



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

DECEMBER 2022

From our Minister



*May your walls know joy, may every room hold laughter,
and every window open to great possibility.*

~ Mary Anne Em Radmacher

In my household we tend to look at the end of the year as a time to reflect on all we have to be thankful for that transpired during the year, and to consider what new things we might learn in the coming year – a future vision of sorts. I think about these things during the month of December, but really hone in on it during the week between Christmas and New Year's. I will admit that I'm not one for setting goals or resolutions but, after the often frenetic holidays, I relish taking time for reflection on all that has been good in my life and then dreaming about what might be possible in the year ahead.

When I think about all of the wonderful opportunities we've had at UUCD to gather for dinners, music, activities, and in-person meetings during 2022, it makes me smile with gratitude. It hasn't been an easy year, and there have been losses suffered. But we are a resilient people who are capable of finding much to celebrate and appreciate. And in the new year we will begin to envision the future of our beloved community: what our shared ministry will look like, and who we want to be. Undoubtedly, there will continue to be challenges and losses, but together we will express gratitude for all that is our life as we serve our mission and share our joy.

I'm wishing each of you moments of deep peace and abiding love during this last month of the calendar year and the holiday season.

Truly blessed and duly grateful,
Rev. Kathleen

**The final celebration of our 200th Anniversary
will take place Friday, December 9th at 7:30 pm.**

We will enjoy a decadent dessert buffet, music from Jerry Phelps, and get a peek at the anniversary quilt being made to honor this milestone. All are welcome. If you do not drive at night and would like a ride, please email our Administrator, Sherry, or 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 January Comment –
Friday, December 16th.

December Services – One Service at 10:00 a.m.**Sunday, December 4th****Radium Girls** a play by Kate Moore

This is a special service featuring a staged reading, directed by Tony DiFabbio. The cast includes: Dan Brodax, Marcia Brooker, Marian DiFabbio, Alex Makai, Phil and Rev. Kathleen Rudoff, and Suze Shaner. The service is expected to conclude around 11:30.

Holiday Party - You are invited! After service on Sunday, December 4th we will have a holiday party for all ages, with Sequoia Lowe as DJ. We will put up a live (yes, live!) Christmas tree and decorate the Fellowship Hall during this party.

Sunday, December 11th

Seminarian Steven Miller

Steven Leigh Williams (they/them, he/him) is a Candidate for Ministry. He holds a Master of Arts in Social Justice (2016) and a Master of Arts in Ministry and Culture (2022), both from Phillips Theological Seminary. Steven currently serves as Pastoral Care Associate with the Church of the Larger Fellowship. They have previously worked as a consulting community minister for the UU Church of Bartlesville, OK, as the Pastoral Care Chaplain at All Souls Tulsa, and the Collegial Care Associate for the UU Ministers' Association. They are a proud member of TRUUsT and a youth chaplain for UPLIFT, the UUA's monthly online gathering for trans and non-binary people. Steven has a passion for youth ministry, and has served at local, regional, and national levels, including three years as the co-leader of the youth group at First UU New Orleans, camp chaplain at U-Bar-U and Camp Murray, and two years on staff for the UUA's Summer Seminary program. He lives in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, a suburb of his hometown of Tulsa, with his spouse Karyn, two young adult stepkids, and their menagerie. Steven loves being in nature, discussing theology, and putting googly eyes in unexpected places.

Sunday, December 18th**Holidays and Holy Days**

Rev. Kathleen Rudoff and Sierra-Marie Gerfao

The exciting multigenerational service will offer a Christmas pageant, Hannukah songs, and an exploration of the winter solstice. Come and celebrate the season of light!

This Year's Christmas Pageant Will Be a No-Rehearsal Pageant - Get ready for some Christmas magic on Sunday, December 18th. During the service, we will debut our first ever no-rehearsal Christmas pageant, including both kids and adults. Kids who have already signed up in advance will be assigned their parts in advance, but we will be liberally giving out additional parts the morning of the pageant. Arrive a little early if you are open to getting roped into the fun. It may seem like organized chaos, but we trust it will be magic.

Saturday, December 24th**Hope, Love, and Joy**

A very special Christmas Eve service for all ages will be held at 5:00 pm and all are invited to enjoy the stories and music of Christmas.

Sunday, December 25th**Christmas Favorites**

This service will be an informal gathering to watch a recorded service prepared by UUCD staff and the Sunday Services Ministry Team; sharing favorite holiday memories, songs, and readings.

