



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

DECEMBER 2024



FROM OUR MINISTER

Dear Beloveds,

Our theme for December is Presence, and even though winter is upon us, I'm thinking of surfing. Being in the present moment, being non-reactive and aware of yourself, your emotions, and your thoughts without letting them overwhelm you is a meditative practice that takes years to develop. No matter, the present moment is always a good time to begin a good practice. Breathe.

Many years ago when he and I were still young men, my cousin Matt, with whom I was close, moved to Hawaii. During the years he lived there, he learned to surf. He was always an athletic person and it was no surprise that he learned a new sport. And yet, as athletic as he was, he found surfing difficult. It took a lot of practice to get up on the board and then more to learn how to ride the wave. Learning to surf requires effort, concentration, dedication, and repetition. It's a practice. So too is being in the present moment.

In his book about mindfulness and mind-body holistic health *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, Jon Kabat-Zinn says "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." Life can be hectic enough under ordinary circumstances. Throw in the stress of the holiday season, and the anxiety about the health and future of our democracy, and the waves we're surfing have morphed from average-sized recreational waves to world class 80-footers like the ones off the coast of Nazaré, Portugal and Dungeons, South Africa.

The waves will most likely get rougher in the near future, but our first task isn't to solve all the problems, as urgent as they are. Our first task is to get out the board and learn to surf. Having a mindfulness practice is good in itself and at any time for most people, but right now, I invite you and encourage you to lean into your spiritual practices, especially your mindfulness practices. If you don't already have a mindfulness practice, I invite you and encourage you to begin one. Learning to stay in the present moment helps us battle anxiety, make better decisions, and be our best selves under difficult circumstances. If you're new to mindfulness, meditation, and remaining in the present moment, these resources might be a place to start:

- <https://www.freemindfulness.org/welcome>
- [21 Mindfulness Exercises and Activities for Adults from PostivePsychology.com](https://www.postivepsychology.com/21-mindfulness-exercises-and-activities-for-adults/)
- <https://www.mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started/>
- [UMass Memorial Center for Mindfulness](https://www.umass.edu/mindfulness)
- [Jon Kabat-Zinn's phone app](#)

This holiday season, give yourself the gift of being present to yourself and to the present moment.

Shine on,
Rev. Tony

SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE - “Prepare to be a Powerful Presence”

Quite often when someone is hurting, the best thing you can do is just be present to them. Sit with them, maybe hold a hand. Your presence is powerful and enough. You don't have to find a wise thing to say, you don't have to have answers. Just being there is good medicine.

Sometimes however, just being there isn't enough. When hatred and bigotry rear up in conversation, it may be necessary to speak up, speak out, and take action. We may be called to make our presence known. This month's theme is Presence, and my challenge to you is to prepare yourself to respond to hateful rhetoric. This includes making a plan for how you can respond and how you can't. Not all of us are able to speak up, intervene, or take action in a given situation. Different levels of privilege, personal emotional and physical health restrictions, differences in size, strength, and personality all contribute to what any individual can and can't do. There is something that everyone -- every single one of us -- can do, however. We can have a plan for how we will respond when the time comes. My challenge to you is to make that plan.

First of all, make a pledge to form a plan to speak up and speak out to the best of your ability and to your level of personal safety. This may require giving some serious thought to how far you're willing to go. It's never OK for someone to deny another person's humanity and dignity. We can't simply agree to disagree when the disagreement is about the equal humanity of any person.

Then, prepare some phrases so when you hear the hateful, hurtful words you know what you can say, you'll have the response ready. Here are some helpful phrases to practice so you're not at loss for words:

- That's not funny to me. Those types of jokes are not OK.
- I'm sorry, what was that you just said?
- I need a moment to process that.
- Please choose your words carefully and be respectful.
- That comment makes me uncomfortable.
- Maybe you don't realize the impact of your words.
- Can you explain to me what you mean by that?
- You may not realize it, but what you said can be interpreted as being (racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.)

Always assess the situation, and decide if this is a time you can speak up or if anyone speaking up might provoke a more violent response than just words. If you decide to speak up and challenge someone who is spouting hate and hurt, focus on their behavior, not their character. Make an appeal to their character, give them the benefit of the doubt that the hurtful words they've spoken don't reflect the goodness in their heart. Set a boundary and draw a line for good behavior such as “I don't let other adults speak to me that way,” or “I find that type of language offensive and hurtful, I do not want you to use it around me.” If you're in public, look for allies to draw into conversation.

