



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

NOVEMBER 2024



FROM OUR MINISTER

“Mending”

Dear Beloveds,

Some years ago, the stitching on a favorite pair of slippers let go. I noticed when I nearly stepped out of it while carrying the laundry. “Damn!” I thought, “I need to get some new slippers.” I stepped out of the slippers, put the laundry basket on the bed and began folding the laundry. Then I remembered something. “Wait! I don’t have to throw the slippers away. I can mend it! And I did. Instead of creating trash and spending money on slippers, I kept the slippers and spent a few dollars on a set of needles and various types of thread. This was my first opportunity to take up a spiritual practice I had learned about a few weeks prior at a workshop called “Mending Church,” led by the Rev. Laura Everett at a Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship retreat at First Unitarian Church in Worcester, MA. Rev. Everett had spoken about mending as a spiritual practice and made connections to church, faith communities, and ministry, noting “*the metaphors are rich and tactile.*”

And indeed they are. I need mending, you need mending, the church needs mending, the country needs mending, the world needs mending, just about everything needs mending. And all of us have the ability to mend. We can all learn to mend. Rev. Everett explained that just as we have actually lost the art of mending clothes in our culture, we have in many ways also lost the art of mending ourselves, our relationships, our families, and our communities. Rev. Everett writes (<https://religionnews.com/2019/04/10/the-spirituality-of-mending/>):

We learn to look for the places that need repair. We discover holes at the elbows and fraying at the cuffs. We see stress at the seams. We notice the places of friction and instability often need the most repairs. Sometimes we find that the garment was not well created to begin with and thus, prone to tearing. We learn to look carefully and ask, “Is this worth fixing?” I find myself asking this often about my neighborhood, my city, my church, and my country.

The act of physically stitching my slipper back together brought me to that place where the Spirit teaches me lessons. I couldn’t find an exact matching thread, so I used something close in color. My life is like this, I thought, I am not always a perfect match and I repair myself as best I can. I am not like I used to be. I am worn and used – I’ve been through parenting, divorce, depression, and cancer. I’m full of patches and mends that don’t perfectly match. I am not the shiny new shoe or garment I once was, but who is? Like my slipper, I am worth repairing. Heck, I love my odd little slippers, they’re warm and cozy and broken in to fit my feet. I love them the way they are, even with the repair stitching that doesn’t quite match. Sometimes I get mad at myself for not being a famous designer brand three piece suit. Over and over I have to get used to the fact that I am an off the rack jeans and cotton T-shirt. That’s who I am. And not a top brand at that. But I’m me and me is enough. Worthy. Lovable. And when I break down, I am worth fixing. “Mending,” Rev. Everett says, “is a validation of worth.”

The looming presidential election rents our minds and hearts with anxiety. Civil discourse is ripped apart and needs mending. The Supreme Court needs mending. Congress needs mending. The constitution and democracy need mending. Health care needs mending, reproductive freedom needs mending, education needs mending, the social safety net needs mending, immigration policy needs mending, Gaza needs mending, Ukraine needs mending. So much seems ripped apart, worn out, and broken.

But it's worth mending. All of it. Just like you and me. I can't afford to buy new things all the time. I need to mend and repair. I can't make a new me when I feel broken, I must work on mending and repairing myself. I can't afford to tear down my country and culture and start from zero, so I am going to go about mending it as best as I can. I hope you'll join me.

Shine on,

Rev. Tony



Calling all Hospitable Folks of UUCD

Do you love coming to UUCD? Does it feel like home in some ways?

Do you want others to feel as welcome as you do when they arrive?

Join us in the Cottage at **9:00 a.m. on Sunday, November 10th** for bagels and coffee.

Let us give a big thank you to those who already greet at UUCD.

Let us talk about pointers to bring more of you on board to be the best hosts you can be at UUCD on Sunday mornings.

Be the first smile our members and guests see on Sunday morning, and make everyone feel welcome!