From the Board of Trustees

by Gina Cassetta

In the Spirit of Thanksgiving, I want to extend the Board's appreciation for Gary and the other volunteers I have witnessed helping as well. You may have noticed some improvements in the buildings and grounds authorized by the Board... Gary and his assistant David have completed the deck repair plus some other projects that were urgent to complete before winter and have nearly finished creating a new trash area. We are also grateful to announce that the Board of Trustees is now fully staffed and functioning well as a group!

A few things of note from our November Board of Trustees meeting:

- The Auction Committee suggested the Board members donate a few holiday-related items and services to the holiday "pre-auction".
- In keeping with the 8th Principle, Margaret suggested we discuss the UUA's 2022-23 Common Read: *Mistakes and Miracles: Congregations on the Road to Multiculturalism* by Nancy Palmer Jones and Karin Lin. The Board felt it would be beneficial to UUCD given our location in a diverse city and the obvious minimal diversity represented in our membership. We have also been charged by the UUA's Commission for Cultural Change to eradicate white supremacy in ourselves, our communities, and the wider world. The book explores the journeys of five UU congregations who braved the process of creating the multicultural Beloved Community with varying degrees of success. Along the way, however, they experienced growth through the frustration and joys of connection. Since the Social Action Council is not very active at this time, the Board hoped there might be two or three people who are willing to lead a group read of this book (386 pages). Randy Becker has come forward - is anyone else interested? There are discussion guides available (<https://www.uua.org/read>) to assist in leading four sessions, to be held later this winter. As part of our faith formation, the book offers methods to assist in honest conversations and practices to assist in creating an anti-oppressive space. To borrow a theme from one of Rev. Kathleen's recent sermons, may we have the humility to recognize when we have not done so.

Wishing you all a peaceful holiday in this season of hope.



Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Joan Campbell is the contact person for December.

Joan Stapleton is the assistant.

If you have a need, please contact **Joan Campbell**.

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

From Our Director of Religious Education For Children and Youth



Dear Congregation,

While it is not always visible on Sunday mornings, we have an active ministry for children and youth. There are kids in Greater Danbury who understand themselves to be part of the community at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury, even if they are not present with you on Sunday mornings.

Last month I asked you about what might help you feel connected in this new era, when we are “more than Sunday, more than one way.” I didn’t hear from anyone. If you are reading this, let me know some upcoming Sunday that you read it, and I will give you a prize. That way I can discern whether my not having heard from anyone last month was a matter of people not knowing what might help them feel connected, or if the newsletter simply is not a good way to move some conversations forward.

One thing that I think congregants should be aware of is that most of the children you remember running around on Sunday mornings before the pandemic are now middle schoolers. These kids are in our new Middle School Youth Group and those who are in the 7th and 8th grades will begin the 25-session Our Whole Lives sexuality education program soon.

Because the middle schoolers make up the bulk of children in this congregation, the majority of children in the congregation will be graduating in four to six years. If you intend to continue offering ministry to children and youth in Greater Danbury beyond that time, we will need to turn our attention now to what this new era calls for in terms of ministry for families with young children.

In this congregation, we have a number of people whose older youth or adult children were raised in the congregation and who remember with joy the way they sought a particular kind of experience for their kids many years ago and found it in this community. However, family needs have been changing for a number of years now, and of course the pandemic introduced additional changes. It is time for a needs assessment, not based on what has worked in the past, but based on the needs of families in this community today.

Over the holidays, you may be spending time with people who have young children. I encourage you to listen carefully to them, not through the filter of what worked for you, but with an open mind and open heart. What ministry needs do the families you know have at this time? What are their hopes for their children? What are their worries? What do they want for their children that they worry they are not getting? How do they talk about their children’s spirituality? Where are they finding community? What kinds of experiences make them light up and get excited? What challenges and struggles mark their days and weeks?

As a congregation, this spring, we will be talking about some of the things you learn in these conversations as we consider ways we might minister to another generation.

Warmly in Faith,
Sierra-Marie

Upcoming in Religious Education

The nursery is open for children ages 0-5 every Sunday during service. Our nursery care providers are eager to welcome your children! For children up through 8th grade we have a Forest School-inspired, child-led program in which we explore spiritual themes through play. The middle school youth group also meets once monthly (usually Sunday evenings), and the high school youth group meets most Sunday mornings during the service.