Here are some practical resources for speaking up and speaking out when you hear hateful and harmful rhetoric:

- [The Southern Poverty Law Center web pages on Responding to Everyday Bigotry](#)
- [The Anti-Defamation League's Guide to Responding to Bigoted Words](#)
- [A PPTX presentation outlining Essential Partners' strategy for communicating across differences.](#)
- [NPR piece on How to Approach the Holidays with People You Deeply Disagree With](#)

As always, I'd love to hear from you about your experience with this challenge.



December’s theme is Presence and all services will relate to that idea in some way. Some services may differ slightly from these descriptions as details of the main presentation aren't finalized until a day or two before each service.

Sunday, December 1st Your Presence is the Present: Attention as an Act of Compassion Chris Bolster
 UConn Ph.D. (English) candidate Chris Bolster explores the power of presence as a radical act of compassion in our busy, distracted world. We will reflect on the gift of attentive listening, the comfort found in silent support, and the simple yet profound impact of truly being there for others. Through stories and shared moments of mindfulness, we will discover how offering our full presence can be a meaningful spiritual practice that connects us more deeply to ourselves and to those we love. UU Danbury’s Holiday Party will follow this service.

Sunday, December 8th The Repair of Patriarchy Rev. Tony Lorenzen
 Rev. Tony reflects on religion's treatment of gender, UU history on the inclusion of women, and the false information that’s perpetuated about biological and cultural gender. This is part of our Transgender Inclusion in the Congregation series.



Our Share the Plate offering will go to Renewal House. Renewal House provides transitional housing, case management, counseling and life skills enhancement to older men and women who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless so they may be empowered to restore their lives.

Sunday, December 15th Pageant Sunday Rev. Sierra-Marie Gerfao
 This year’s multigenerational pageant Sunday will feature a visit from our friend JETPIG who will bring another symbol for our chancel table. Our no-rehearsal pageant will be participatory and fun! Turn yourself over to some holiday magic as we sing carols and re-enact the Christmas story as told in Luke and Matthew in the Christian Bible. Come a little early if you are willing to take part in the story.

Sunday, December 22nd Winter is Coming Rev. Tony Lorenzen
 Rev. Tony leads a Winter Solstice celebration exploring how solstice themes prepare us for living through dark times in any season.

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December 24th at 4 pm UU Lessons and Carols
Join Revs. Tony Lorenzen and Sierra-Marie Gerfao as they lead a multigenerational service of short readings, stories, and songs, with highlights of Unitarians and Universalists in Christmas traditions.

Sunday, December 29th Presence Rev. Sierra-Marie Gerfao
Rev. Sierra-Marie wraps up our month on the theme of presence.



December 1st!

You are invited! After service on Sunday, December 1st we will have a holiday party for all ages, with music, food, and time together decorating the Fellowship Hall. Come celebrate with us!



Important Reminder: Mitten Tree Gifts Due December 8th

Please bring the gifts you have purchased for families of the Interfaith AIDS Ministry when you come to service on Sunday, December 8th. Wrapped gifts are helpful, but if you are not able to wrap your gift, the youth group can wrap it for you. 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, please email Sierra-Marie at dre@uudanbury.org.

From Our Director of Religious Education For Children and Youth, Rev. Sierra-Marie Gerfao



Upcoming in Children and Youth Ministries

Our nursery is open every Sunday for young children who prefer not to stay in the service with their adults. For children in preK-12th grade we offer Sunday programs.

- **Sunday, December 1st** - Regular Sunday morning programs followed by our multigenerational after-service holiday party
- **Sunday, December 8th** - Deadline for bringing in Mitten Tree gifts; Regular Sunday morning programs for preK-7th grade; Group for Parents of LGBTQIA+ People after service; 8th-12th grade game night
- **Sunday, December 15th** - Multigenerational Pageant Sunday (no other programs)
- **Sunday, December 22nd** - Regular Sunday morning programs
- **TUESDAY, December 24th** - Christmas Eve service 4PM
- **Sunday, December 29th** - Holiday Break (no programs)

What Has Been Happening in Family Ministries?

Family Ministry is not a program or set of programs! It is a broad congregational ministry that happens every week in a myriad of ways, not just through particular programs and explicit curricula but also through the implicit curricula of everything we do and how we do it together as a community and the null curricula of everything we don't do. It is relational and congregation-wide. **You are a part of family ministry at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury.**

That said, if you aren't involved in any of the programs we offer as a *part* of Family Ministry, consider reaching out to Rev. Sierra-Marie at dre@uudanbury.org and getting involved. We are staffed part-time. These programs happen only because the congregation makes them happen! Here are some of our program highlights from this year:

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We started the year with a bang, hosting a Family Fun Fair that drew in a good number of visitors!



