



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

APRIL 2021

From our Consulting Minister



Dear UUCD Members and Friends,

Spring is springing--it *is*! And we are emerging from probably one of the strangest--and for many, loneliest--winters most of us can remember. It is a little like emerging from a cave, a dark room, or even just the eye doctor's office, into the brightness of day. The glare of the whole wide open world can be simultaneously stunning and overwhelming. And even once we start to adjust to the expanse opening up before us, what precisely we are facing next is still unclear.

On a very practical, day-to-day basis, we are having a whole variety of experiences of this emergence. Some among you have been to the movies (in an actual movie theater!), to the dentist, or gotten your hair cut for the first time in year or more. Some have felt ready to go out-to-eat with a few friends again. Some are planning or already taking some long-postponed trips. I think it's safe to say that none of us are 100% comfortable with everything we are doing--or not doing--but we are tip-toeing or skipping, and sometimes both in combination, into more fully living our lives.

At some point recently I read an article in which an epidemiologist remarked: "There have always been diseases among us, and there always will be. We can't eliminate all disease. We have to go about our lives." In Unitarian Universalism, we list among our sources of wisdom "the guidance of reason and the results of science." We also cite "an openness to the forces which create and uphold life." My wishes for all of us, for all of you, are two-fold: that we can gently affirm the wide range of choices we will each be making, sometimes a difference of choices and comfort levels even within one household on just one day, *and* that we can move forward into the coming weeks and months attentive to those activities that most nourish our lives and spirits. If you're going to do something that's perhaps a little more risky than you have done in months, well: do it with joy. Savor it. Shine on in your love for one another. Beam your gratitude and delight in-person upon your beloveds. We have gotten through such a bizarre and complicated year. Make sure you are still-and-always nourishing your spirit and heart *as well as* protecting your and your loved one's bodies.

As many of you have heard me say repeatedly, there are and need to be Many Right Ways. Many Right Ways to feel. Many Right Ways to connect to this beloved community. And Many Right Ways to tiptoe out of a pandemic. May it always be so.

If there is ever anything you would like to talk with me about, 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.

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 May Comment –
Friday, April 16th.**

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.

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

Sunday, April 4th Change Thrusts Us Forward Rev. Heather Rion Starr & Sierra-Marie Gerfao
There are so many situations in each of our lives when things don't exactly go the way we think we'd like...and then it turns out okay in the end--occasionally, things turn out even better than we could have planned. Not always, but sometimes. On this Easter Sunday, we will celebrate together the ways that we are each-and-all sometimes forced, kicking-and-screaming, into transformation.

Sunday, April 11th Joy and Beauty in Times Like These Em Kianka
Between pandemic exhaustion, personal and collective grief, and the ebbs and flows of routine life, many of us may find ourselves running on empty. During uncertain and challenging times, how do we stay connected with joy and beauty? How can we as a spiritual community continue to call upon our inner and communal resilience? Let us explore ways to use joy and beauty to sustain ourselves, resist injustice, and nourish our community.

Em Kianka graduated with her Master of Divinity from Starr King School for the Ministry in 2018 and is a Candidate for Ministry. She currently works at the organization Common Justice, where she supports survivors of community violence through their healing and the restorative justice process. In her free time, she loves running, baking, exploring nature, and reads Tarot professionally. Em grew up on Long Island and now lives in Washington Heights, NYC with her wife. You can follow her Tarot ministry Hallowed Dark on Instagram (@emkianka) or at www.emkianka.com.

Sunday, April 18th Stewardship Sunday Rev. Heather Rion Starr, Peter Horton, and others!
This community would and could not exist were it not for your support – specifically, your financial support. Today we celebrate all that we each do, bit-by-bit, day-by-day, to create this lively congregation that truly is a crew of "*people with open minds, loving hearts, and helping hands....*" Join us in celebrating, scheming, and committing to support this congregation for the congregational year ahead, and beyond.

Sunday, April 25th REThinking, for 2021-22 and beyond DRE Sierra-Marie Gerfao & the RE Ministry Team
If you have found yourself re-evaluating your priorities and life during the pandemic, you are not alone. Many people have been taking stock and even making big changes during this time, both out of necessity and desire. As we look forward to a slow return to in-person congregational life, let's consider what we've learned from the pandemic and begin to take stock of what it means to be a community, including what it means to be an intergenerational learning community.



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

Upcoming In Children and Youth Religious Education (RE)

Our scheduled monthly spiritual theme is: *becoming*. Because of the holiday on the first Sunday of the month, we will not be having classes. For this reason, please see your at-home packets to consider ways to explore the theme as a family.

