



# Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

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MAY 2022

## From our Minister



*Your vocation in life comes from where our greatest joy meets the world's greatest need. ~ Frederick Buechner*

I love this quote from theologian Frederick Buechner. But I don't limit its impact to vocation. It's a great motivation for congregational life as well. While our stewardship campaign is officially over, and our Finance Team is working on a budget for the upcoming year, our mantra of "one community many hands" needs to remain in the forefront of our minds as we look to our future and each member and friend decides where to share their talent. Which Teams will you serve on in the coming year?

I can remember when I found this congregation some 24 years ago. I was invited to join the Sunday Services Committee just a week or so after signing the membership book! It was a great fit for me and from there I tried other areas of congregational life; serving in religious education, membership, a capital campaign, and much more. I found places where my joy, passion, and skills met the needs of the congregation. One of the most inspiring, and yet daunting, truths of Unitarian Universalist congregations is that we are fully self-governing and totally self-sustaining. If we want to have programming, or professional staff, or a lovely facility, we have to pay for it with our finances, time, and talent. It's what we've been doing for 2 centuries with the many hands that have engaged in the efforts to be a beacon of independent thought in our corner of Connecticut. It's what I hope you are considering as a part of your commitment to UUCD. We need each other in order to live out our mission.

I know it's been a challenging and often painful couple of years. I know the feeling of exhaustion and uncertainty. I know the frustration and sadness that comes from hearing and seeing the unthinkable violence and oppression throughout the world. And I also know that we have an amazing congregation that continues to support one another and those in the wider community, even when it's difficult. The only way that we keep our beloved community thriving is by every person taking seriously their role as a steward; sharing not only financially, but with time and talent. I've always felt it was a gift and an honor to steward the congregations I've been a part of. And when your joy meets the congregation's need, it's priceless! I'm looking forward to welcoming new members on May 1, and seeing where each of you chooses to engage in congregational life and service in the new congregational year.

Deeply grateful for the dedication and talent among us,  
Rev. Kathleen

*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 20<sup>th</sup>.**

**The Annual Meeting of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury will take place on Sunday, May 5, 2022 following the Sunday service.**

**May Services – One Service at 10:00 a.m.**

**Sunday, May 1<sup>st</sup>**

Celebrating Generosity

Rev. Dr. Kathleen A. Rudoff

Our Stewardship Campaign ends and we welcome new members into our beloved community. It is a time of celebrating the many forms of generosity in the congregation!

**Sunday, May 8<sup>th</sup>**

The Wisdom of Broken Things

Rev. Kimberley Debus



Where do we find wisdom when times are hard, nerves are frayed, and conflict breaks our relationships? We will turn to the sages as we ponder the lessons broken things can teach us about vulnerability, nurturing, and forgiveness.

Rev. Kimberley Debus is a community minister based in Takoma Park, Maryland, inspiring an artful and art-filled faith. She consults with congregations and religious professionals throughout the denomination. She is joyfully affiliated with the Unitarian Church of Lincoln, Nebraska, and has previously served at the Church of the Larger Fellowship as well as congregations on Long Island and Key West.

**Sunday, May 15<sup>th</sup>**

The Theology Of Louis Armstrong

Rev. Dr. Kathleen A. Rudoff

What a Wonderful World is a song by Louis Armstrong that exhibits an expectation of hope and a theology of wonder. We need this in our lives.

**Sunday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Senior High and Bridging Sunday

Senior High Youth Group

Led by the youth group, this service will include a bridging ritual, honoring the journey of high school seniors who are passing over the bridge between youth and young adulthood.

**Sunday, May 29<sup>th</sup>**

Called to Serve

Rev. Nicole McKay



At every juncture in our lives, we are asked to be attentive to that still small voice inside that guides us on our way. This is the journey of discernment which is revealed to us slowly over time and it is our responsibility to stay curious about how these callings will play out. This Sunday, join Nicole as she shares how she has come to discern her call to ministry as a Unitarian Universalist military chaplain, and how your own life's journey is helping you bring your gifts and talents in service to the wider world.

Rev. Nicole is a Unitarian Universalist who completed her seminary studies at the University of Toronto. Nicole joined the Canadian Armed Forces in 2005 and is currently posted to Canadian Forces Base Borden, about an hour north of Toronto. She is the first Unitarian Universalist military chaplain in Canada. Nicole shares her life with her partner Graeme, their children, and their cats.

