



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

MAY 2021

From our Consulting Minister



Dear UUCD Members and Friends,

Have you ever served on a jury? Many, if not most, of you probably have. I have just once been not only summoned, but then selected, to serve on a jury. It was for a fairly minor traffic accident and the question before us involved sorting out responsibility for medical bills one person involved in the accident had incurred in the year since the accident. Including the jury selection process itself, I think our whole experience lasted just 3-4 days at the most, with ample time for lunch each day from the food trucks outside the courthouse.

It was a fascinating experience for me because I got to observe and experience, multiple times along the way, the moments at which the process seemed to veer mightily from what I would call "focusing on achieving justice" as its highest goal. I observed what seemed like racial profiling during the jury selection process. And once we, the jury, were down to the nitty-gritty decision-making of the charges filed and the laws on the books that we were supposed to either match up precisely or find inconclusive, it felt more like a really complicated version of a 1st-grader's Matching Activity: "match each column in item A to the corresponding action in column B" -- and if they don't match, then there's no "guilty" verdict. In other words, my experience on this jury of trying to sort out responsibility felt very constrained by the perimeters presented to us of to whom responsibility could legally be assigned. It wasn't a fun experience, trying to do this work of interpretation with a room full of strangers, and I did feel at times that we were each somewhat warily eye-ing and judging each other's backgrounds and possible personal "agendas." The judge remarked on our lengthy deliberation process --given the fairly minor details of the case-- in a way that felt somewhat patronizing to me, and everyone moved on, back into our lives-- though one other woman and I did have a short, profound exchange in the parking lot about her spouse's recent death from skin cancer (because I was clearly somewhat obsessive about wearing my sunhat, even just from the courthouse to the adjacent parking lot).

Being human in this country right now can feel like a smattering of such short, contextual experiences, but it is from these snapshot moments in our lives that we sort out meaning. This week*, I look back on my jury experience and remember that it felt somewhat fraught and unsettling at times, and it was so relatively minor in the larger scheme of things. No one outside the courthouse was watching us. There were no cameras when we left the building.

I hold in my heart, mind, prayers, and fierce good wishes the jury deliberating on the Derek Chauvin trial, right now. I cannot imagine what their lives have been like, the tension that is probably in the room, the different roles that each person is finding themselves falling into. I hope they have developed some degree of care between them, these past more-than-3-weeks together. I expect that this is an experience like none other in their lives. And I pray for their health, their clarity of thought, and their personal safety, while I also continue to hold in my heart all of George Floyd's beloveds and how retraumatizing this trial must be for them.

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I feel like many of us in this country are holding our breath, right now. Again. And I honor that UUCD is a community where we can come together and name these complexities and wrestle with the heartbreak, struggle, and beauty that is living in this country. May we each find ways to stay connected to one another, with our own open hearts, and to not turn away from the work that needs to be done.

If there is 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

*This column was clearly written before the afternoon of April 20, when the verdicts in the Derek Chauvin trial were announced. Our country is so quick to move on. I will leave this column as-is though, in part as a reminder and a record. We witness to our larger world alongside each other. And there is so much to learn and remember from this past difficult month (and beyond).

Outside at the Ridge - We have a portable restroom onsite. Please make a reservation for your outdoor meetings with Sherry at officemanager@uudanbury.org. A waiver is required to be signed. Kindly abide by CDC and State of CT protocols.

Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Inge Hill is the contact person for **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.

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 June Comment –
Friday, May 21st.

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.

May Services – One Service at 10:00 a.m.**Sunday, May 2nd**Remember The Worker!

Joe Jencks

International touring musician, storyteller, and lay UU preacher Joe Jencks will lead the service focusing on a celebration of work and workers. Singing songs of solidarity and sharing stories of community, history, and hope for the future. We will honor May Day with a service dedicated to many facets of labor and an invitation to value the work we each have done and continue to do in the world. We will also Share the Plate with the Connecticut Worker Center, a non-profit supporting those who work in other people's homes providing house-cleaning, childcare and eldercare. Many of these workers are immigrants who have been out of work during the pandemic. Come help us create a more just society for all.

Joe Jencks is a 22-year veteran of the international Folk circuit, an award-winning songwriter and a celebrated vocalist based in the Chicago area. He is known for his performances of musical beauty, social consciousness and spiritual exploration. Joe delivers engaged musical narratives filled with heart, soul, groove and grit. Blending well-crafted instrumentals and vivid songwriting, Jencks serves it all up with a lyric baritone voice that has the edgy richness of a good sea-salt caramel. Co-founder of the harmony trio *Brother Sun*, Jencks has penned several #1 Folk-songs including the ever-relevant *Lady of The Harbor*. He has become a fan favorite throughout North America and beyond. Joe has performed and preached in over 200 Unitarian Universalist congregations in the US, Canada, and Ireland, and is also a dual US-Irish citizen. Jencks was also a Cultural Ambassador with the US State Department. For more info, please visit: www.joejencks.com.

