



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

MAY 2024



FROM OUR MINISTER

“Through the Other’s Eyes”

Dear Beloveds,

One of the most important and powerful moments of grace we can experience is to see the world through the other’s eyes. Even with the people we love the most in our most intimate relationships, we can never actually know what it’s like to be the other person, to feel exactly as they do. Yet we all have the ability and the experiences of entering the heart space of another; of feeling a glimpse of someone’s pain or joy or an overwhelming oneness and bond with another in their hurt or their celebration.

We open ourselves up to seeing through another person’s eyes when we hear their story. Not the story we make up about them in our head, but when we are silent and listen deeply and give another our full attention and hear their story, their experience, as they experience it, free from whatever judgement or preconceived notions we have of what their experience is like because we have or know of similar experiences.

In the spring of 2016, I read an essay by Benjamin Hart about the increasingly hostile and ugly political climate rising in that year’s elections campaign. Hart wrote in the form of an open letter to his children, and he tells them that one day they will have to come to terms with the realization that they are privileged children - they are safe, loved, and protected, and in a very real sense, people do listen often to their story. Then he tells them that as they grow older they will realize their privilege is a hard thing to come to terms with, and they may even reject the idea at first.

Hart says, “Privilege can make you stop hearing people’s names and caring about their stories. Privilege can make you afraid. Afraid that people will take what is yours or what you feel should be yours... You can let your privilege make you afraid. Or you can let your privilege make your world bigger. You can use it to make this place where you are living and growing better. By hearing as many different stories as you can. And remembering as many names as you can. Without hearing and seeing the other and hearing and seeing the world through the other’s eyes, we have no concept of what it is like to be any of things which we ourselves are not: poor, sick, young, old, gay, straight, cis, trans, black, Latino, Arab, Muslim, male, female, liberal eyes, conservative eyes.”

This month spend time contemplating and reflecting on the idea of pluralism, remember that your eyes are not the only ones that see, and your story is not the only one that needs to be told. Raise your voice, add it to the conversation, but make plenty of space for the other voices. Tell your story, be proud of it and own it, but make room for everyone else’s story, too.

Wishing you grace and peace,

Rev. Tony

SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE – Reflect on some of your identities and intentionally learn about an identity that is not yours. All of us have multiple identities according to what demographic markers we share with others and various personal traits and characteristics. We all identify ourselves in multiple various way such as gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, ethnicity and race, religion and spiritual practice, politics, physical body type and abilities, emotional and intellectual abilities and disabilities, the generation to which we belong, where we live, and income. Make a list for yourself of the various identities that are important to you and then – spend some time this month learning about people who have different identities than you do in one or more ways. For example, I’m a heterosexual, cis-gender, fat, white, male Christian-Unitarian Universalist, with a graduate degree. I have a good friend who is Muslim, but my knowledge of Islam is rather rudimentary. I probably know more about Islam than the average non-Muslim American, but not nearly as much as I want to know. I might challenge myself to spend some time learning about Islam this month. As you go through the month reflect on what you’re learning about an “other” identity and how it makes you feel about your own related identity. I might reflect on being a Christian-UU in the light of what I’ve learned about Islam.

To get started you might use these two resources from Soul Matters to map your own identities. But we rarely - if ever - step back to reflect on how those multitudes influence us and interact with each other. And without that reflective distance, our many identities end up sneaking into the driver’s wheel. So this month spend some time getting to know your many selves, your pluralism within.

1. [Identity Chart](#)
2. [Identity Reflection Questions](#)

If you choose to explore another spiritual identity, I can recommended these resources:

- *How to Be a Perfect Stranger* by Stuart M. Matlins and Arthur J. Magida, Editors
<https://www.amazon.com/How-Perfect-Stranger-6th-Essential/dp/159473593X>
- How to Be a Perfect Stranger video by the Multifaith Council of Northwest Ohio
https://youtu.be/_3BCOhbhwnY?si=oXU--B5TB-pVqZJ5
- *World Religions: The Great Faiths Explored and Explained* by John Bowker
- *Living a Jewish Life, Revised and Updated: Jewish Traditions, Customs, and Values for Today's Families* by Anita Diamant and Howard Cooper
- *Buddhism Without Beliefs: A Contemporary Guide to Awakening* by Stephen Batchelor
- *Native American Spiritualism: An Exploration of Indigenous Beliefs and Cultures* by L. M. Arroyo
- Crash Course World Mythology YouTube playlist
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8dPuuaLjXtNCG9Vq7vdvJytS-F-xGi7_&si=e957ansWx8ulVf6j
- Cogito YouTube playlist on world religions
<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPXQWpXEHYlcBYxBUfD98ixQh7iKJuHEs&si=FntcMncbNR3Qs3Hx>
- Khanpadawan YouTube playlist on world religions by a college professor
<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMCt15e8gG-j3nRRZlmlhtadY8XDn4KAH&si=kBkCYSvxNwf2mKnO>