## Important Announcement About Sunday Services and Religious Education

**Beginning Sunday, May 1<sup>st</sup> and going through at least part of June, we will be experimenting with integrating Religious Education for children into Sunday services instead of having children go to separate programs during the services.** After the service there will be child-directed, adult-supervised playtime outdoors. This experiment will not involve high schoolers.

This means:

- At 10AM on Sunday mornings, high schoolers will go to the club house/youth room in the cottage as usual for their programs, but children through 8th grade will go to service and remain there until coffee hour.
- A section of the Fellowship Hall will be designated as Religious Education space. This space will have activities that children may do during the service (as well as fidgets for those who wish to focus on the service).
- If anyone needs a break from the Fellowship Hall, they can get this break downstairs. The service will be broadcasted on a TV downstairs, but there will be plenty of room for moving around as well as a quiet space for taking sensory breaks.
- During coffee hour, children are invited to come outside as desired for child-directed but adult-supervised play.
- Even though we have been closing out the Religious Education year in early June with the Religious Education and Flower Communion service, this year we will extend the programming through June in order to have a fuller experience with the experiment.

There are many reasons to do an experiment like this, *and* it is only an experiment. Let's give it a try and see, as we get used to it, how it is for us. In the meantime, it will take some getting used to and may at times be uncomfortable (as new things so often are). Thank you in advance for all the patience and openness to trying you can muster.

For a page with links to more information about the experiment, [click here](#).



### Flowers

The beauty of nature is brought into our Fellowship Hall on Sunday mornings by the contributions of members and friends of UUCD. If you enjoy seeing flowers at our services please consider signing up to provide them on a Sunday of your choice.

A note will be included in the OOS each week with the name of the person donating the flowers and the occasion for which they are donated: remembering loved ones, special events, honoring someone's birthday or anniversary, or just because you wish to add some beauty to our Sunday service. To sign up email [officemanager@uudanbury.org](mailto:officemanager@uudanbury.org) with the date and occasion you would like to bring flowers. Thank you.

# Welcome

## New Members

### Andrea Anderson



Andrea grew up in Detroit until her father transferred to Lexington, KY where she completed junior and senior high school. Religious background: Lutheran. Schooling: Wittenberg University, Springfield Ohio, Bachelors in English/America literature, minor in education; Duke University, Masters in American literature; Fairfield University, 6<sup>th</sup> year in Library Media Studies. Professional life: taught in Danbury schools for total of 38 years, 19 years in the classroom as English teacher, middle school primarily; and 19 years in the library/media and computer labs as specialist, middle school. Married to Jerry Bielizna.

UU involvement: began visiting the Barn in Redding in 1998; attended a couple of women's retreats, a couple of chalice circles, and other events. Have attended UUCD intermittently ever since.

She is grateful for the way this congregation's principles overlap with dedication to the social justice imperative found in Judeo-Christian texts and many other teachings of kindness, compassion, truth. She also appreciates the acceptance of human beings for who they are and the importance of stewardship for our lovely home, planet. She's never fit into theology as taught and learned early on to travel her own path without discussion.

### Randy Becker



Randy Becker is a lifelong Universalist Unitarian from Utica, New York, who was active in local and national Unitarian Universalist youth and young adult organizations. Randy's educational background is in physics and sociology prior to his preparation for the UU Minister. Credentialed as both a Parish and Religious Education minister, Randy served congregations and regional area councils as a minister for over 50 years prior to recent retirement. A move from the last settlement in Key West to Ridgefield is in progress as Randy and Jane Leff will be married in June. Randy's complex blended family includes four daughters and six grandchildren.



### Virginia Cameron



My name is Ginny Cameron and I delighted to have found the UU of Danbury. I had a long standing commitment on Sunday mornings but that opportunity was no longer available and I remembered Unitarianism (is that a word?). I say remembered because my parents joined the UU on Staten Island when I was 12 years old, and the church and the friends they made were an integral part of their lives.

I have spent the last 5 Sunday mornings with you and feel grateful to have the opportunity to join.

### Carver Fell



Carver Fell is an ex Catholic who soon afterward left to join UUCD. While only joining UUCD this month, they participated in youth religious education from 2010 until 2013. Recently, they had made the decision to return to UUCD as it was always the place they felt most spiritually comfortable. Unitarian Universalism's openness to any sort of spiritual beliefs has made it the most appealing for Carver. Spiritual and religious beliefs are jarringly individual, and Carver believes this feature is necessary in a spiritual Community.

