



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

JUNE 2024



FROM OUR MINISTER

“Do Over”

Dear Beloveds,

When my son was four years old, we went to an amusement park and one of the things we did that day was play mini-golf. He loved it! He became a mini-golf aficionado. We couldn't pass a mini-golf course without him begging to stop and play. I never drove past the mini-golf courses in our area with him in the car unless I was prepared to stop and play - or listen to him plead, beg, and even cry if we couldn't stop.

The first year or so he played the game more like hockey than golf. He hit the ball and then ran after it and hit it again, often before it stopped rolling from the previous hit, until he steered it into the hole. He raised his arms, and the club, as he had just scored the Stanley Cup winning goal. Eventually he learned that the game wasn't supposed to be played like hockey and this threw him for a while. Every time he mishit the ball or missed a shot, he'd run after the ball pick it up and yell, “Do over!” He would then run back to spot of the previous shot and reshoot. He didn't like the term “mulligan.” It was just “Do over!” When he was really frustrated it became a stream of consciousness and yell of despair, “Do over, do over, do over, do over, doover, doever, doover!!!!”

The do over is a fundamental and foundational component of young children playing just about anything. “Wait, wait, do over!” There's no anxiety ridden phone calls to friends and extra appointments with the therapist, getting into a funk about what they've could have done differently or better, it's just an immediate stop and a demand, even a command, to try again. Do over.

As we grow up, we give up the do over. We become resigned to the fact that there are things we don't do well. We give in to the cultural demand to let our failures stand. For some reason, we begin to relegate if at first you don't succeed, try, try again to childhood. And yet, the art of the do over is a necessary part of the practice of renewal.

Life is a series of do overs. And embracing the do over can help us refresh when weary, renew when worn out, and reinvigorate when depleted, reboot when we freeze and get stuck, reinvent ourselves when life seems to have run its course on the path we were on. We start over all the time. It's not really a big deal. All of us engaged in the biggest starting over of our existence today, we got out of bed and tried again another day.

I don't know anyone whose life isn't filled with a history of stops and starts. I bet you are a master of starting over, just like me. When I was a kid growing up, I wanted to be President of the United States. Then I wanted to play for the Boston Red Sox. Then I wanted to be a rock star. When I was in college, I wanted to be a writer for Rolling Stone. Then I became a teacher. And then I became a minister. I kept doing it over until I ended up where I am now. Careers are but one place in life we do over. Those who struggle with addictive behaviors do over. Anyone in a long-term relationship knows how to do over or the relationship wouldn't have lasted long term. Most Unitarian Universalists are people who have started their religious life over. One of your do-overs is probably why you're reading this.

(continued)

This month as we focus on the theme of renewal, ponder how you've rebooted, refreshed yourself, and started again after what seemed to be the end of the line. We'll all fail, we'll all run out of time, money, and patience. We'll all come to a place where we think we "just can't" any longer. And then grace will happen.

Decide to accept the opportunity and understand that you need compassion for yourself and for others because the do over needs to be granted. When I was growing up, anyone who asked for a do over got it.

Wishing you grace and peace,

Rev. Tony

SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE – Take a Nap

Our theme for the month is renewal and this month I challenge you to take a nap. Seriously. Make taking a nap a more regular practice than you have been. Allow yourself to rest, to pause, and renew.

Rest is serious business. When I was training to be a spiritual director one of our assigned readings was a book by a minister about rest as a spiritual practice. Living in Texas for eight years I came to understand why some cultures develop the practice of siesta, pausing everything during the worst heat of the day and resuming life again after it cools down a bit. Air conditioning and our consumer culture that has us produce at all costs and never waste a waking minute in the pursuit money, power, and fame have erased the nap from our day-to-day existence, and when it does dare to show up, it's somehow a mark of failure. Either we didn't get enough sleep at night or we're slacking off.

When I was in college, my friend Eric was the Editor-in-Chief of the student newspaper and wrote an editorial about napping. I thought it was brilliant. And as he pointed out, the school library had one wall overlooking the quad that was all glass and in the heat of the day, the sun through those windows made it almost impossible to stay awake if you were trying to study there.