Sunday, May 9thFar from the Tree? Loving Lars

Li Kynvi

Our guest seminarian Li Kynvi will offer reflections on parenting their son Lars, and what Lars might have to teach those of us who can talk and make plans, including Unitarian Universalism.

Li Kynvi is a UU ministerial candidate, currently interning with the First Parish Church of Groton, Massachusetts. Li has 2 complicated children—17 & 22—and works as a hospice music therapist and mental health counselor.

Sunday, May 16thBut It Seems So Obvious! Is It Necessary?

Rev. Heather Rion Starr

After more than a year of consideration, this congregation will be voting on whether or not to adopt the proposed 8th Principle at our Annual Meeting on May 23rd. It's probably past time for me to share my own thoughts on the 8th Principle more fully with you, and so I will do so, today. <https://www.8thprincipleuu.org/>

Sunday, May 23rd Nuts & Bolts & Minds & Beauty & Dreams & Hearts Rev. Heather Rion Starr
Nothing delights our preschoolers more than jumping in muddy puddles and getting all wet in the splashing of spring and summer. How can we carry that "joy in and of the messiness" into our community-building efforts together, and not shy away from the work involved? The congregation's Annual Meeting will follow this service.

Sunday, May 30th Remembering Rev. Julie Taylor
It is Memorial Day weekend, a time set aside to remember. Historically, Memorial Day (originally Decoration Day) was created to honor and remember those who have died in service to our country. This morning we will remember sacrifices for our nation from a UU perspective. Joe Gillotti will lead our brief annual honoring of Memorial Day following the service.

Rev. Julie Taylor is a Unitarian Universalist community minister specializing in critical incident response, community crisis and spiritual care. Rev. Julie is the Senior Director of Contextual Ministry at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago. Additionally, Rev. Julie serves as a chaplain (Captain) with the New York Air National Guard and on the boards of the UU Trauma Response Ministry and the UU Military Ministry at Great Lakes. A sought after speaker and teacher, Rev. Julie has contributed chapters to several books on the subject of spiritual care and crisis. Agitating, preaching and working towards dismantling systems of white supremacy are key in Rev. Julie's theology and work.



Thank you to our team members: **Michele Cousens, Chris Creter, Margaret Henderson, Judy Lacker and Suze Shaner**, who have been hosting and co-hosting all of our Sunday Services this past year.

We are looking for a few more volunteers to assist with Zoom support for our Sunday services. This does not require a lot of time - depending on how many volunteers we get, possibly one Sunday every 6 weeks AND YOU get to pick which Sundays you are available to assist! Training will be provided. Please contact Sherry at officemanager@uudanbury.org for more information and to volunteer.

Call for the Annual Meeting of UU Danbury June 6, 2021 following the 10:00 a.m. service via Zoom

Every May, or the first 10 days of June, as specified in the By-Laws, we hold the Annual Meeting of UU Danbury. The purpose of the Annual Meeting is to “hear reports of officers, committees, and staff, to elect new officers and trustees, to adopt an annual budget, and to transact any other business that may properly come before the Congregation.”

SLATE OF CANDIDATES FOR ELECTION 2021-2022

The Nominating Team, Yvonne Ruddy-Stein, Jane Leff, and Bob Bollinger, offer the following slate of Officers and new Trustees for the Board of Trustees, to be voted upon at the Annual Meeting on June 6, 2021. Persons to be elected are in **bold** type.

SLATE OF CANDIDATES FOR ELECTION 2021-2022

To Be Elected to The Board of Trustees

Co-President:	Michele Cousens	1 year term until June 30, 2022
Co-President:	Margaret Henderson	1 year term until June 30, 2022
Secretary:	Samantha McCoy	1 year term until June 30, 2022
Trustee:	Debra Oria	2 year term until June 30, 2023
Trustee:	Diane Purvis	3 year term until June 30, 2024

Remaining on the Board of Trustees

Treasurer:	Marie Dupree	2 nd year of 2 year term until June 30, 2022
Trustee:	Peter Horton	3 rd year of 3 year term until June 30, 2022

Remaining on the Nominating Team

Chair	Yvonne Ruddy-Stein	3 rd year of 3 year term until June 30, 2022
Member	Jane Leff	2 nd year of 3 year term until June 30, 2023
Member	Bob Bollinger	2 nd year of 3 year term until June 30, 2023

Roberts Rules of Order prevail at all Congregational Meetings. Our bylaws also state that there must be a quorum of at least 15% of the membership. At an official membership of 137, this means there must be at least 21 members present at the June 6th meeting for the meeting to proceed.