ALL ARE WELCOME! Please RSVP to **Lisa Horton** so we know how many bagels to get.

SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE - The Mending Meditation

Our theme this month is REPAIR and my challenge to you for the month is something I call the “Mending Meditation.” It has three parts and each part involves a different type of mending or repair work: 1. Mend something that physically or mechanically needs repairing. 2. Mend something about yourself. 3. Mend something in the world around you.

First is to find something that physically or mechanically needs repairing and fix it. Some things will be beyond most of us. If you’re not a car mechanic, or HVAC technician or computer IT person, perhaps look for something you can do already or you may be able to learn with a lesson or two from a family member, a friend or YouTube. Manageable repair tasks might be things such as a sock with a hole in it, a pair of jeans with a rip or tear, a squeaky door hinge, a flat bicycle tire, or even a dead battery in a television remote. The physical act of fixing it yourself is a meditation. Be present to it. What did you have to do to mend something that was broken? Did you need to learn a new skill? Was it frustrating? When you fixed it and it was repaired, how did you feel?

Next, repair something about yourself. No one is perfect. There is probably something about you that could use a tune-up. This could be something physical, something emotional, or something spiritual. It might involve your physiology or mental health. It might be an attitude or a skill. Perhaps you’re already doing this. Those of us living with physical or mental illnesses engage this type of mending daily. Maybe choose something about being nicer to a family member or friend who gets on your nerves. Maybe finally learn to use Google Docs or go back to yoga class or take up tai-chi.

Finally, do something to repair the world. Tikun olam is Hebrew for “world repair.” Although the term is found in the Mishnah (compilation of oral Jewish law circa 200 C.E.), since the 1950s it has come to mean doing social justice work in more liberal Jewish circles. How you repair the world takes many forms. Sometimes it’s as simple as acts of loving kindness toward family, friends, and neighbors. Sometimes it’s more involved such as volunteering for a social, racial, or environmental justice organization. It could be as simple as voting or donating money to a worthy charitable cause.

The challenge is to practice each of these three types of repair this month and reflect on the commonalities and differences of these three ways to mend things. Rev. Laura Everett, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Council of Churches says the spiritual practice metaphors of mending are rich and tactile. Experience these for yourself this month. As you do reflect on how mending something, including yourself, is as Rev. Everett reminds us “a validation of worth.”

As always, if you take on the challenge, I’d love to hear about your experience with it.

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



Upcoming in Family Ministries

- **Sunday, November 3rd** - This is a multigenerational service Sunday (no other programs)
- **Sunday, November 10th** - Sunday morning programs for preK-7th grade; Possible launch of the Mitten Tree; 8th-12th grade game night
- **Sunday, November 17th** - This is a multigenerational service Sunday (no other programs)
- **Sunday, November 24th** - Regular Sunday morning programs

Sunday Services

Sunday, November 3: All Souls - Bring photos or mementos of your deceased loved ones, whether they have died recently or long ago. In this multigenerational service, we will remember and honor them.

Sunday, November 17: J is for Justice - People of all ages, please join Jerry Phelps and Revs. Tony and Sierra-Marie for a multigenerational music and ritual-centered celebration of justice.

New Group for Caregivers of LGBTQIA+ Young People

Parents and guardians of LGBTQIA+ young people, please join us in gathering on the **Second Sunday of every month at 11:30AM** for mutual support and celebration of our kids. Our November meeting will take place on **November 10**.

Mitten Tree



It is almost time for our annual Mitten Tree program, which benefits families of the Interfaith Aids Ministry of Greater Danbury (IAM). Here is how it works: a little later in November (possible date November 10th), the children and youth ministry team will invite you to take home a paper “mitten” from our mitten tree. Each mitten has a gift request. After purchasing the gift, you will bring the gift back to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury. In early December, we will take all the gifts over to IAM.