As always, I’d love to know how you did with this challenge. Text me or call me at 508-344-3668 or email me at revtony@pm.me.

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

Sunday, May 5th

Love Across Enduring Lines of Difference

Katie Grosh

How do we handle encounters with fundamental differences? Katie Grosh (MDiv '22, Yale Divinity School) will share from her experiences working in interfaith chaplaincy, environmental sciences, and with the Life Worth Living project at Yale, to share examples of pluralism in practice. We will consider how love allows us to expansively connect with and care for our human and other-than-human neighbors, while honoring and celebrating our uniqueness's.

Sunday, May 12th

Nancy Hershatter and Todd Zagorec

'We Are Not Going to Carry Your Water For You': Beyond Land Acknowledgement

Join members of the Sunday Services Team for an interactive service today. As a follow-up to the service in February when we welcomed the Clan Mother of the Golden Hill Paugussett people to our pulpit, we will explore together what our weekly land acknowledgement statement really means and how we might take an action-planning approach to showing solidarity with the local Paugussett people going forward. We will listen to native voices via readings, music, and interviews and then do some of our own work as justice-seeking Unitarian Universalists. Come be part of the conversation!



Our Share-the-Plate offering will go to the Golden Hill Pagsussett Tribe.

Sunday, May 19th

Revs. Tony Lorenzen and Sierra-Marie Gerfao

What Do You Have in Common With a Bird?

Revs. Tony and Sierra-Marie reflect on the ways humans learn in this multigenerational service and celebration of the 2023-2024 children and youth programs.

Sunday, May 26th

Slow Down!

Rev. Sierra-Marie Gerfao

Rev. Sierra-Marie reflects on the joys of slowness and reasons to embrace inefficiency. Come be challenged by this counter-cultural invitation to not be the fastest or the best.



Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Andrea Andersen is the contact person for May and June.

Donna Lawrence is the assistant.

If you have a need, please contact **Andrea**

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



Upcoming In Children and Youth Religious Education (RE):

Nursery care for children ages 0-3 is available during services on Sunday mornings, or caregivers are of course welcome to keep their children with them during services.

Children over the age of three are invited to attend the first part of the service with the adults. After the story portion of the service, these children have the option to go to children's programs.

Youth groups for pre-teens and teens in junior and senior high school take place on designated Sunday evenings.

- **Friday, May 3:** Group for Caregivers of LGBTQIA+ Young People
- **Sunday, May 5:** Regular Sunday morning programs; Junior High and Senior High Youth Groups meet Sunday evening
- **Sunday, May 12:** Regular Sunday morning programs
- **Sunday, May 19:** Multigenerational Service in the morning; Senior High Youth Group meets Sunday evening
- **Sunday, May 26:** Final week of regular Sunday morning programs

Note that on Sunday, June 2, we will have our Senior High School Sunday and Bridging Sunday.

Volunteers Needed!

This is the time of year when we turn our attention to program planning. Children, youth, and family plans for this summer as well as the upcoming school year will depend on volunteer availability. However, it is still very important to match people with the right volunteer roles for them. If you are interested in volunteering, please send an email to dre at danbury dot org with the following information.

- **Frequency:** How frequently are you interested in volunteering (once or twice during the year; three or four times during year; once or twice per month; most Sundays)?
- **Type:** What inspired you to reach out? Are you interested in helping with planning, preparation, or committee work, or is your preference to work directly with program participants?
- **Style:** What is your preferred style of interaction (for example, do you prefer to be in charge, or are you more interested in mutuality; do you like to have structure or do you prefer to interact in more flexible ways)?
- **Age:** Is there a particular age group with whom you are best suited to work?
- **Skills:** Do you have a special skill you can offer the children's community in either behind-the-scenes or direct work (some examples might include making music, telling stories, creating props and sets for stages, art of any type, etc.)?
- **Connections:** Do you have a connection to a community organization with which we could partner for social action events?

