



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

JANUARY 2025



FROM OUR MINISTER

“Religion is the Story We Tell”

Dear Beloveds,

One way to approach religion is to think of religion as the story we tell ourselves about who we are. This includes the story of where we come from, where we’re going and who we should be. The story is grounding. It places us in time and history as well as in relationship to life. The story gives us direction in terms of relationships to people, places, and things and in terms of ethics and how we should behave.

Many of us became Unitarian Universalists because the story of a former religion no longer worked for us. The story no longer made sense or was no longer believable. It failed to give a sense of place, purpose, and identity. So, in a search for new story, we found ourselves here in Unitarian Universalism, a religion in which you might mix and match stories and swap them in and out of your sacred canon.

Although the number of people who claim no official religious identification continues to grow, people still look for the defining stories that religion and its sacred texts have provided humanity for a great part of history. Many of our contemporary fantasy and science fiction stories and franchises serve this function for some of us, with “scriptures” and tales as familiar to adherents as the Bible or the parable of the Good Samaritan are to others.

The Lord of the Rings is perhaps the most well-known “Hero’s Journey” story of our time. Gollum is what happens to the human soul when its motivation is misplaced, solely internal, narcissistic, and consumptive - it becomes isolated, shriveled, unable to relate to others, scheming, and mistrustful. Among the famous quotes from this scripture are teachings of the wizard Gandalf - “Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends.”

Star Trek and its various iterations are a bible-like collection of iterations and versions providing a grounding story and way of looking at life with chapter and verse being replaced by season and episode. One of my favorite parables from this corpus is “Darmok and Jalag at Tanagra” from Star Trek: The Next Generation, season 5, episode 3. It deals with the inability to communicate due to lack of shared cultural and historical perspective. In this episode Captain Picard runs into the commander of an alien craft whose race speaks only through allusions and quotes from history and literature - *their* history and literature, of which even the Star Fleet computers are ignorant. The phrase “Darmok and Jalad at Tanagra” is now common code among geeks for talking past each other due to not having a shared history and background.

(continued)

Unitarian Universalists have a story that tells us we are people who center Love as a motivating and sacred force and value justice, equity, transformation, pluralism, interdependence, and generosity. We seek to build community, pursue personal spiritual paths, and work for justice. We come from a long history of human beings who have valued human spirituality and human intellect, sought wisdom from various sources, valued compassion and kindness, and sought human dignity and respect for all people. Some of this history took the form of our ancestor religions Unitarian Christianity and Universalist Christianity. As we move into the beginning of this new year, I invite you deeper into the story of Unitarian Universalism and into a deeper exploration of your own personal story.

Shine on,
Rev. Tony

SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE: A Personal Growth Exercise - “SWAP STORIES”

Our theme for January is **STORY** and my challenge to you this month is to Swap Stories with someone. Swap the Story of your life with someone who doesn't know it. Your partner for this probably won't be your life partner or spouse or closest friend because they will most likely know too much of your story too well already. The most difficult part of this challenge is finding a partner. The partner you want to find for this challenge is someone you know, but don't know well enough that they really know your story. People you know from church can be great for this exercise, or perhaps someone you know from another group or endeavor such a gym acquaintance, a distance relative you're friendly with but perhaps all you know about their story is the parts you share. If you can't find a partner or don't know how to ask, get in touch with me and I'll match you up with another person who is looking for a partner.

Once you've found a partner, agree on how you'll share your stories as well as when and where. You might choose to share them over a meal or coffee or even via Zoom. You could write your stories and swap them to read. You could make videos and share them. You might get very creative and tell your story via poetry, or painting, or drawing. Musicians might write a song. You could make a collage or storyboard. There's no “wrong” way to tell your story.

After you've shared stories, and hopefully asked each other questions about your respective stories, reflect together on what it was like. What was it like to hear your partner's story? What really grabbed you about their story and the way they told it? What did you find yourself asking about and wanting to know more about their story? What was it like for you to “tell” (or write or draw, etc.) your story? What did you learn about your own story and how you usually tell it by telling it to this person who didn't fully know it?

As always, if you undertake this challenge, I'd love to know how you did with it, and if you made a new friend.



January’s theme is Story 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, January 5th Grassroots Jeremy Klein Farrell
 Jeremy Klein Farrell, the lead organizer of Justice Southbury in Southbury, CT will reflect on how an afternoon standing outside decrying the murder of George Floyd turned into a community organizing effort that continues to grow stronger.

Jeremy Klein Farrell is a queer, autistic, Jewish activist. He is an Autism Advocate and public speaker professionally. He is an admin for Not Just Us, which holds rallies around the state. Jeremy is also coordinator for Justice Southbury, holding rallies for 235 consecutive weeks, where he has learned the true power of love, presence, and persistence. He has also pushed back on LGBTQ+ focused book bans.