- **Saturday, April 3rd:** Egg Hunt! (Teens are invited to help with the hiding if they don't wish to search for eggs, but both kids and teens are welcome to search)
- **CONNECTIONS Sunday, April 11th:** UUCD Spring Cleanup and In-Person, Socially-Distanced, Outdoor Games
- **CREATIVITY Sunday, April 18th:** Making Bird Houses; Bridging Preparation for High School Seniors (Session 1/4)
- **CARING Sunday, April 25th:** "RE-Thinking" Service; Partnership Project With a Community Organization TBA; Bridging Preparation for High School Seniors (Session 2/4)
- **On Dates to Be Announced:**
 - Parents of Preschoolers (POP) Group
 - Parent Covenant Group

Family Surveys

Families with children and youth, please watch your email inbox in April for **a survey about the upcoming year in Religious Education**. Your prompt response is requested. The surveys are a follow-up to the Family Meetings in March, and will help our Director of Religious Education and the Religious Education Ministry Team (REMT) plan our 2021-2022 programs for children and youth. If you were unable to attend one of the two Family Meetings in March, you may also receive an email about finding an alternative time to meet in April.

From Our Director of Religious Education For Children and Youth

Dear Congregation,

In a 1951 essay titled "The Method is the Message," Universalist minister Angus MacLean writes: "I place method in the heart of our curriculum because methods determine so largely the human relations that prevail in our work with children . . . I place method at the heart of our work because the methods of address to life and people are at the heart of our liberal faith."

I have always felt an admiration for congregations that have taken time to discern in practical terms what they are trying to accomplish with their religious education ministries. It makes me smile to read goal statements such as “we will promote awareness and engagement of issues of social responsibility,” or even more specifically, objectives such as “by high school, each participant will be able to name one social issue that is important to them and one action they have taken on the same issue.”

Not all kids learn in exactly the same ways or thrive under precisely the same conditions, however. In almost two decades as a religious educator, I have observed that families and children who don’t fit the congregational model of religious education don’t arrive at evaluation points. When we go to measure whether what we did met our desired outcomes, these families and children aren’t around to provide us feedback. These families and children eventually stop coming or the children eventually “check out.”

This outcome gives congregations an inflated sense of the efficacy of traditional models of religious education. I love when teens get to the Coming of Age or Bridging stages of life and we hear directly from them about the difference the congregation has made in their lives. As a religious educator, it is thrilling! But over the years, I have become more curious about the kids who never do make Coming of Age or Bridging statements to the congregation when it is their turn, not just because they opt out of these particular events, but because after not having found a place in community, they opt out of participation in the congregation more broadly.

Like Angus MacLean, I think methodology matters. I am interested in methodologies that transmit our values, just as we attempt to do so with our instructional content. We cannot recognize the inherent worth and dignity of the participants in our community if they must fit a singular model of participation in order to find a place for themselves in the community. Are there ways we can be together as people who “seek and speak the truth in love” that make room for the diversity of learning and participation styles that exist not just among adults, but children and teens as well?

This is one among a number of questions the Religious Education Ministry Team and I have been asking as we begin to look toward the future of religious education when we can offer more in-person ministries again. I am excited to explore these questions with you and plan for the 2021-2022 Religious Education year. I hope as this conversation unfolds and is shared with the broader congregation, that many of you will begin to recognize your own place in ensuring that we are able to welcome the participation of a diverse group of children and youth.

In 2020-2021 we intentionally designed our religious education offerings to require only minimal volunteerism so that people could be stretched a little less thin during these difficult times (and long-time volunteers might have a much needed break). In the coming year, though, we will need the whole community to come together to help us live into a future that will be informed in new ways by the pandemic experience. May this opportunity to consider methodology be a fruitful one, and may it energize and excite us all!

Warmly,
Sierra-Marie

From the Board of Trustees

by Melody Levy, President

Certain memories insist on having a stake in our history. This March marked one; one year from the start of a pandemic that we will collectively recount far into our future. As vaccine availability ramps up for some, it still is an indefinite number of months away for others. We acknowledge these milestones with gratitude, and with hope for the continued resilience of our congregation, and the communities in which we reside.

- What opportunities and newly realized tools do we have to **enliven the new normal** that lies ahead?
- How will we balance the needs and hopes of those who feel safe with those who don't?
- Will our deeply held values be in sync with the decisions we make?
- What support does our staff need to be healthy and effective?
- How have our priorities changed in the past twelve months?