Teresa Hersey, founder of the Nap Ministry (<https://thenapministry.com/>) reminds us that rest *is* resistance. Her book, *Rest Is Resistance*, is "a call to action and manifesto for those who are sleep deprived, searching for justice, and longing to be liberated from the oppressive grip of Grind Culture." The Jewish practice of Sabbath is an affront to the Pharaohs of the world who would have us be slaves (or wage slaves) as if enjoying life and rest were only a privilege for the wealthy.

So, my challenge to you this month is to work napping into your life a little more than you have been. While resting, ponder how rest is an act of resistance and right of all people to have enough rest and opportunities for renewal.

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.

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

Sunday, June 2nd

The Ocean (a Senior High and Bridging Sunday Service)

On this Sunday Our Senior High Youth Group will lead the service with an ocean theme. We will also have a bridging ceremony honoring those group participants who are transitioning out of youth into young adulthood.



Our Share-the-Plate offering will go to Literacy Volunteers on the Green.

Sunday, June 9th

Music Sunday

In our community, we have an abundance of musical gifts! On Sunday, June 9, 2024, come and enjoy the beautiful music created by our own UUCD musicians, featuring our UUCD Choir and many others as we celebrate the important, necessary role that music plays in all of our lives.

Sunday, June 16th

Sowing Seeds

Rev. Tony Lorenzen

Rev. Tony leads us in Flower Communion and reflects on the importance of doing what good we can in the world as we renew our connections to each other.

Sunday, June 23rd

"Live-ish from General Assembly"

Rev. Tony Lorenzen

We will watch the Rev. Molly Housh Gordon preach the Sunday morning worship sermon and look at what happened this week at the Unitarian Universalist Association's annual General Assembly.

Sunday, June 30th

Rev. Tony Lorenzen



Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Andrea Andersen is the contact person for 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):

With the exception of a pre-planned trip for our Senior High Youth Group to Boston on June 30th, our children and youth ministries are heading into summer break.

During this time, activities are on hold, though we do still encourage families to attend on Sunday mornings, especially when we have our Senior High Sunday (June 2) and our Flower Ceremony (June 16). We are currently getting our nursery staffed for the summer and plan to open it to children of any age during services.

Kids and teens, we look forward to welcoming you back to children and youth ministries in September!

Congratulations to Bridgers!

On Sunday, June 2nd we will have a special ceremony for two members of our community who are transitioning into young adulthood. Here are their bios.

Anja Westenberg: Anja has been attending the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury (UUCD) since she was an infant and has loved exploring the spiritual and social UU world through Religious Education (RE) and Youth Group every year. She has recently enjoyed attending the normal morning services and is so appreciative of the incredibly supportive community that has provided a safe haven throughout the past 18 years. She is graduating from Danbury High School where she played the trumpet in the marching band for 4 years and helped the musical theater tech crew for 3, and Anja is planning to attend Western Connecticut State University in the Fall. WCSU is only 10 minutes away from UUCD, so she hopes to continue attending services throughout the next year while working towards a degree in Elementary Education. She recently discovered her passion for working with kids through her volunteer work at the Children's Leadership Training Institute in downtown Danbury.

Kye Gerfao: Kye (they/he) is a lifelong Unitarian Universalist who has attended congregations in Washington, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. Throughout high school Kye has been a member of youth groups both at UUCD and the Unitarian Society of New Haven. Kye has particularly enjoyed doing community service activities with the youth group, such as making sandwiches for Dorothy Day Hospitality House. Kye will be graduating in June from the Sound School, a public agricultural high school in New Haven that specializes in marine sciences. Kye's high school years included working as a babysitter, doing over 375 hours in community service, playing varsity ice hockey, sailing on the Sound School's sailing team, rowing with Crew Haven, and participating in the leadership team for the Sound School's Sexuality and Gender Alliance. Kye also maintained membership in the Socialist Scholars Party and the Sound School Student Council. Over the last two years, Kye's studies have included a focus on underwater science, which involved learning to scuba dive and leading construction of oyster reef balls for an oyster reef restoration project. Kye is leaving the Sound School with a

boating license and certifications in Open Water Diving, Rescue Diving, and Scientific Diving. On a senior research trip Kye received an award as Best Representative of Connecticut Scuba Academy. Over the summer Kye will participate on Team USA in an international seamanship competition called Atlantic Challenge. Next year Kye will begin studying Marine Sciences at UConn on the Avery Point Campus. Kye currently plans to do five years at UConn and leave with a Master's Degree in Teaching with the goal of teaching middle school science.