Our Share the Plate offering will go to the UUA Disaster Relief Fund. Your donation allows the UUA to respond flexibly to current disaster needs as well as to new emergency situations as they arise. We are at the lowest level of available funds since we began this project in 2017 due to the recent hurricanes. Our Disaster Relief Fund is part of a covenant between the UUA and congregations, between congregations who give generously and those in need, and with our community partners. Through this work, we are able to embody our faith and values.

Sunday, January 12th More than Two Sides to Every Story Rev. Tony Lorenzen
 Rev. Tony Lorenzen reflects on moving beyond binary thinking as part of our Trans Inclusion in the Congregation series.

A **Pathways to Membership** class for newcomers looking to join the congregation follows the service at 11:30 a.m. in the cottage.

Sunday, January 19th

Why Tell a Story?

Benjamin Lowry

Yale Divinity School seminarian Benjamin Lowry reflects on telling stories and how we can use them to make sense of our lives.

Benjamin Lowry is a first-year MDiv student at Yale Divinity School. After growing up in Boston, he studied geology in Minnesota, taught high school in Wisconsin, and directs a summer camp in New Hampshire. At YDS, he is studying how religious communities provide social support and stability and hospital chaplaincy.

Sunday, January 26th

Stories of Transformation

Revs. Tony Lorenzen and Sierra-Marie Gerfao

Revs. Tony and Sierra-Marie lead an all ages service on the moments of transformation that help define our stories.



Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Joan Campbell is the contact person for January and February.

Andrea Anderson is the assistant.

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

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

Parents/Caregivers Group

We have a group for parents and caregivers of LGBTQIA+ individuals of any age. The group meets monthly. We support one another and celebrate our kids. If you know a parent or caregiver in the larger community who might benefit from our group, please share Rev. Sierra-Marie’s contact information and let her know to expect to hear from this person.

Calling Scientists!

Are you a scientist or do you know a scientist whose work is motivated by and informed by a sense of awe and wonder? If so, please get in touch with Rev. Sierra-Marie who has an idea for a possible multigenerational “awe and wonder” event series we could do over the late winter/spring.

From the Board of Trustees

by Annie Senol, Vice-President

The Common Council Meeting will be held after the Sunday Service on January 26, 2025.

Our Common Council Meeting gives us an opportunity for members of the Board and the chairs of the teams and ministries of UU Danbury to deal with matters that affect multiple constituencies, including sharing information, hearing and discussing concerns and seeking input from a wide cross section of our community. We use this meeting to foster better communication within UU Danbury and build greater engagement with those who volunteer on our teams.

The Board wants to thank every team and ministry leader for the work they do as UUCD continues to grow as a spiritual source of light and love. We look forward to being together. This is a chance to find out what's needed, what we'd like to restart or do differently, and what we'd like to build together.

Please send any agenda items you have to Annie Senol, Board Vice-President.

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 from 9:50-11:10AM 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, January 5** - Regular Sunday morning programs
- **Sunday, January 12th** - Regular Sunday morning programs for preK-7th grade and Evening Game Night for 8th-12th Grade
- **Sunday, January 19th** - Regular Sunday morning programs (Rev. Sierra-Marie is away)
- **Sunday, January 26th** - Multigenerational Sunday Service (no programs)

Upcoming Events



De-Greening the Fellowship Hall

On Sunday, January 5th (the day before Three Kings Day), please gather after the service and help take down the holiday decorations in the Fellowship Hall. We'll especially need some strong individuals to move the large artificial tree, once disassembled, into the Cottage House basement. Many hands make light work! Thanks in advance for the assistance of those who can provide it.



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



Please note date change to Saturday, January 18th - **Suze Shaner** and **Dan Brodax** are facilitating **Movies with a Message**, using **Spiritual Cinema's** movie shorts 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.



George Mallis & Louise Coombs

Louise Coombs may well be the brightest young folk-oriented artist to emerge from Nashville in many a year. Her pure, expressive voice delivers the songs with the perfect balance of expressiveness and direction. She brings a pleasing mix of personal songs and songs outside of her own life, such as songs set in the Civil War and one about a young girl leaving home for the larger world in 1920 and coming to grief.

“In my book, Coombs song ‘Singing My Heart Out’ alone is worth buying her CD.” –
 Rich Warren — WFMT-FM “Midnight Special” Chicago

George Mallis is a piano based Singer/Songwriter writing since his teen years. Influenced by the likes of Joni Mitchell and others, George sings his melodic songs of love, longing along with other subjects. Currently he is in the studio working on his 4th full length album of original songs titled 'Within These Walls' which will be out in 2025. George also hosts a podcast featuring Singer/Songwriters.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 5, 2025 – 4PM



www.musicattheridge.org
 24 Clapboard Ridge Road
 Danbury, CT



\$25 in person/\$20 streaming
 Tickets at door cash or check only

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

Ministry/Team News

From the *Membership Team*

The Membership Team is looking forward to providing discussion opportunities for newcomers to UUCD. Each week following the service, we will continue to have representatives from the Membership Team and/or the Board of Trustees in the *Connections and Conversations* corner. Visitors attending for the first time or those who would like to reconnect are welcome to join the conversation over coffee. Look for the sign near the chimes in the corner of the Fellowship Hall.