The risks of transmission of COVID-19 are lower in outdoor settings. The Board together with the Hygiene Task Force established guidelines to keep our most vulnerable members and friends safer from the possibility of viral transmission. With longer days and warmer temperatures, our *onsite outdoor areas are available* for meetings, classes and getting together. Here is our guidance thus far:

- Reservations for all outdoor use must be made with Sherry at officemanager@uudanbury.org.
 - A waiver will be emailed to the person making the reservation.
 - Please forward it to all the participants who will be in the meeting and collect the signed forms once you are onsite. Everyone who meets outdoors is required to sign a waiver.
- This includes parents on behalf of children.
- Signed forms can be placed in the container outside of Fellowship Hall.
- Whomever makes a reservation will be responsible for reminding everyone in the meeting of proper mask wearing and social distancing.
- Food, Drink, and Trash: for now, everyone is being asked to pack in their own food and pack out their own trash. Please do not share food or drink outside a household unit.
- We will refrain from communal singing until more favorable guidance is published by the CDC, State of CT, UUA or other reputable agency.
- There are tables and chairs on the deck outside the cottage conference room. Please clean them after use and recover them. A tarp and cleaning solution will be available.

We look forward to in-person joys for which there is no adequate substitute.

Springtime has arrived, the time of year when we ask ourselves how much this congregation means to us personally, and to the larger community. How much are we able and willing to support it financially? I can't answer that for you, but I can tell you this congregation means a great deal to me. Please pledge what you can – please help to keep our light burning against and in answer to the prevailing storms all about.

Ministry/Team News

From the *Caring Circle Ministry Team*

Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Inge Hill is the contact person for **April and May**.

Joan Campbell is the assistant.

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

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*

by Margaret Henderson

Unlike last year, **the Connecticut General Assembly** is actually in session this spring! They have about 6 weeks to go, and they're considering quite a few **Bills** that support UU principles. Things change quickly, so see the link to the latest info in "This Week at UU Danbury" every Thursday. You can find contact info for your legislators [here](#). Many thanks to **Chris Halfar** for doing this work! If you might be able to help with this now or in the future, please contact Margaret or Chris. We'll teach you everything you need to know, we promise!

SAC is working with several groups to promote the needs of **domestic workers**. These workers - mostly women, mostly immigrants -- clean houses or provide in-home care to families. Many of them lost their jobs or had their hours severely cut when Covid hit. As a group they suffer from many compound inequities.

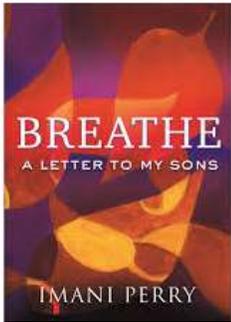
We have also been working with **Recovery for All CT**, a large coalition working to eliminate inequities in the state. From making our tax system fairer to strengthening the social services that working class people rely on, they're accomplishing great things! You can find them on Facebook or Twitter.

Anti-Racism: Besides Marian's upcoming discussion of *Breathe*, the Racial Justice Forum has a list of anti-racism resources [here](#) that is updated every few days. Check it out! And please send any suggestions for new events or resources to Margaret Henderson.

Come help us do some good work! Join the SAC, or contact **Margaret Henderson** if you want to volunteer for a single, time-limited activity.

The Racial Justice Corner

by Marian DiFabbio



Please join us on Monday, April 12th at 7:00 p.m. to discuss this year's UUA Common Read, *BREATHE*, by Imani Perry. You can access the discussion questions at the link below. Please email **Marian DiFabbio** for the Zoom link.

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/609122/breathe-by-imani-perry/9780807076552/readers-guide/?sp=email&share=none&sp=email&share=none&sp=email&share=none>

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On Saturday, April 3rd, some members of Soup Kitchen Team #2 (Team Leader **Carl Tramontana** will be assisted by **Rose Schlemmer, Chris Halfar, Darlene Anderson-Alexander, Suze Shaner, Nicole & Sean Paris, Deborah Casey and Lisa Deldin**) 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 for lunches and breakfasts, (to be delivered to the Super 8 homeless shelter), also prepared in volunteers' homes as well as 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 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 meet via Zoom on Monday, April 12th at 9:30 a.m. Any UUCD men who would like to join, please contact **Joe Gillotti or Gary Mummert**.

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. April dates are the 13th and 27th. 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, April 15th, the **Book Conversations group** will be meeting at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom, to discuss **Entangled Life** by Merlin Sheldrake. This book is about Fungi, as the cover says: "How Fungi make our world, change our minds and share our futures." Michael Stengle will be moderator as we learn about this almost unknown partner in the interdependent web of existence. 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**.

Future reads are **The Code Breaker**: Jennifer Doudna, Gene Editing and the Future of the Human Race, by Walter Isaacson. **Caste**, **How the South Won the Civil War**, and **How to Avoid A Climate Disaster** by Bill Gates are queued for future months though not necessarily in this order.