From The Board of Trustees

by Peter Horton, Trustee



Here's a fun test. If you are reading this, please go back to the original email and hit "reply". That's all you need do. Thanks.

Board Work

Have you ever thought about being on UUCD's Board? I think most of us have at one point or another. I've talked to folks who have flat out turned down being on a UU Board. I've been with folks who have come onto a UU Board and realized at some point during their tenure that it just wasn't for them. I have to tell you, I think I've been on a UU Board for at least 12, maybe 14 years. I like it; I like Board work. I'm mystified why others don't like it.

UU Board work is not like other non-profit boards. It takes time for a new member to integrate with the existing members. It takes time to figure out the processes and behaviors that the Board uses to get on with their business. And it can be difficult to ascertain whether the Board is actually accomplishing anything at all.

For me, the biggest challenge, even after all these years of Board work, is moving from "me" to "we". It gives me an opportunity to focus and appreciate each individual's mindset. Why did they say that? Am I engaging with folks in a way that is helpful to them and myself? That's a spiritual practice for me.

I believe that we are leading the congregation somewhere, not just overseeing our finances and our programs. I think my personal relationship with UUCD is enhanced and my spirituality deepened by our focus on our future, be that what will happen in the next few months to what will happen over the next few years. That's one of the big reasons I like Board work.

I think every one of us is looking to make sense of our lives; to have a meaningful life. Being on UUCD's Board helps give my life meaning.

All-virtual General Assembly June 20-23!

This year's General Assembly (GA) will be 100% online June 20-23. The theme is "Love Unites, Stories Ignite." As you've probably heard, this year Unitarian Universalists from all over the country will be voting on whether to adopt the new [7 Values with Love at the center](#). Our congregation can have 3 delegates - would you like to be one?

But more than the Article II vote, it's a great chance to commune with other UU's and learn more about what's going on across the nation. Most programming will be in the afternoons in our time zone, and you can choose what topics you want to focus on. Find out more at uua.org/ga/registration. UUCD has funds available to cover your registration if needed.

For questions, contact Margaret Henderson.

Upcoming Events

Chair Exercises at UUCD

Gentle Stretching using a chair - Breathing exercises – Laughter

Chair Exercises Classes are starting again at UUCD for women and men. Classes are FREE. The importance for seniors to maintain flexibility and mobility cannot be overstated. So often this vital human function gets lost or totally ignored. Perhaps it's time to consider a new healthy activity and begin to create a more peaceful mind and body for yourself.

You'll find the gentle stretches both sitting and standing can have a wonderful effect on a person's body and sense of wellbeing. All aspects of this class are designed to lead a person to a feeling of physical wellbeing and learning to become calmer in their daily life. Come join this new class and become connected to our happy little group. We meet on Wednesday's from 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall lower level.

Participants need to contact their doctor or medical provider for approval before attending this Chair Exercise Class. In the event you have questions or to register, please call **Iris Rainone** any evening during the week after 5:00 pm.

UUCD Men Conversing over Coffee meets on the second Wednesday of each month. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, May 8th, at 10:00 a.m. at UUCD in the Fellowship Hall Lower Level. For more information contact **Jeff Asher** or **Joe Gillotti**.



May 11th: Suze Shaner and Dan Brodax are facilitating **Movies with a Message**, using **Spiritual Cinema's** movie shorts the second Saturday of each month **from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.** These nights will consist of 1-3 short movies that explore the big questions about life and living (i.e, Who are we? Why are we here? Where are we bound? and What can we become when we live at our highest level of potential?) with discussion afterwards. We will supply water and popcorn. Feel free to bring your takeout dinner. Donations to UUCD accepted.



JOE JENCKS

**SUNDAY
MAY 5 – 4 PM**

Joe Jencks is a 25-year veteran of the international folk circuit, an award-winning songwriter, and celebrated vocalist based in Chicago. Merging conservatory training with his Irish roots and working-class upbringing, Joe delivers engaged musical narratives filled with heart, soul, groove and grit. Having penned several #1 Folksongs including the ever-relevant *Lady of The Harbor*, Jencks was also co-founder of the harmony trio, Brother Sun. From Festivals like Falcon Ridge, Kerrville, Mariposa, and Old Songs, to venues like Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall, Jencks has enthralled diverse audiences with his approachable style. Joe is noted for his unique merging of musical beauty, social consciousness, and spiritual exploration. 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.