### David E. Lias



When I was born in Akron, Iowa, the Second World War was just getting serious. My first relocation was to Sioux Falls, SD and in following years my wife Ginger, and our three daughters lived in Birmingham, MI, near Detroit, Pittsford, NY near Rochester and now Danbury, CT, sans daughters, since 1998.

My last 40 working years, I served a variety of non-profit organizations doing financial development to secure donations to support their causes. Prior to this, I worked for Northwestern Bell and later for Investors Diversified Services (IDS).

My wife died in March of 2018. We were married in the American Episcopal Church and were active at every location in that group. Upon the death of Ginger, I realized that that had been her church and did not fit my nature, always seeking freedom. After some searching, I was delighted to discover UUCD and this is much better for me.

## From the Board of Trustees

by Michele Cousens, Co-President



As you read this, UU Danbury will have just ended a successful Stewardship Campaign. Thanks to Captain Peter Horton, and to all of you who pledged for our 2022-2023 congregational year – we will all benefit from your generosity!

Now, what to do with the money? Well, for starters, we will compensate our four paid staff, whom we could not do without; staff expenses are our biggest investment each year (57%), and they are worth every penny! The next largest expense (32%) is for Buildings and Grounds, which includes our mortgage and insurance for the buildings and property at 24 Clapboard Ridge Road, as well as maintenance and utilities. And the rest goes to everything else that makes our congregation run smoothly. Our expenses during COVID did not decrease, and in fact, there are some line items in the budget that have increased this year, or will for the next.

If you would like to express your opinion or voice your concern about item(s) in next year’s proposed budget, we’d like to have your feedback BEFORE the Annual Meeting. And so, we are trying something new this year – you will have an opportunity to ask members of the Board of Trustees and Finance Team how we made our financial decisions, both in-person and by Zoom. One budget meeting will take place on Sunday, May 22<sup>nd</sup> directly after our service, and one will be held on the evening of Wednesday, June 1<sup>st</sup> – watch for a special email to be sent out with all the details. The intention of these meetings is to provide a forum for folks to get some answers to their budget questions BEFORE the Annual Meeting (which will be held Sunday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, directly after our service), so that Members can vote and pass the budget in a more efficient way. During these meetings, changes to the Bylaws will also be discussed.

As we come to the end of this congregational year, I would like to say that it has been an honor and a privilege to serve, along with Margaret Henderson, as your Board of Trustees Co-President. I am excited to see what can be accomplished in this next year without the constraints of pandemic protocols. Our congregation is made better by your presence and participation – I’m so glad you are here, and together, we can make this world a better place. Personally, I look forward to another year of service to my UU Danbury family!



### 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.



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

### **Religious Education Survey Results**

Thank you to the eleven families that have responded to the Religious Education survey about the 2022-2023 year. If you have children or youth in your household and have not yet responded, please [click here](#) to do so.

Here is some of what we have found so far:

- The two most common ministry needs families are expressing right now are:
  - Social connection
  - Shared values and opportunities to gather to care for the earth and other people
- 9 out of 11 families have reported scheduling conflicts with Sunday morning programming, either seasonally or throughout the year
- Most commonly, families expect they will be available to attend two or fewer Sundays per month
- Our Whole Lives and Coming of Age are two high priority programs for families, and a number of families are willing to rearrange other commitments to ensure attendance for these programs (but may not be able to do them on Sunday mornings)
- The two most popular options for experiments with family ministry in the coming year are monthly family dinners (4 out of 11 respondents) and a monthly family social justice, social action, or social service activity (6 out of 11 respondents)

### **Thank You For Your Donations to the Religious Education Refugee Fundraiser**

Thank you so much for your donations to the Easter Religious Education fundraiser to support refugees from Ukraine and elsewhere. As of this writing, we've received \$550. The children decided to split the funds evenly (\$183.33 each) between the three organizations this fundraiser was designed to support:

- [The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee Emergency Relief Fund](#)
- The Hungarian Unitarian Church's [Providence Charity Organization](#)
- [The International Refugee Assistance Project](#)



## From Our Director of Religious Education For Children and Youth



Dear Congregation,

This month we will begin undertaking an experiment with a model of religious education that is multigenerational. It feels important to point out that multigenerational religious education is nothing new. I am writing this column during Passover, and I am remembering that seders are great examples of multigenerational religious education in Jewish communities. Here are some of the things that seders can teach us about doing religious education in communities made up of all ages:

### **Plan for everyone to be at the table**

Expect plenty of guests. Expect children, each with a different personality, different needs, and/or different kinds of questions. Make sure there is something for everyone. Leave room even for a prophet.