The Nursery Is Hiring - Immediately

We need two summer childcare providers. Are you interested? Do you know someone who might be? Please get in touch with Sierra-Marie right away. You can reach her at dre@uudanbury.org.

Calling All Congregants!

We need volunteers for next year's children and youth ministries. There are lots of ways to get involved. Please contact Sierra-Marie at dre@uudanbury.org to find the right fit for you and your skills and interests.

Rev. Sierra-Marie's Summer Office Hours

During June our Director of Religious Education will not hold weekly in-office hours but will be available to meet by appointment and answer phone calls and emails until June 18th. After that date she will be attending the UU Minister's Association Ministry Days, the Liberal Religious Educator's Association Professional Day, and the Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly and then taking a week of vacation time until the end of June.

In July and August, she will be doing a combination of professional development and 2024-2025 preparation time. During this time, she will generally be available to meet by appointment and answer phone calls and emails with the exception of vacation time from August 9th - August 18th. Please note that her summer response time may be slower. If any additional vacation time is added, however, an email auto-reply will notify you of when she next will be available.

From The Board of Trustees

by Nancy Cullen, Secretary



Annual Meeting

Please attend the June 2nd Annual Meeting at 11:30 after the service. Members will vote on the 2024-25 budget for UUCD and elect at least one new Board member - hopefully two. Childcare will be provided in the form of a simultaneous Children's Annual Meeting. There will also be a Zoom link available, to be sent out that morning.

The term *Beloved Community* sounds generous, comforting, and you can create it. Serving on UU Danbury's Board of Trustees is one way to do that. The board meetings are a place where all voices may be heard - unusual in my experience. I am grateful and often learn things that change my perspective. We prioritize treating each other with care and we accomplish a lot. If, like me, you never considered serving on UU Danbury's Board of Trustees, maybe you are *exactly* who is needed. If you're interested, contact Jackie Alexander with the Nominating Committee.

The past year included:

- Welcoming a new minister,
- Welcoming more families, children, and young people with Sierra-Marie's creative programs -- which included a *Bounce House* last September!
- An open discussion of Palestine, Israel, and the US was held, as was a Passover Seder,
- A committee formed to plan an in-person Auction Event for this fall,
- We selected and installed sound panels in Fellowship Hall, and redesigned the entry way,
- We continued: Community Dinners with Neighboring Faiths programs, Movies with a Message, Chalice Circles led by Rev. Tony, Music at the Ridge and more. You can find a more in depth listing of ways to connect with and serve others at this link <https://uudanbury.org/take-part-2/activities/>
- You can even submit your own idea for an event.

Check the Calendar at <https://uudanbury.org/blog/events-calendar/>, managed by Sherry, for times and dates. Some activities may pause for a few months, but many of us will be around and meeting all summer.

See you at the Annual Meeting on June 2nd!

The logo for Tech Team Ministry, featuring the words "Tech Team" stacked above "Ministry" in a bold, sans-serif font. The background is a blurred image of what appears to be a person's face.

Opportunity Knocking!

Attention members/friends far and wide!

Looking for a way to give back to UUCD that DOESN'T involve committee meetings, AND allows you to try something different?

We have an amazing hybrid system which allows us to offer our services both in-person and online. BUT... more helpers are needed to make it happen every Sunday.

This is something you can do from **home** (yes, even from across the US!) or from the **back of church** - either **by yourself** or **with a partner**. You don't have to be "tech-savvy;" and team support and training is always available. It's a simple (flexible) once-a-month commitment.