"The spirit of Folk music is people working together. Joe is a fantastic singer who carries on the traditions." ~ Pete Seeger



www.musicattheridge.org

24 Clapboard Ridge Rd
Danbury, CT



Tickets at Eventbrite.com

\$25 in person/\$20 streaming

Tickets at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdfdnwsj>

Ministry/Team News

From the *Family Ministry Team*



Join the Family Ministry Team for a **May Pole Celebration** immediately following the service on **May 5th!** The program will take place rain or shine, either outdoors on the grounds of UUCD or inside the Fellowship Hall. Wear your crowns of flowers and join in the fun at this multigenerational event to celebrate the coming of Spring!

From the *Social Action Council*

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On Saturday, May 4, some members of Soup Kitchen Team 3 (Team Leader **Lynn Taborsak, Bob Taborsak, Diane Purvis, Nancy Brown, Linda & Steve Schneider, Jyo Buyyala**) will be returning to the Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen on Spring Street to help serve take-out meals and sandwiches that were cooked or prepared in volunteers' homes or through donations. Unfortunately, we are not yet able to serve the guests a meal inside Dorothy Day Hospitality House.

You can also help feed our neighbors with a gift card in any amount from any local supermarket.. 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!



In the past couple of years, we have lost some of our **Dorothy Day** volunteers. Please consider volunteering to be on a DD Team - it only involves a few hours, 3 Saturdays per year. You will find it to be a very rewarding experience. Please contact **Judy Lacker** for more information or to sign up.

We have resumed collecting non-perishable food donations on Sunday mornings. Please place your food donations in the basket in the foyer. You can sign up to help transport the weekly collection to The Dorothy Day Hospitality House on Spring Street.



Notes on Two Hundred Years (and More)

by Douglas H. Parkhurst

Continued from April 2024...

What was known as the "Humanist Controversy" became an issue for Unitarians, and to a lesser extent Universalists, during the 1920s and 30s. In 1933 a group of about three dozen liberal intellectuals endorsed "The Humanist Manifesto." This group included thirteen Unitarian ministers, including two who held dual fellowship with the Universalists, and some Unitarian laypeople. One Universalist minister, Clinton Lee Scott, also signed the Manifesto. Scott was a denominational trustee and later became superintendent of Universalist churches in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Years later Ernest Cassara (not a signer), who had been fellowshipped in both denominations and was for many years a church historian, college history professor, and author, succinctly described the objective of the Manifesto.

It was an affirmation of man's faith in himself, a faith that through the use of disciplined thought man could reorder society in such a way as to assure a world of peace and plenty. The humanists asserted that man must do it on his own, not expecting intervention by divine power. They denied the very basis of the faith of the theists in the liberal churches.

The years after World War II saw the Universalist Church of America (UCA) begin in earnest a move away from its traditional theological position centered in liberal Christianity. Universalist theology was evolving in the denomination's divinity schools [see note below] and humanist thinking was having a larger impact. The new direction was creation of "a religion for one world." This effort to "universalize Universalism" had support from the UCA's general superintendents; other prominent ministers; and newly-minted clergy coming of age in the wake of the catastrophic effects of world war. Not all clergy, laypersons, or local churches were enthusiastic about a beyond-Christianity concept, however, or the humanism described above. Many retained their conventional theistic beliefs and practices in the presence of this new kind of Universalism.

In 1945 the American Unitarian Association (AUA) began the process of forming small, lay-centered groups of Unitarians in communities with minimal or no liberal religious presence and where individual Unitarians were eager to get involved. This effort became the modern Unitarian fellowship movement; the first fellowship was formed in Boulder, Colorado, in 1948. In the program's first decade more than two hundred fellowships were established. These groups were lay-led and largely self-sustaining, with an organizational structure and formal affiliation with the AUA. Fellowships were not necessarily meant to become full-fledged Unitarian churches though some eventually did. Some did not survive. In Connecticut, Unitarians were able to establish a greater presence throughout the state than they had in the previous century and a half, with six active churches and fellowships by 1960 [see note below]. The Unitarian Fellowship of Ridgefield was formed in 1964, a few years before the general fellowship effort concluded.