### **Repetition is necessary**

We don't come to know a story in one telling. We tell the same story, repeat the same rituals year after year. We learn and re-learn the story. We encounter it in new ways at different points in our lives. We may even be changed by its telling, as we newly integrate its meaning.

### **Story is at the center**

Stories are not a sidebar for analysis. There is no analysis, in fact, without stories because stories are simply experiences in narrative or symbolic form. Without these experiences, there is nothing to analyze.

### **Ritual gives us structure and symbolism helps us make meaning**

We are held by both ritual and symbolism. Ritual is how we dwell with the story as it is told. Symbolism can help us find a path through the story to its meanings.

### **We honor that we are embodied**

Our bodies are part of our meaning-making. At a seder, pillows go on chairs because it is time to tell a story, and we are meant to lean back and soak it in. We even take in the symbolic meaning of the story by the foods we consume. Our bodies make the story alive. It is through our bodies that we come to know the story, to understand it.

### **Questions are vital**

Meaning-making often arises from the questions we ask about the story. Questions are not just expected, but built into the structure and cultivated by everything that we do, that we say, and what is unsaid.

I look forward to thinking with you more about these things and more as we experiment in the coming two months.

Warmly,  
Sierra-Marie

## Notes on Two Hundred Years (and More)

by Douglas H. Parkhurst

Of enduring interest to Unitarian Universalists (UUs), and of some curiosity too, is the symbol of the "off-center cross," a circle enclosing open space with a small Latin cross in the lower left quadrant. It was and still is used today by some UU churches as a symbol of Universalist faith. UUs also may see a resemblance between the off-center cross and the still widely used Unitarian Universalist symbol of an off-center (to the right) flaming chalice within an intertwined double circle. Some today consider the off-center cross as a continuing connection to the Christian roots of [Unitarian] Universalism, though this was not its original meaning or intent. The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury (UUCD) possesses a fine example of an off-center cross, fashioned of metal, and dating from the 1950s.

The off-center cross was associated with a group of young clergy calling themselves the "Humiliati." This was in the late 1940s and early 1950s. These ministers were mostly Universalists and mostly students and recent graduates of the School of Religion (also called Crane Theological School) at Tufts College. The Humiliati developed a theology they called "emergent Universalism;" it was to be "functional, naturalistic, theistic, and humanistic." During the first part of the twentieth century the Universalist denomination suffered from declining membership and the perception that the church's distinctive and traditional messages of "no hell" and the universal restoration of all souls were narrow and perhaps outdated. Universalists were long interested and had worked in social service and social reform movements. In addition, religious humanism was making itself felt in the denomination. Humanism was strongly influencing Unitarians as well. While many Universalists took issue, influential leaders in the church encouraged changes in thinking, even radical changes, and a move from Universalism's historic grounding in liberal, universalizing Christianity to acceptance of an evolving concept of a "new" Universalism as a world religion, a universal faith.

Members of the Humiliati created the off-center cross around 1946 with the assistance of Julia Scamman, a layperson in the Wakefield, Massachusetts, Universalist Church. What was it meant to symbolize? Here is a description from a Humiliati pamphlet of the time:

"What ideas does it portray? The religion of the unities and the universals...that universalism is the important emphasis of religion for today... that Christianity has been an important step for us in reaching universalism... that universalism is a higher development than traditional Christianity. What does the circle represent? This is the all-inclusive circle made by a line without beginning and without ending -- that is, infinite in its conceptions. It is the ever-expanding circle that takes in all men [*sic*], binding them in a universal brotherhood. Why not put the cross in the center? Because Christianity is not central or even necessary to Universalism... The important feature of the symbol is the circle and not the cross....Here is a new symbol which is distinctly Universalist in its impact...."

How is UUCD connected to the Humiliati and their emblem?