Article 111, Section 1. from our by-laws state: General: Any person, at least 18 years of age, who is in sympathy with its purpose and program, signs the Membership Book, and makes and fulfills an annual monetary pledge, may become a voting member of this Congregation.

Voting rights extend only to those who have been members for at least 60 days, which, for this year’s meeting, means anyone who signed the membership book prior to **April 6, 2021**. Absentee ballots are allowed. Absentee ballots are to be requested and returned to **Melody Levy** by **June 5, 2021**.

From the Board of Trustees

by Melody Levy, President

We face the complicated task of allowing the current ministry to conclude while, at the same time, preparing for the next ministry. The reality is that the next ministry will be different than the current one. I look forward to celebrating Rev. Heather's ministry and accomplishments with gratitude and joy. Saying good-bye does not pretend to be easy. However, it will be a time to honor the meaning we have made with each other, all of us ("no exceptions"--Barbara Fast). The date and festive details will be forthcoming.

As one member of the Ministry Search Team, I was tasked with sending the completed Ministry Search application to the UUA. It is positioned for review by our regional representative, Evin Carvill-Zeimer, and following that, it will move along to Christine Purcell, the UUA Manager for Transitions. She will review the completed profile for clarity, consistency, and a balanced view of our strengths and challenges. She may offer suggestions and then she will publish it on our behalf.

For the next number of weeks or months, the Ministry Search Team, composed of Board Members, Sam McCoy, Deb Oria and I will check into the UUA Ministry Search database. We will arrange to meet applicants, listen to sermons and review ministerial records and references. Any ministry less than 3/4 time is considered a contract ministry by the UUA. Unlike developmental and interim ministry, contract ministry may lead to a call and a settled position. Contracts can also be renewed and modified. The process is more flexible, sometimes faster, easier on volunteers, and less expensive than the settled search process. When the search team finds a minister who is best for the congregation's needs, we will recommend a hire to the Board. The Board will negotiate and finalize the contract with the minister, and if all goes according to plan, we will secure a contract with a consulting minister, commencing this August.

What gifts, skills or qualities will they bring to ministry? How well do they relate to people in a pastoral setting? Do they listen and make people feel heard? How well do they work with people of divergent ages and generations? Different cultures and identities? Do we have shared common passions that will make our ministry together worthwhile and vibrant? Where would they hope to grow and where would we hope we grow? If there is a question you'd like to ask an applicant, please forward it to a search team member. We will make sure it is answered. As we do the work of presenting the congregation to potential applicants and discerning the best choice of the ministers who apply for the position, you may want to offer the team additional guidance by answering any number or these questions.

- Why did *you* come to UUCD?
- Why do you stay?
- In the last ministry, I wish our congregation had had more...
- In the last ministry, I wish our congregation had had less...
- What do you hope never changes in our congregation?

Things are changing day to day when it comes to COVID-19. What may be less apparent is the work being done in order to return to indoor events. We are in the beginning phases of planning for multi-platform services and RE programs. The Hygiene Task Team, composed of Barb Myers, Yvonne Ruddy-Stein and Uwe Koepke is in the process of determining which indicators will be used to inform the decision on when to reopen Fellowship (continued)

Hall and the Lower RE classrooms. At this time, the level of risk of transmission of COVID-19 in Danbury (and Fairfield County in general) is higher than what is safe to allow for reopening. The Task Team will create protocols that will need to be followed by everyone in the building, once we reopen. Masks, physical distancing, handwashing, respiratory etiquette, cleaning, and ventilation will be addressed. Who even remembers how much time to allot in order to slip out of pajamas and make it to church on time? A lyric by Billie Holiday comes to mind; "The difficult I'll do right now. The impossible will take a little while."

To date, the Tech Task Team obtained two estimates for audio/visual system updates, and additional technology. We will continue to evaluate options and providers. Our current expectation is to have a fully functional multi-platform sanctuary by September.

A soft entry for Sunday service staff is expected throughout the summer months. During this time of pause and rewrite, we are working every day to narrow the distance between what was and what will be.



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

Upcoming In Children and Youth Religious Education (RE)

Please note that **our last day of 2020-2021 Religious Education programming will be June 6th**, when we have our Flower Communion service and celebrate the Bridging of high school seniors into young adulthood. This slightly early start to the summer will allow us some additional time to plan for a hybrid return in the fall.

Our scheduled monthly spiritual theme in May is: *Story*.