Holiday Tree

Want to pick out this year’s holiday tree for the Fellowship Hall? Funds provided! You just pick it out and bring it in. Don’t want to do it alone? Get friends from the congregation to join you. Contact Sierra-Marie at dre@udanbury.org.

Save the Dates!

December is a busy month with lots of holiday festivities. Please consider saving these dates in your calendar:

- **Sunday, December 1st or 8th (date TBD) - All-congregation holiday party**
Stick around after the service for food, music, and a chance to make crafts and help decorate our holiday tree
- **Sunday, December 15th - No Rehearsal Christmas Pageant**
Come early to service on this Sunday and grab some costuming or a prop. There will be parts for anyone who wants one.
- **Sunday, December 24th - Christmas Eve Service**
Our Christmas Eve service will take place at 5PM.

From the Board of Trustees

by Peter Horton

Can You Hear Us?

One of the items that the UUCD Board spends a lot of time on is how the congregation communicates to each other and with the greater community. Can you hear us? Are we efficient and effective with our communications? Here are some things to ponder:

Sesame Street broke ground decades ago because they followed the model of modern advertising, information was bundled into approximately one minute segments. As we know, it was a huge success. The trend of condensing messages has continued. Experts recommend that a message on Facebook be no longer than **40** characters. Not 40 words, 40 characters. Wow!

What about our signage on Clapboard Ridge? At 40 mph (the average speed on Clapboard Ridge) letters should be at least 6 inches high and no more than 20 - 30 characters. Everything else is a blur.

UUCD's *Comment* is cherished by a number of our congregants but, sadly, ignored by many. 200 emails get sent out regarding the *Comment*. 70% of those emails are opened. And a small group of folks actually click on the hyperlinks. Even more revealing, less than 10% of the readers open the full pdf document and those folks are usually the authors of the articles in the *Comment*. More than likely the pdf version of the *Comment* will be discontinued sometime next summer. The *Comment* articles and messages will appear exclusively on our website.

And what about social media? Currently we have weekly posts on Facebook and Instagram (thank you Melody Levy for the amazing and attention-grabbing visual design). Do you know you can "share" the weekly Facebook posts with your own Facebook followers? Very few of us do. Are we reluctant to broadcast our religious preferences? Maybe.

We'll never be done talking about and strategizing on ways to communicate. One thing is for sure, we are looking ahead of us, not behind.

Upcoming Events



GREG GREENWAY

Born in the shadows of the now famous fallen statues of Richmond, VA, Greg Greenway moved to Boston for its rich Folk Music tradition. He has since become one of its most unique and superlative emissaries. Musically raised on the magically percussive right hand of Richie Havens, and the flowing lyricism of Eric Andersen, these seminal influences became the DNA of his own unique and continuing growth. He has blended them into a multi-instrumental, genre crossing style - the never-ending process of a musical omnivore.

He has played at such notable places as Carnegie Hall, he's been heard on NPR's All Things Considered and Mountain Stage. He considers the height of his achievements as having "Driving in Massachusetts" played on Car Talk.

His eight year collaboration with Pat Wictor and Joe Jencks as Brother Sun, reached thousands of fans with their intricate three part harmonies being heard in festivals and concert halls across the US and Canada. They produced two #1 CDs for the years of 2013 and 2016 on the Folk DJ list. His newest project with his beloved friend of 35 years, Reggie Harris, is a musical presentation on Race in America called Deeper Than The Skin. It is the bringing together of both of their stories, born three days apart, DNA passing through the same portal of Richmond, VA. One African-American, one White, together they convey a quintessential American story.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 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



Saturday, November 2nd – 6:00 p.m.

UU Danbury is returning a Live, In-Person Auction this year! Lots of goodies, lots of FUN - we are looking for this major fundraiser to be HUGE success!



Saturday, November 9th - 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.



UUCD Men Conversing over Coffee meets on the second Wednesday of each month. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, November 13th at 10:00 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall Lower Level. For more information contact **Jeff Asher** or **Joe Gillotti**.