First through Rev. Dr. Raymond Hopkins (1919-2013), a charter member of the group and Danbury native who grew up in the church at 347 Main Street. He was active on a local and statewide basis in the Young People's Christian Union (YPCU), the Universalist youth and young adult group of his era. Rev. Hopkins graduated from Tufts (ordained in 1949) and went on to a distinguished career as a parish minister in Massachusetts and Maine; as an advocate and long-time worker for the consolidation of the Universalist and Unitarian denominations,

serving on many committees; as the first executive vice-president from 1961 to 1974 of the newly formed Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA); and as administrator of the Ferry Beach Park Association.

The second connection is Rev. Frederick Harrison (1912-1962), a Tufts graduate (ordained in 1949) and charter member of the Humiliati who served Universalist churches in Massachusetts before coming to Danbury as parish minister in 1956-57. He moved on to become superintendent of Universalist churches in Connecticut and Massachusetts. This writer remembers Rev. Harrison and his family well and being fascinated by the clerical collar he wore, as did other members of the Humiliati. At this time and later the Danbury Church displayed the off-center cross and printed it on orders of service, stationery, and the like. Rev. Harrison's daughter is a UU minister, the Rev. Jeanne Harrison Nieuwejaar.

The third is through Rev. Dr. Gordon McKeeman (1920-2013) who is indirectly connected to the UUCD. He did not grow up in Danbury or personally serve the Congregation as parish minister; his influence came later. A Tufts graduate (ordained in 1945) and charter member of the Humiliati, Rev. McKeeman was for many years minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron, Ohio. Later he served as president of Starr King School for the Ministry; as president of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee; and on the UUA Board of Trustees. Barbara Pescan, UUCD minister from 1988 to 1995 and now retired, and her family were laypersons in the Akron UU Church during Rev. McKeeman's pastorate there. Rev. Pescan, whose eloquent sermons and caring ways are fondly remembered, recently shared with this writer how Gordon McKeeman influenced her with his style of ministry, with his ability to be present with and listen to others, and with her own decision to enter the ministry. Continuing, Rev. Dr. Kathleen Rudoff served a year-long ministerial internship under the guidance of Barbara Pescan at the Unitarian Church of Evanston, Illinois. In 2007 Kathleen Rudoff was ordained by the Evanston Church with Rev. Pescan delivering the ordination charge. In the summer of 2021 Rev. Rudoff came to Danbury to serve the UUCD as consulting minister. The influence of the Humiliati touches another generation!

**Please check out our new website if you haven't already done so at [www.uudanbury.org](http://www.uudanbury.org).**

You'll find that the new page for members and friends is simpler and more streamlined.

As of May 1<sup>st</sup>, the member portal password is changing. Please email any Board member or [officemanager@uudanbury.org](mailto:officemanager@uudanbury.org) for the new password.

# Ministry/Team News

From *Buildings and Grounds*

## Help needed with Buildings and Grounds

The spring is upon us and there are tasks that need to be done off-budget. The B&G team is very flexible and can work to meet your schedule. Please contact **Gary Mummert** via email if you can paint, use a rake or shovel, clean windows, or operate a blower or trimmers. Also, listen to the spring peepers and frogs, and take time to meditate near our pond.

From the *Social Action Council*

## Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker



On Saturday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 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 for Pacific House 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](mailto: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** meets on the second Wednesday of each month. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, May 11<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 a.m. at UUCD in the Fellowship Hall Lower Level. For more information contact **Gary Mummert** or **Joe Gillotti**.



On Thursday, May 19<sup>th</sup>, the **Book Conversation Group** will be discussing “Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think like a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economist” by Kate Raworth. Renegade economist Kate Raworth says most of the fundamental ideas in economics are centuries out of date. Yet they are still taught in college courses worldwide and still used to address critical issues in government and business alike. The author says it's time to revise our economic thinking for this century. She points out ways to break our addiction to growth; redesign money, finance and business to be in service to people. Ultimately, we can create economies that are regenerative and distributive by design. Call **Mary Ann Kulla** if you want to join the discussion.

## **Rudoff and Friends Dance Party is almost here and tickets are still available!** May 20<sup>th</sup> 7-10pm In the Fellowship Hall at UUCD



BYOB Non-alcoholic beverages and snacks will be provided. This is an event that was offered at our 2021 auction by Rev. Kathleen and Phil Rudoff. They love to dance and invite you to join them for East Coast Swing, free style, Cha-Cha, line dancing, and more. There will be mini lessons throughout the party. No dance experience necessary. Two left feet are welcome, as well as those who just want to sit, tap their toes, and enjoy the diversity of music!

Limited tickets are available for \$15. Please contact the office to reserve your tickets.



