participating in the meeting.

The Board and the Racial Justice Forum encourage anyone with questions or suggestions to reach out to members of the RJF, specifically its chairperson, **Marian DiFabbio**, or **Sam McCoy**, the Board Liaison to the RJF.

Ministry/Team News

From *Adult Programming*

by Joe Gillotti

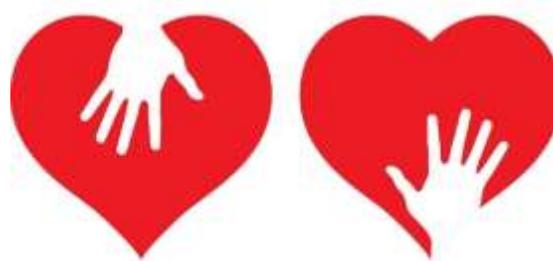
Now is Your Chance to Take Action and Share Your Skills and Ideas with other UUCD Members and Friends

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 *Financial Stewardship Team*

by Peter Horton, Stewardship Lead

Loving Hearts and Helping Hands: UUCD 2021 Stewardship Campaign



In the 1930’s when Martin Luther King, Sr. assumed the leadership of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, he felt it was no longer appropriate to keep secret what his congregants gave to the church. He opened the pledge records of the church for anyone to see. Rev. King’s position on secrecy reversed a long standing tradition of only a few knowing what families pledged and which ones didn’t. It was a radical move.

This year the Stewardship Team has decided pull the veil back on secrecy, without naming names, and share with you where everyone’s pledge fits into our overall giving. The table below summarizes the last two years of pledges into numerical groupings. You will be able to see how your pledge reflects against our overall pledge amount.

	Pledge year 20/21	Pledge year 19/20
Total amount pledged	\$164,300	\$173,363
Pledging households	90	92
Pledge amounts	Number of Pledges	
\$10,000+	0	0
\$7,000 - \$9,999	1	1
\$5,000 - \$6,999	3	6
\$3,500 - \$4,999	9	6
\$2,500 - \$3,499	11	12
\$2,000 - \$2,499	9	7
\$1,300 - \$1,999	16	20
\$1,000 - \$1,299	13	11
\$500 - \$999	17	13
Less than \$500	11	16
Non-pledging households	12	15

As Unitarian Universalists we have often struggled with the question of “how much should I pledge?” For newcomers without a tradition of religious pledging or tithing it can be bewildering. For congregants who change to a retirement lifestyle and retirement income, the question may be, “do I keep my pledge the same?” For others, as they become increasingly invested in UUCD, their gratitude increases as does their generosity. They may ask, “I want to make a stretch pledge but I’m not sure how much that should be.”

There is quite a bit of analysis that one could undertake with the data above. And year-to-year pledges show the challenges that we face. As we approach our Annual Pledge Drive please consider what your current pledge is and how much more it could be. In these challenging times the world could not possibly need our UU mission more – our community needs UUCD now more than ever.

From the *Membership Team*

by Bruni Edwards, Chair



Pathway to Membership Classes

Thursday, March 18th and Thursday, March 25th, 6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. via Zoom

In this 2-session workshop, you will...

- Learn about Unitarian Universalism
- Discover what UU Danbury can offer you
- Receive information about how to become a member

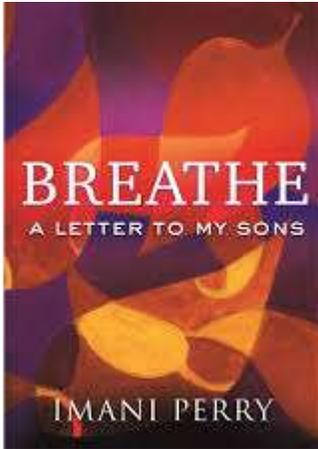
Please contact **Bruni Edwards** if you are interested in attending this workshop.
Rev. Heather will be with us for both classes.

From the *Social Action Council*

The Racial Justice Corner ~Save the Date~

by Marian DiFabbio

Please join us on April 12th at 7:00 p.m. for a discussion of this year's UUA Common Read
Breathe: A Letter to My Sons, by Imani Perry.



The 2020-21 UUA Common Read is *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* by Imani Perry. *Breathe* reflects on race, racism, and the hope that one's child will be wholly known and valued by society. It is "an unforgettable lesson in Black resistance and resilience." The *New York Times* calls *Breathe* "an elixir of history, ancestry and compassion, which, together, become instruction... a parent's unflinching demand, born of inherited trauma and love, for her children's right simply to be possible."

To order the book, go to [InSpirit: UU Book and Gift Shop](#).

Please contact **Marian DiFabbio** for more information and the Zoom link.

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On Saturday, March 6th, some members of Soup Kitchen Team #4 (Team Leaders **Judy Lacker and John Miglietta, Rose Schlemmer, Inge Hill, Brian Teagarden, Jane Leff, Sally Mandler and Gary Wynn**) 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 and through donations. Unfortunately, we are not yet able to serve the guests 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 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 ddhhsandwiches@gmail.com. We can all be an important part of the fight to end hunger in our community!

Legislative Advocacy 2021

by Chris Halfar

The Connecticut General Assembly is in session for 2021. Once again, we at UUCD can examine the bills being proposed and lend our support to those which align with our principles of justice, equity, compassion, and the interdependent web of existence. Our legislators are eager to hear from us by phone calls or email.

As I have done for the past few years, I will be providing updates in the Thursday “This Week at UU Danbury” email on the status of proposed bills in the legislative process, links to further information such as full text of the bills, as well as our legislators’ contact information.

Some of the proposals already in motion include: compassionate choice aid-in-dying; fair work week scheduling; expansion of affordable housing; expanded access to health care, including a public option; easing post-prison barriers to housing and employment; legalizing adult marijuana use; and steps toward constitutional amendments allowing early voting and expanded mail-in voting.

Please let me know if there are other issues you wish us to follow.



The **Joint Committee on Public Health** introduced [H.B. 6425](#), **An Act Concerning Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients**. This legislation authorizes medical aid in dying for terminally ill adults.

If this bill passes, mentally sound, terminally ill adults will be allowed to consult with their physician to receive medical aid in dying. To make this happen, however, we need your help.

Similar legislation has been introduced in the Connecticut General Assembly almost every year since 2013, but has not advanced to a vote. [Can you email your lawmakers today and ask them to co-sponsor the bill?](#)

The next step for this bill is a public hearing, and with additional cosponsors and support from constituents like yourself, we believe that this can be the year where Connecticut residents will have access to this compassionate end-of-life option. Nine states plus the District of Columbia allow for individuals to chart their end-of-life journeys according to their personal values.

[Please, take a few moments today to advocate for end-of-life autonomy by emailing your lawmakers.](#) Our terminally ill neighbors need this option today.

Thank you,

Tim Appleton
Connecticut Campaign Director, Compassion & Choices

Upcoming Events



UUCD Men **Conversing over Coffee** will meet via Zoom on Monday, March 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. March 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.