- **CLASSES Sunday, May 2nd:** Final Gathering for Classes and Youth Groups
- **CONNECTIONS Sunday, May 9th:** Family Walk in the Woods
- **CREATIVITY Sunday, May 16th:** Making Art Outside; Bridging Preparation for High School Seniors (session 3/4)
- **CARING Sunday, May 23rd:** Stories and Songs for Justice; Bridging Preparation for High School Seniors (session 4/4);
- **COACHING Sunday, May 29th:** Workshop Led By a Teen For Younger Children
- **On Dates to Be Announced:**
 - Parents of Preschoolers (POP) Group
 - Parent Covenant Group

Family Surveys

We need family input **about the upcoming year in Religious Education**. If you are a parent/guardian of a child or teen, and you haven't responded to [the survey emailed to you in April](#), please do so at your earliest convenience. The surveys are a follow-up to the Family Meetings in March. If you were unable to attend one of those meetings, you can catch up on some of what you missed by watching the video [here](#). There will be additional opportunities to give more specific input as plans develop.

From Our Director of Religious Education For Children and Youth

Dear Congregation,

The pandemic has changed us. With the New Year came a Netflix documentary titled "Death to 2020," and a stand up comedy special on Amazon Prime called "Yearly Departed." More somberly, in March, the minister at my family's church in New Haven, the Rev. Lindasusan Ulrich, led a "Memorial Service For the Way Things Were." They said:

It's hard to let go. When everything in the world turns sideways, our instinct is to cling to what's familiar, what's comfortable, what's recognizable. We tell ourselves that the world will right itself again soon, if we can just hold on for a couple of weeks, a few months, through the fall, until next summer...if we make do for now, then eventually everything will go back to normal. The heartbreaking reality is that such a return isn't possible. Normal has died. The way things were is gone, and it's not coming back. We are going to have to learn to live without it.

Not all of it is heartbreaking, of course. We are eager to give up things about our "old normal" that are life-diminishing. Many of us are eager to embrace a new normal if it means things like universal healthcare or the end of violent policing. Many of our experiences of pre-pandemic community, though, we will grieve. We long for what was.

Even if we ignored the changes that good public health practice will require for the next year (if not indefinitely), and even if we ignored the changes within ourselves (loss and trauma, the reevaluation we have done of personal and communal priorities, new personal habits, and so on), we would still come back to a changed community.

For instance, the Rev. Heather Rion Starr will not be returning with us. Instead, a new minister will be in the office. When the doors at 24 Clapboard Ridge Road were closed last March, I had not had a Sunday with you, but when we return, I will be your new religious educator. It is possible other community members will come and go in this return.

We will come back celebrating, but also changed and grieving. If we aren't honest and gentle with ourselves in the process, and we refuse to recognize our grief for what it is, we will probably "act out." That's what hurting people who don't know they are hurting, or don't know what to do with the hurt, tend to do. And while this acting out displaces anxiety we don't want to deal with, the anxiety doesn't go away but rather just gets transferred to new locations.

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For example, when we act out, we may create “fake fights” about things that are adjacent to, but not the actual conflict. This doesn’t happen consciously. We will actually feel as if our “fake fight” is a real disagreement. If the conflict is over how the chairs in the fellowship hall are arranged, for instance, we will feel very strong feelings about how the chairs in the fellowship hall are arranged.

We will think what we care about is the configuration of chairs. And maybe there are some real issues to deal with about chairs: accessibility or safety, for example. But it is very possible that the real conflict is about our feelings of inclusion as we learn how to be an in-person community again in a changed community.

Part of our shared work, as we slowly return to in-person activities (with continued online access) will be recognizing and tending to our pain before we act out in ways that are harmful to the community. And when we find we are acting out, our job will be to discern displaced anxieties and find ways to minister to (not fix, but tend) the heartbreak that has given rise to them. We will need to actively practice being covenantal, which doesn’t mean avoiding conflict or disagreement, but navigating our conflicts with attention, ethics, and care. This is some of the work that typically comes in the wake of communal grief or trauma. And we are capable of that work.

With Love,
Sierra-Marie

Ministry/Team News

From *Buildings and Grounds*

by Gary Mummert

Come and Meditate at UUCD

The grounds are being spruced up and we have two outside benches that remain vacant most of the time. Take a walk around the perimeter of the property, listen to the peepers, meditate on a bench or where comfy, write some notes to friends, pick some garlic mustard for a try at pesto with walnuts, or otherwise enjoy.

Know that there is work to do as well and that Buildings & Grounds remains flexible and able to work with your schedule.

From the *Social Action Council*

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On Saturday, May 1st, some members of Soup Kitchen Team #3 (Team Leader **Lynn Taborsak, Bob Taborsak, Jim Wruck, Julie Gordon, Diane Purvis, and Laura Reynolds**) 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 ddhhsandwiches@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, May 10th 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. May dates are the 11th and 25th. 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, May 20th, the **Book Conversations group** will be meeting at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom, to discuss **Caste** by Isabel Wilkerson. This book is about this study of the hidden class system in America. The author compares it to the caste system of India. Bob Bollinger will be 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**.

Future reads are **The Code Breaker:** Jennifer Doudna, Gene Editing and the Future of the Human Race, by Walter Isaacson. **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.