The Senior High Youth Group moved their youth room downstairs in the Fellowship Hall because they have outgrown their room in the Cottage House and we wanted to make sure they were meeting in an accessible space. They also traveled to the shoreline together for a retreat by the ocean.



We began development of a new model of multigenerational services and just generally enjoyed time together in services on Sunday morning.



We had some Halloween fun with an all-ages Trunk or Treat as well as a youth trip to Shelton's Legends of Fear.



From the Board of Trustees

by Marie Dupree, Treasurer

Hi, all my friends at UUCD,

I have been a member of UUCD for 50+ years and have seen lots of changes!!!

I will turn 80 on December 9th. I lost my husband, Keith, on March 16th this year. We had been married for 59 years. We had a Celebration of Life service, which a lot of you attended in person or on Zoom. I really appreciate all the support that I received.

My two children were educated in the UU principles and still carry these principles as the core of their values. My son was married twice, and each time it was officiated by a UU minister. I have five grandchildren. My daughter who is not married has Jocelyn who is 17 years old and a senior in high school. My son has four children: the twins (a daughter and a son) by his first wife, who are twenty years old and attend UCONN as juniors; and two daughters with his second wife - one is 13 and the other is 10. They attend Hudson Montessori School. Although my grandchildren have not attended any UU congregations, they have been brought up with UU values! We also go to Star Island off the coast of New Hampshire each year to the "Life On A Star" summer program!

I have been Treasurer of UUCD a bunch of times. When I first became Treasurer, the budget was \$16,000. Today it is \$337,000 with a planned deficit of \$16,035. We are still struggling. It is a challenge, but the congregation is very supportive. I have the support of Finance Chair Carl Tichler, Peter Horton and Margaret Henderson. Sherry Kyriacou as Administrator is fantastic and saves me a lot of time.

I have been Board President once!

We, my family and I, are proud that we are UU's. I am proud that I'm a member of UUCD! This congregation has been very supportive of our marriage! I attended the UUCD Women's Retreat and have been involved with the UUA and the old "Metropolitan District" which our congregation was a part of.

Being a UU has given purpose to my life. I do not know where I would be today without UU's.

Upcoming Events



MAGPIE

Since 1973, Terry Leonino and Greg Artzner have brought their unique sound and remarkable versatility to audiences everywhere, featuring traditional and vintage Americana to contemporary and stirring original compositions.

With two strong voices in harmony and superb instrumental arrangements, their sound is powerful and moving. Award-winning recording artists, singers, songwriters, musical historians, playwrights, actors and social activists, Terry and Greg are proud to be, as Pete Seeger said of them, "...more links in the chain", dedicating their lives and music to leaving this world a better place.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2024 – 4PM

www.musicattheridge.org

24 Clapboard Ridge Road

Danbury, CT

*\$25 in person/\$20 streaming
& tickets at door (as available)
at same price as online*



In-person and live-streaming
tickets at [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com)





UUCD Men Conversing over Coffee meets on the second Wednesday of each month. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, December 11th at 10:00 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall Lower Level. For more information contact **Jeff Asher** or **Joe Gillotti**.



Saturday, December 14th - **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 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 gratefully accepted.

From the *Caring Circle*



Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Donna Lawrence on is the contact person for December.

LouAnn Heller is the assistant.

If you have a need, please contact **Donna**.

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

From the *Social Action Council*

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On **Saturday, December 7**, some members of Soup Kitchen Team C (Team Leaders **Judy Lacker and Rose Schlemmer, John Miglietta, Jane Leff, Randy Becker, Gary Winn and Andrea Andersen**) 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 ddhsandwiches@gmail.com. We can all be an important part of the fight to end hunger in our community!



Our team of Dorothy Day volunteers needs new members! 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 November 2024...

The year 1958 was a watershed for First Universalist Church (now Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury). It was the first full year of the pastorate of Rev. Gaston Carrier, and in January Mrs. Mary Carrier became director of religious education. Three attainable goals were being pursued: 1) for First Universalist to become a local leader in liberal religion; 2) for the continuing development of the religious education program; and 3) for the improvement of the church building and grounds. More visitors attended Sunday morning services and membership increased (six people had signed the membership book in 1957 and twenty more in 1958). The Sunday school, with nine classes registered, outgrew existing facilities. A major construction project, partly underwritten by an ambitious fundraising campaign, transformed the church basement into classroom and chapel space. [See "Notes..." articles of September, October, and November 2024.]