- **Sunday, December 4th** - Regular Sunday morning programs followed by a multigenerational after-service holiday party!
- **Friday, December 9th** - Senior High Youth Group DJ Skate event
- **Sunday, December 11th** - Regular Sunday morning programming through 8th grade
- **Sunday, December 18th** - Multigenerational Sunday Service with our Christmas Pageant!
- **Saturday, December 24th** - Christmas Eve Service

NOTE: The Religious Education programs will be on holiday break on Sundays December 25th and January 1st. Though everyone of all ages will always be welcome in the service, there will not be any special programming for children on either day.

Mandatory Parent/Guardian Orientations for Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education

If you have a child in 7th-8th grades or in high school, please plan to attend the Our Whole Lives (OWL) mandatory parent/guardian orientation on Sunday, December 11th after the service. There will be a separate orientation for each of these two groups. Bring your calendars with you too. We will talk about the schedule, as regular attendance is required for participation. Both programs will begin mid-January. 7th-8th Grade OWL is a 25-session program that will take place on Sunday evenings. High School OWL is a 12-session program and will take place Sunday mornings during the service. Each session for either group runs 90 minutes.



Mitten Tree Gifts Due December 4th - Please bring the gifts you have purchased for families of the Interfaith AIDS Ministry when you come to service. Children's gifts in particular should be unwrapped. Please make sure to include the mitten label for the gift, or if you signed up online and don't have the mitten, bring a tag with the name and four-digit code of your recipient. If you need to make alternative arrangements to drop-off one or more gifts you have committed to bring, email Sierra-Marie at dre@uudanbury.org.

Our monthly community dinner and social action project experiments have concluded and now we need your feedback. Be on the lookout for a feedback survey coming to your email address soon!

Big Thanks to all those who helped with set up, clean up, and the UUCD cooks who fed us at our community dinners: Diane Purvis, Barb Myers, Marie Dupree, Anne Krieg, Rev. Kathleen, Sierra-Marie, Randy Becker and Jane Leff, Marcia Brooker, Deb Oria, Cheryl Edelen, and Judy Lackner. We apologize in advance if there are any names that were inadvertently left out.

Women of the Congregation

by Jane Leff

I would like to join other UUCD women in a group where we can meet in person, talk to each other about ourselves, get to know each other, and enjoy feeling at home in a supportive group. We would welcome long-term members, young women, women who are new to UUCD, and older women. What I'm thinking is that we could start with a monthly meeting in January. It would be held in the afternoon, perhaps 2:00 PM, or 3:00 PM so that we could drive home before dark. Many of us don't want to drive at night anymore. We could take turns leading the discussions, and together we could make changes that make it work well for all of us. I'm hoping we might have at least 12 of us, and we could take turns leading the discussions. If you are interested in being a part of this group please let me know.

Ministry/Team News

From the *Auction Committee*



Thank you so much to our generous cooks, bakers, mice makers, drivers, and other auction item donators. And thanks to the wonderful folks who have purchased items from our Holiday Flash Sale. We have raised over \$1,000 and haven't even had our auction yet!

You still have until December 3rd if you haven't ordered your holiday treats yet!

And on December 4th we are having our first committee planning meeting. It's not just Barb & Lisa anymore! And we have room for more! Please let us know you would like to help with this year's auction and put December 4th on your calendar, after the service. Join us for some fun!

Our auction event will be online and in person for a select group of lottery winners on February 11, 2023. You won't want to miss it!

From the *Social Action Council*

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On Saturday, December 3rd, some members of Soup Kitchen Team #1 (Team Leader **Carl Tramontana, Rose Schlemmer, Chris Halfar, Darlene Anderson-Alexander, Suze Shaner, Deb Casey, Lisa Deldin and Andrea Anderson**) 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 and hot lunches for Pacific House 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 meets on the second Wednesday of each month. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, December 14th at 9:30 a.m. at UUCD in the Fellowship Hall Lower Level. For more information contact **Gary Mummert** or **Joe Gillotti**.

Chair Yoga - All aspects of this class are designed to lead a person to a feeling of wellness and learning to become calmer. Come join our happy group, it's great value in so many ways, on Mondays 3:00 – 4:00 p.m. at UUCD. Participants must contact their doctor or medical provider for approval before attending this Chair Yoga Class. To register, or if you have questions or concerns, contact **Joe Gillotti** any evening during the week after 7:00 pm.