Want to find out more? Email Sherry (officemanager@uudanbury.org), Keith Henderson or Barbara Myers. Come join the team!

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, June 12th, at 10:00 a.m. at UUCD in the Fellowship Hall Lower Level. For more information contact **Jeff Asher** or **Joe Gillotti**.



June 8th: 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.



REGGIE HARRIS

in concert

**SUNDAY
JUNE 9, 2024**

Reggie Harris is a singer-songwriter, storyteller and world-renowned song-leader who is a powerful interpreter of the global music narrative. A passionate, engaging inspirational entertainer and concert artist Reggie is recognized for focusing new energy on the important role of music in the discourse for inclusion and the struggle for human rights using the lessons of history as a base. As an expert on the music of the Underground Railroad and the Modern Civil Rights Movement he is at home on stage as performer, lecturer, or leading discussion in seminars or in the classroom.

A 2021 winner of both the Spirit of Folk Award from Folk Alliance International and the W.E.B. Du Bois Legacy Award, Reggie is a charismatic community builder who was featured in 2020 on CNN's "Silence is Not an Option with Don Lemon." He was recently featured in The New York Times to discuss his familial connection as the descendant of slavery as a great-great-great grandson of confederate General Williams Carter Wickham and his slave Bibbanna Hewlett with his white cousins.



www.musicattheridge.org

24 Clapboard Ridge Rd

Danbury, CT

\$25 in person/\$20 streaming

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



Tickets at Eventbrite.com

Ministry/Team News

From the *Social Action Council*

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On Saturday, June 1st, some members of Soup Kitchen Team 4 (Team Leaders **Bruni Edwards and Yvonne Ruddy-Stein, Joanne Davidson, the Parr Family, the Bonansinga/Twombly family and Ali Haffner**) 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. If joining a team is not for you, you may consider being an alternate. It would require you to be available to substitute for a team member who would contact you a few days in advance of the particular first Saturday of the month. You can sign up on the poster on the bulletin board in the lobby and indicate "Alternate".

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 May 2024...

The Rev. John P. Christensen, then in his mid-thirties, arrived at First Universalist Church, now Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury, in the autumn of 1948. A 1945 graduate of Tufts College, he earned a bachelor of sacred theology degree in 1947 from Tufts School of Religion-Crane Theological School. As a student minister he served the Universalist church in Chatham, Massachusetts. Rev. Christensen and wife Edith moved into the church parsonage at 8 Division Street recently vacated by the Hersey family.

In January 1949 Rev. Christensen proposed and the church trustees approved a reorganization of First Universalist's governing structure, while still retaining the historic dual society and church arrangement. Officers would be a board chair, a treasurer, and a clerk. Trustees and/or officers would head six standing committees: finance and budget; education and service; publicity and extension; worship and music; hospitality and membership; and property and maintenance. Other committees could be formed or continue as necessary.

Highlights of church and society activities during 1949 included the every-member canvass in March; participation in Danbury community Lenten services at the Church of Christ; a visit by a group from the local Odd Fellows lodge to a service in April [note - several church members belonged to the Odd Fellows]; parish suppers; roof repairs and new linoleum on the kitchen floor upstairs; and a new sign with black background and gold lettering placed on the front lawn of the church. Services continued through July 17 with summer vacation to follow.

A contribution made to the denomination's Unified Appeal was earmarked for two endeavors, a Universalist church project in Germany and the Jordan Neighborhood House in Suffolk, Virginia. In October a communication was received from the state superintendent of Universalists in New York regarding something called the Jeremiah Smith Trust of the North Salem Universalist Church. The officers and trustees needed more information on this. And, in what may be called a sign of the times, a tenant in a neighboring Main Street building asked permission to place a television antenna in a tree in the rear of the church property. This request was tabled.