Examining Personal Stress in a Chaotic World – Rescheduled for November 17th

The 45-minute Sunday program will allow interested adults to share their concerns and feelings about stressful events they may be experiencing. We all have lots of stress, personal, family, political and so on. After the period spent sharing, we will discuss several time-tested solutions to help dissipate the sometimes-uncontrollable stressful emotions that can have such a powerful negative effect on people. These techniques can also help to bring greater clarity to a persons thinking. This meeting is scheduled for Sunday, November 17th at 11:15 a.m. in the Cottage House Library. **Joe Gillotti** will be the facilitator. Childcare will be provided, but please RSVP to Joe for that by November 13th.

Ministry/Team News

From the *Buildings and Grounds Team*

by Keith Henderson, Chair

What's New in Buildings and Grounds?

First, we have rearranged some more furniture. The middle classroom in the lower level of Fellowship Hall has now become the new "**Youth Room.**" That, in turn has displaced the "**Spirit Play Room**" which is now located at the end of the hall where the small meeting room used to be. The large conference table from that room is now located in the Cottage House Kitchen, which is now designated as our newest "**Conference Room!**" The large Cottage House room at the south end of the first floor is now designated as the "**Library**" and currently serves as the home for Chalice Circles. In each room you may also notice a few new chairs that are designed to safely and comfortably seat large heavy people.

Next, outside you will notice that while we filled cracks and sealed the weathered pavement we also took the opportunity to improve the striping. Perhaps most importantly, we painted four of the curbs white so that they can be better seen at night. We also added two handicap parking spots at new locations so you won't have to struggle up or down a hill to use them.

Finally, we are in the process of building two picnic tables outside the lower level of Fellowship Hall. These tables are made with recycled plastic decking for the contact surfaces and they are designed to be easy to access for people with mobility issues. If you would enjoy helping with this project, let Keith know and we'll find an hour sometime to work on it together!

Many other things, such as pruning, planting, painting, and planning are also in progress. Just speak up if you'd like to become involved in any of our various B&G activities.

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 November and 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, November 2nd, some members of Soup Kitchen Team B (Team leaders **Bruni Edwards & Yvonne Ruddy-Stein, Joanne Davidson, Parr Family, Bonansinga/Twombly Family, Haffner Family**) 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 October 2024...

We begin this month's article with a look back to early 1957. The board of trustees of First Universalist Church (now Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury), at its February meeting, discussed the current arrangement and capacity of the church building's Sunday school space. Two large, open rooms, one upstairs and one down, were available for Sunday morning religious education activities. About forty children were enrolled in the church's RE program at the beginning of 1957 (by year's end enrollments had increased to fifty-eight). The board voted to have moveable partitions constructed; these would make for easy separation of various age groups and/or classes. The board also addressed the possibility of creating classrooms in what was then the building's large and mostly unfinished basement at 347 Main Street.

Fast forward to January 1958. A committee was formed, with Rev. Gaston Carrier's continuing encouragement, to look into building religious education space in the church basement. This group included Paul Hull, Perry Brick, Bertram Stroock, Albert Ahlgrim, Frank Keaney, and Mary Carrier. Arthur Wilson represented the board of trustees. The committee went to work, including conducting interviews with three architect candidates. A Mr. Stahl was chosen. Bertram Stroock offered to donate the architect's \$400 fee. [See note below.]

Project requirements were determined, a survey of the basement was made, and preliminary plans were drawn. Ideas and feedback from interested parties were sought, for example, the church school teachers made suggestions regarding new classrooms. Bids for construction work came from the following: Dolan Construction Company, Inc. \$19,583; American Electric Construction Co., Inc. \$1,107; Joseph Mongillo for plumbing and heating \$2,556; Federal Welding Service, Inc. \$390. These bids made the estimated cost of the proposed new Sunday school space \$23,636, equal to approximately \$250,000 today.