Still, routine matters and immediate problems had to be addressed. Repairs and repainting after the sanctuary fire of November 1957 were completed. The church oil burner required work as did some windows in the building. The sidewalk in front of the church was repaired and lawn reseeding done in the spring. The parsonage needed work also, including furnace repairs and removal of a dead tree.

The church organ, in service since 1893, was in poor condition with major repairs estimated to cost at least \$1,000. On top of this, long-time organist Adelaide Grabert fell ill and a substitute organist, at \$10 per Sunday, was recruited to fill in for a time. Two local groups, the Humane Society and the Mental Health Association, applied and were approved to hold monthly meetings at the church.

In April, the board of trustees voted the church take a summer recess from June 29 to August 24, with the exception of Sunday, July 27. This July date was when First Universalist was scheduled to broadcast a Sunday morning service on Danbury's WLAD radio.

Earlier in the year, Rev. Carrier recommended to parishioners a book by Clinton Lee Scott titled *Religion Can Make Sense*. The board authorized purchase of enough copies to give one to each new family joining the church. On October 25, the Connecticut Universalist Convention held its fall conference at the Danbury church from noon to 7:30 pm. An outside caterer provided box lunches, and a buffet dinner for attendees (at \$1.85 per person) was served at the Elks hall across the street. Among the afternoon's activities was a religious education workshop attended by several local members.

Rev. Carrier, at church board meetings, usually gave a summary of his monthly activities. Typical was his report for November which included: seventeen parish calls, four Sunday services plus a service at the United Jewish Center, and five church school services [see note below]. Also, during the fall, Rev. Carrier led what were characterized as "regional" gatherings, in Brookfield and Kent, for people interested in learning about Universalism.

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A very special event was held at the Danbury church in June of 1958. Fond memories remained of Rev. Dr. Harry Adams Hersey and his ministry at First Universalist, after his retirement and move to Massachusetts a decade earlier [see note below]. Many members of the church and people in the larger Danbury community warmly recalled his pastorate (1930-48), the Hersey family's long residence in town, and Harry Hersey's engagement in a variety of community activities. On Sunday, June 22, following morning worship, the large meeting and social room on the first floor of the church building, adjoining the sanctuary, was dedicated as The Harry Adams Hersey Room.

Participating in the formal dedication was Lottie Champlin Hersey, Dr. Hersey's widow, who offered a prayer and read a tribute prepared by the couple's youngest son, William Hersey, also present. Harry and Lottie's daughter, Helen Hersey Dick, and son-in-law, Rev. Robert Dick, and three grandchildren were in attendance. Rev. Gaston Carrier led the regular 11 am service, which was broadcast on WLAD. Soloists were Clarence Murphy and Pauline Olmstead. Rev. Dick, then associate minister at Church of the Redeemer, Universalist, in West Hartford, preached the sermon, "On the Shoulders of the Past." In his presentation, Rev. Dick quoted the following from a sermon Dr. Hersey delivered on the occasion of his 75th birthday, on April 22, 1945, as World War II was nearing an end.

"Today I have more faith in man, more faith in youth, more faith in God, more faith in the influence of the church, more faith in the deathlessness of human life, more eagerness for truth to be known, more interest in life, more enthusiasm for living than I have ever had. I know I shall die in sight of the Promised Land and you will, and perhaps our grandchildren will, but someday mankind will enter it to live in fellowship, brotherhood, prosperity and peace....Someday mankind will know the truth and the truth will make them free. Someday the knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. So as I leave my 75th birthday behind I thank God for my rich and happy life, for my wife and children and descendants, for my many friends and good neighbors and fellow-citizens as I have known them in many places through many years...."

[Note - First Universalist's Sunday morning service began at 11 am. The children's service and Sunday school started at 10:30, the same time as the adults' coffee (half) hour.]

[Note - The "Notes..." article of September 2023 offered an overview of Harry Adams Hersey's life and career. He was born and lived his early years in Dorchester, Massachusetts, and passed away at home in Somerville, Massachusetts, on October 11, 1950, at age eighty. Dr. Hersey prepared an interesting series of reminiscences about life in Dorchester in the period 1870-1890. It can be seen on the website of the Dorchester Atheneum at <https://www.dorchesteratheneum.org/project/harry-adams-hersey-1870-1951/>.

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” for LGBTQ+ people. This year we are engaging in a Trans Inclusion program of education and action as we live out our UU values of Love, Equity, Justice and Transformation. 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 13th.**