MUSIC AT THE RIDGE PRESENTS:

GEOFF
KAUFMAN

Sunday
December 4
4pm

24 CLAPBOARD RIDGE ROAD, DANBURY, CT

Although Geoff is best known to a lot of people for his 35 years of singing and organizing maritime music at Mystic Seaport Museum in CT he has always maintained an active touring schedule featuring music from such formative influences as singers and songwriters from the "folk scare" of the 60s (Tom Paxton, Joan Baez, Steve Gillette...), songs collected in the Catskill Mountains where he grew up and his time as a Sloopsinger with the Hudson River Sloop *Clearwater* and Pete Seeger.

Since his retirement from Mystic in June of '19, Geoff has turned greater attention to music that speaks to issues of social justice, the climate crisis and our need to find common ground, but also wants to keep singing songs that caught his ear over the years for their pure grace and beauty. Mostly, Geoff just loves to sing whether a cappella or accompanied by guitar, concertina, or bones.

Geoff has eight albums available on his website at www.geoffkaufman.com, seven of his music and one he produced with a wonderful cast of performers including Pete Seeger, Ronnie Gilbert, Jay Ungar & Molly Mason, and Eric Weissberg of folk songs collected at Camp Woodland in the Catskills.



tickets at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/geoff-kaufman-tickets-415494514277>



An open letter about the UUA and "Article II"

Dear ones,

Article II (two) of the UUA Bylaws defines the principles and purposes of the UUA (Unitarian Universalist Association). It's where the 7 principles and the 6 sources are spelled out. These were adopted in 1984(!) and have not changed substantially since.

Several years ago a "study commission" was appointed to thoroughly revise and update this purpose statement. You can see the charge they were given [here](#). I encourage you to read this thoughtfully and to browse the UUA website some time, uuu.org. I've spent many hours exploring the wisdom stored there! For those of you who heard Rev. Sierra-Marie's words on 11-13-22 (recorded [here](#) - start at 13:10), she did an excellent job of introducing the proposed changes to Article II.

[The current version of Article II](#) just states the principles and sources. The study commission has released a [new draft](#) which is mostly prose but includes a graphic version of the proposed new "principles" and definitions. As the study commission says:

This draft makes significant changes to Article II. We invite you to read it using one of the practices we have started following in our work:

1. Read it the first time to observe how it makes you feel.
2. Read a second time, observe what it makes you think.
3. Finally read it a third time before thinking about any suggestions.

Folks, this is what discernment looks like in action!

The UUA does nothing quickly. The Study Commission will present its final draft to the UUA Board in January for inclusion on the agenda for General Assembly (GA) 2023, in June in Pittsburgh. It will then be the subject of mini-Assemblies before the initial vote at GA 2023. If it passes that delegate vote by a majority, it will require a 2/3 majority vote at GA 2024 to become the new Article II of the Bylaws.

I encourage you to set aside time to study and contemplate the proposed changes to Article II, and then to discuss them with other UU's. And I'm hoping UUCD can send a van-load of people to GA June 21-25 in Pittsburgh! Keep an eye out for registration info for that in the coming months, and know that UUCD will provide scholarships to those with financial need.

Thank you for your commitment to Unitarian Universalism in this changing world.

With gratitude and love,

Margaret Henderson
UUCD Board President

Notes on Two Hundred Years (and More)

by Douglas H. Parkhurst

...Continued from November 2022

The early 1850's was a time of transition for First Universalist Society. At a meeting on April 1, 1850, the group voted to amend the Society's Constitution. The 1850 preamble states:

"We, the subscribers, thankful for the privilege of worshiping our heavenly Father agreeably to the dictates of our own conscience, and desiring with the Father's assistance and protection, to extend a knowledge of that Truth which frees from sin and error, do hereby unite and form ourselves into a Society under the name of the First Universalist Society in Danbury."

Ralph Waldo Emerson, radical Unitarian and leading transcendentalist, reportedly delivered a public lecture in Danbury in 1850. Did any of our Universalist forebears attend? This was long before the 1961 consolidation of the Universalist and Unitarian denominations. Emerson was a popular speaker. We would presume that if indeed Emerson lectured in Danbury that year at least a few Universalists were there.

The church was seeking a minister in the spring of 1851. Rev. George H. Deere came to Danbury in 1849 and served for two years before moving on to a parish in Massachusetts. His successor, Rev. Salmon C. Bulkeley, was not settled at the Society until the following year. It would be Rev. Bulkeley's second pastorate in Danbury. He was previously at First Universalist from 1836 to 1838.