This would be a significant commitment, financial and otherwise, for First Universalist Church, in a year when the annual budget was around \$10,000, with regular pledge income expected to be a little over \$9,000. Nevertheless, a special parish meeting gave its unanimous consent to proceed. Securities owned by the church might be used, in whole or in part, to finance construction or be pledged against an outside loan or loans. It was decided to mount a new one year pledge campaign specifically to raise money for the Sunday school project. The initial goal was \$5,000 in donations.

Herbert Becker was named chairman of this fundraiser, to be assisted by a pledge committee that included board chair Joseph Farris and ten other congregational leaders. Building out the new space began, with oversight and supervision of this work in the hands of Perry Brick and Arthur Scott. Final plans called for creating eight new classrooms, a kindergarten area, and a children's chapel. The classrooms would be equipped with chairs, tables, and bookcases; the chapel with a large table placed in front, ten benches for children's seating, and a small organ [see note below]. Immediate access to this church school area would be from an existing stairway inside the south side entrance of the church building and through an entrance/exit in the rear

Construction progressed through the summer and fall of 1958. In October, the board authorized a committee of three, Joseph Farris, Perry Brick, and Wallace Parkhurst, to make arrangements for a bank loan of up to \$25,000, to be taken as needed, and backed by First Universalist's investment portfolio.

In the meantime, the church's religious education program continued to grow under the guidance of committee chair Francis Albert and director of religious education Mary Carrier. Enrollment had increased to sixty-five by March and seventy-two a month later, almost double what it had been a year before. During these years, First Universalist used learning and teaching materials developed through the vision of Unitarian and Universalist religious educators like Sophia Lyon Fahs and Angus MacLean. These resources (the books are now mostly out of print) introduced children to themes like the universal qualities of religious experience; religion and science; how religion is relevant in today's world; and religious values in home and community [see note below]. At least four additional teachers were needed on Sunday mornings and the lack of classroom space, pending completion of construction, was acute.

The junior high youth group was learning about crafts and hobbies, including wood carving and leather tooling. The young people played baseball in April and a cake sale was planned for May. Later in the year the group studied French and "learned semaphores." The senior high youth group was responsible for First Universalist's morning service on Youth Sunday, March 11, and also that month took part in a program "Many Paths to the One God." In April, the teenagers visited the Vedanta Society in New York. That spring, the senior high group voted to join Liberal Religious Youth (LRY), the combined continental youth group of the still separate Universalist and Unitarian denominations. A meeting with their counterparts from the Bethel Congregational Church and the United Jewish Center was planned, with refreshments and a record hop to follow. A conversation with Mormon elders, a party at the Carrier home, bowling with teens from the Westport Unitarian church, and painting the new Sunday school rooms were activities for the coming months.

Construction of First Universalist's new church school was mostly complete by late fall. Children and teachers used the space for the first time on Sunday, December 1, 1958. A formal dedication ceremony and public open house took place on March 8, 1959, following the regular 11 am service and a ham and turkey luncheon buffet prepared by the ladies of the church.

[Note - "Mr. Stahl" was likely Frederick A. Stahl, a young architect who had recently opened an office at 345 1/2 Main St., next door to the church. Frederick Stahl's older brother, Dr. William M. Stahl, Jr., at that time conducted a surgical practice at 345 Main St. Frederick A. Stahl went on to become a prominent architect in Boston.]

[Note - The table from the children's chapel has been stored in the basement of the house at Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury, along with the surviving benches that are now stacked and used as shelves in the "cage" area of the same basement. The small organ, long gone, was donated to the Sunday school by Melvin and Lee Green, proprietors of The Play Pen, a juvenile furniture and toy store in Danbury.]

[Note - This writer, then of elementary school age, recalls, for example, the Martin and Judy stories and such material as *From Long Ago and Many Lands*; *Beginnings of Earth and Sky*; and *Jesus: The Carpenter's Son*.] To be continued in December 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 December Comment –
Friday, November 15th.