Early in 1950 trustees of First Universalist began a lengthy process of discussing, securing information and quotes, and approving installation of a new heating system for the church building. The existing system was old; it circulated hot air and was fueled by a coke and coal burning furnace. Finding suppliers of coke or coal was also becoming difficult. The decision was made to modernize, with installation of a new one pipe steam heating system with boiler and fueled by an oil burner. This would be a substantial undertaking both in labor and cost. The price tag of the installation exceeded \$4,400, this at a time when the total church operating budget was approximately \$5,000. A furnace fund campaign was started to raise money to help pay for the new system. In addition, a loan was sought at a local bank and funds from separate society accounts were tapped. Local plumbing contractor Joseph Mongillo was low bidder out of five and was selected to undertake the conversion. At mid-year Rev. Christensen announced he would be leaving Danbury to accept a call to a Universalist church in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. The Christensen family, now including an infant daughter, departed at the end of October after a well-attended going-away reception. Meanwhile, the search process was underway for a new minister. In late 1950 the board engaged the Rev. David O. Long, a 1946 graduate of Chicago Theological Seminary and then teaching history and philosophy at the University of Bridgeport, on an interim basis. Rev. Long served the Danbury church through the first half of 1951.

First Universalist Church, like the present-day Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury, had a history of dedicated and effective lay leadership. Many of the people involved were Universalists of long standing. Among those active in governance during the late 1940s and early 1950s were board chairs Wallace Parkhurst, William Wood, and Charles Walters; treasurer Frank Rollins; clerks Harry Lincoln and Helen Scott; trustees Arthur Olson, Sallie Rollins, Edith Ritton, Clifford Taylor, Ralph Jackson, and Perry Brick.

The year-long search for a settled minister concluded on November 1, 1951, with the Rev. Leon S. Simonetti's arrival for what became a four year pastorate. Born in 1901, Leon Simonetti was a 1924 graduate of Dickinson College with further study at Drew Theological Seminary and Columbia and Boston Universities. Ordained to the Methodist ministry in 1928, Rev. Simonetti fellowshipped with the Unitarians around 1932 and with the Universalists in 1940. In his more than two decades of ministry before coming to Danbury, Mr. Simonetti served both Unitarian and Universalist congregations in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.

Unfortunately, First Universalist board minutes after August 1951 to mid-1955 are missing and associated records are sparse. We know the Association of Universalist Women's (AUW) lay group was active as had been the local Universalist Youth Fellowship (UYF). A couple's club called MMT (for Meet Me There) organized social events, parish suppers, and fundraisers. What appears to have been a short-lived Men's Fellowship was also organized. First Universalist continued an active participant in the work of the Connecticut Universalist Convention. At the Convention's 123rd annual session in May 1955, which was held at the Danbury church, Wallace Parkhurst was elected president. The usual cycle of births, marriages, and deaths, christenings, child dedications, and funerals continued. The society gave up its long-time parsonage at 8 Division Street and purchased a house at 17 Homestead Avenue in Danbury. This new parsonage was home to Rev. Simonetti, wife Dorothy, and their three children. [See three notes below.]

Rev. Simonetti accepted a call to the Universalist church in Little Falls, New York, and left Danbury on August 31, 1955. A search commenced for a new minister and concluded quickly with a call to the Rev. Frederick L. Harrison, to serve at a salary of \$4,600 per year plus car allowance. In his forties, Mr. Harrison as a younger man worked for the railroad at the Boston Terminal Company (South Station). He began a second career in the Universalist ministry after graduating from Tufts in 1948 and Crane Theological School in 1949. Rev. Harrison personified a "new" Universalism, a direction being taken by the denomination and some of its local churches and ministers. Frederick Harrison was a founder and member of the Humiliati, a group of younger clergy who advocated an "emergent Universalism," a faith they earlier described as "functional, naturalistic, theistic, and humanistic" [see Notes...articles of May 2022 and May 2024].

[Note - AUW and UYF were national organizations with a local presence. UYF was a successor organization to Young People's Christian Union (YPCU). It would become Liberal Religious Youth (LRY) in 1953. MMT was a group in the Danbury society.]

[Note - State conventions were the primary governing bodies of the Universalist denomination within each state, prior to the formation in 1961 of the Unitarian Universalist Association.]

[Note - Among those christened was this writer, in April 1952.]

To be continued in July 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 July Comment –
Friday, June 21st.