Some kind of Unitarian-Universalist cooperation, federation, or even union had been suggested going back to the nineteenth century. The time was right in the early 1950s for the creation of what became known as the Council of Liberal Churches (Universalist-Unitarian). This arrangement, with representatives from each denomination, would explore bringing together the publications, public relations, and religious education activities of the two parent bodies. In 1953 the denominational youth groups, American Unitarian Youth and Universalist Youth Fellowship, voted to merge into a new organization called Liberal Religious Youth (LRY). The first continental LRY convention was held at Cheshire Academy in Cheshire, Connecticut, in 1954.

A Joint Interim Commission on denominational merger was formed in 1953; a permanent Joint Commission followed in 1955-56. Both included representatives from the AUA and the UCA. The members considered the pros and cons

of, as well as alternatives to, a complete union of the Unitarians and the Universalists. Over the next few years in-depth study regarding the function, organization, and history of the two denominations was conducted and shared with Universalist and Unitarian congregations and individuals at the grassroots. Polls were taken. Interestingly, skeptics in each denomination feared being submerged under the influence of the other. In 1959 a joint conference, after much debate, approved "The Plan to Consolidate the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America." Votes on the proposed plan were subsequently taken at local Universalist and Unitarian churches and fellowships. While agreement was not unanimous, majorities of congregations throughout both denominations voted in favor, as did the Danbury church. In May 1960 a final, binding vote was taken, this time by delegates to concurrent special meetings of the two denominations. The delegates approved consolidation and committees tasked to coordinate necessary details set to work. On May 15, 1961, the Unitarian Universalist Association officially came into being.

Membership in the new Association as of June 1, 1961, including religious education enrollments, was 229,103 in 1,035 churches and fellowships (compared to 187,689 and 1,027 with a much larger national population base in 2020). In 1961 Connecticut counted fifteen groups with 3,162 legal members; the legal membership of the Danbury church was 148. Leaders in the AUA and UCA assumed important positions in the Association. Prominent layperson Marshall E. Dimock was chosen the UUA's first moderator. Rev. Dana M. Greeley (Unitarian) was elected to his first of two four year terms as president. Layperson Lawrence G. Brooks (Unitarian) and Rev. Carleton M. Fisher (Universalist) were elected vice presidents. Rev. Philip R. Giles (Universalist) became vice president for field relations and later vice president for development. Danbury native Rev. Raymond C. Hopkins (Universalist), an advocate of consolidation and active participant in the process, was named executive vice president, a post he held until 1974.

The UUA and its churches and members faced a variety of significant challenges during the Association's first decade, above and beyond the institutional effort required to fully integrate the organizations, workings, and traditions of the two parent denominations. One challenge was the amount, kind, and increasing speed of social change that came about in the United States during the 1960s and early 1970s. Much of this change reflected the civil rights movement and other empowerment efforts. The youth movement at times pitted one generation against another. The Vietnam War divided the country; many Unitarian Universalists participated in Vietnam War protests and the anti-war movement. In 1971 the UUA's Beacon Press published The Senator Gravel Edition of *The Pentagon Papers*, calling down the wrath of the Nixon Administration. Traditional attitudes toward church, government, and social institutions were evolving and church affiliation was becoming less important in the lives of many Americans. The viability of the Unitarian Universalist Association itself came into question, threatened in 1969 by a severe financial crisis. Overall membership in the UUA grew during most of the 1960s reaching a high in 1968 of 282,307 (including religious education enrollments) in 1,135 churches and fellowships. Over the next few years these numbers declined, however, and by 1974 membership in 1,007 UU churches and fellowships stood at 199,138, significant losses in both numbers of groups and members compared to 1961.

With this bit of background let's take a look at what was happening closer to home.

[Note - Theological School of St. Lawrence University (Canton Theological School) and Tufts College School of Religion-Crane Theological School. The former Ryder Divinity School had become part of Meadville Theological School and Lombard College.]

[Note - The 1959/1960 Unitarian Annual Report listed churches in Hartford, New Haven, Westport, and New London. The New London church was federated with the Universalists. The Brooklyn church was inactive. There were fellowships in Pomfret and Storrs.]

To be continued in June 2024...

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 17th.