In June 1851, the Society voted to sell its lower Main Street home of eighteen years. William S. Peck, Society clerk, was appointed special agent to act in this matter on the group's behalf. Curiously, only two months before, the Universalists had made arrangements with Second Congregational Church, then being organized, to use the Universalist meetinghouse during the coming year.

The reason(s) for selling and making a move are not recorded; perhaps it was something as straightforward as a desire for more modern and up-to-date facilities. Because Danbury's center of commercial, industrial, transportation, and social activity was trending north on and near Main Street, especially with the railroad coming to town, there may have been a desire to move with the flow. Or perhaps it was a combination of these or other factors and an attractive offer for the Society's building came along at the right time. In any case "...the Church, Bell, Organ, Lamps, Stoves, Carpets, Table and five chairs..." were soon sold to St. Peter Roman Catholic parish.

The parish of St. Peter had been formed only a few months before, on March 30, 1851. A decade earlier there were perhaps a hundred Catholics living in Danbury, their spiritual needs met through periodic visits by priests from lower Fairfield County. Earliest services were held in private homes. The 1840s brought an influx of Irish Catholic immigrants to Danbury, seeking work as domestics, day laborers, railroad construction workers, and in hat shops. As the local Catholic population grew to several hundred, services moved to larger halls in the borough. Permanent quarters were needed. Rev. Thomas Ryan, newly assigned to St. Peter's, was instrumental in arranging the purchase of the Universalist church. James H. O'Donnell in his *History of the Diocese of Hartford* (1900) relates how the sale was concluded:

"The manner in which this purchase was consummated throws a light upon the prejudices entertained against Catholics at that time. Bishop O'Reilly was in town on the day of the sale, and during its progress walked up and down the opposite side of the street, an anxious, though an apparently indifferent spectator. To manifest interest openly in the sale would have defeated his purpose, for the Know-Nothing element, then rampant, would not have permitted property to be sold to Catholics, especially for church purposes. Nevertheless the purchase was affected through the shrewdness and liberality of three Protestant gentlemen, William H. Clark, Aaron Seely [Seeley] and Samuel Stebbins, whose names are still fondly cherished by the older Catholics of Danbury." (See notes below)

Three sources of information about the sale of the Universalist meetinghouse offer three different sales figures. The archives of First Universalist Society note a sum of \$1,500. The O'Donnell history gives a purchase price of \$2,750. *The History of Fairfield County, Connecticut* (1881) by D. Hamilton Hurd puts the price at \$3,000. In today's dollars these equal an average of perhaps \$85,000.

In August 1851 the Universalists purchased a building lot on Liberty Street, a short distance east of its intersection with Main. By the following spring a new meetinghouse was constructed which would be home to First Universalist Society for the next forty-one years. A photo of this second church building appears in the Scott-Fanton Museum publication *As We Were....A Pictorial Remembrance of Old Danbury* (Second Edition 1979).

What is the rest of the story of what was the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury's first permanent home? St. Peter's soon fitted the former Universalist building for parish use and dedicated the same in the fall of 1851; it does appear the infant Second Congregational Church was able to meet there for at least a few months. Subsequently Second Congregational built a church a stone's throw north on the same side of Main Street where it stayed for about a decade before selling this building to St. Peter parish and moving to a new home on West Street. At that point St. Peter's began using this former Congregational church for worship and redesignated the old Universalist church as St. Peter's Hall.

An 1875 L. R. Burleigh map of downtown Danbury shows James Vaughn's Carriage Manufactory occupying the former St. Peter's Hall. A Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from 1884 shows carriage manufacturing, a paint shop, and a blacksmith shop in the building. The structure is missing from an 1889 Sanborn map.

St. Peter Convent was built on this site and dedicated in 1896 to house the Sisters of Mercy who taught at the recently constructed St. Peter School next door. Today this former convent at 88 Main Street has been repurposed as a senior housing facility, Bishop Curtis Homes. The Danbury Universalists would return to another Main Street address in 1893 but that is a story for another time.

[Note - The American Party, also called Know-Nothings, was a nativist, anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant political movement. It dominated the Connecticut legislature for a time and elected a governor during the 1850s.]

[Note - William H. Clark was a local merchant and treasurer of First Universalist Society. He later became a Congregationalist. Aaron Seeley was a prominent local bank and insurance executive and a Congregationalist. Samuel Stebbins was a local merchant, later a banker, and likely a Methodist.]



December