For those who would like a more in-depth program, we are offering an opportunity to attend *Pathways to Membership* on Sunday, January 12th at 11:30 a.m. At Pathways to Membership, we will share our own spiritual experiences, learn more about our local and national history, and discuss what becoming a member at UUCD means.

A *New Member Welcome* is planned to take place on either January 16 or March 2. This would be part of regular services.

If you are interested in Pathways to Membership or becoming a Member, please contact Membership Chair Heather Smith or Rev. Tony Lorenzen. Friends and Newcomers to UUCD will receive an email invitation to all programming in the coming weeks.

From the *Social Action Council*

One or Two Volunteers Needed

Bakery pick up from Stop & Shop (on Mill Plain Rd) and delivered to Dorothy Day on Spring Street once a week. For more information contact Anne Krieg or Judy Lacker who have been doing it for a few years.

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On **Saturday, January 4**, some members of Soup Kitchen Team A (Team Leader **Lynn Taborsak, Bob Taborsak, Diane Purvis, Nancy Brown, Linda & Steve Schneider, Jyo Buyyals, Michael O'Hare, Lisa Deldidn**) 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. Sandwich donations are being scheduled so we have just the right amount each day at Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen. If you are interested in making sandwiches, please send an email to 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, 4 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".

Please note that we continue to collect 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. Please see the note below for suggestions on donations.

http://www.dorothydaydanbury.org/Wish_List.htm

UUCD Palestine Solidarity Committee

The horrific war on Gaza has been streaming into our lives for 15 months now. To help educate anyone who may be unfamiliar with the history of this conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, **Justine McCabe** is organizing a monthly study group on the subject. Anyone interested in participating can sign up after the service on January 12th. For more information, please contact Justine.

Should Our Congregation Endorse the Apartheid-Free Communities Pledge?

Join us on Wednesday, January 15 at 7:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall lower level for our first discussion, "Should Our Congregation Endorse the Apartheid-Free Communities Pledge?" The national group, the Unitarian Universalist Association, in June urged that individual congregations make this pledge: apartheid-free.org/pledge. The Board of Trustees decided that this should be considered over a couple of months. The event will include an interview with Dana Ashrawi who is president of Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East.

Join us on Saturday, January 25 at 2:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall lower level for a play reading of "**80 Years After the Holocaust in Hungary**". In 1944 Hungary was the last remaining country with a substantial Jewish population and then Germany invaded. Several countries recognize January 27 as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The play talks about the heroes and the fools facing the Nazi Holocaust in Hungary, centering on the Zionist leader Kastner. We are still looking for people who'd like to "perform" (doing a 5 minute reading). Contact **Stanley Heller** for more information.

Notes on Two Hundred Years (and More)

by Douglas H. Parkhurst

Recent "Notes..." articles have chronicled events and people at First Universalist Church, now Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury or UUCD, during the period 1948-58. We will pick up with 1959 and subsequent years another time. This month, for a change of pace, let's look at a different topic.

Between 2008 and 2010, this writer submitted ten articles to Comment under the heading "This Time In History." These pieces related history-oriented topics, much like the present "Notes..." articles. I particularly enjoyed researching the great variety of names of Unitarian Universalist churches, societies, fellowships, congregations, and their buildings past and present. These include the several names by which UUCD has been known over more than two hundred years. An article about such names appeared in the March 2009 Comment. Here is an expanded version of that article.

Anyone traveling around the United States may see local Unitarian Universalist signs and buildings. Perhaps you have visited one or more of the groups associated with these. Have you noticed UU congregations come in many shapes and sizes? So do their names! Following are examples of the great variety of names from both present and past.

The historic First Parish and First Church designations, including the name of a town and/or the denomination, are common throughout New England. First Parish of Sudbury, Massachusetts; South Parish Unitarian Church, Charlestown, New Hampshire; First Church in Boston, Massachusetts; and First Universalist Parish, Derby Line, Vermont, are examples. Sometimes the word "Congregational" is included, as in Congregational Unitarian Society of Bernardston, Massachusetts, and First Unitarian Congregational Society, Wilton, New Hampshire.

While the name All Souls is not unique to Unitarian Universalism, it identifies many UU congregations across the country. Present-day examples of All Souls, among others, are in Bellville, Ohio; Kansas City, Missouri; Watertown, New York; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Colorado Springs, Colorado. And, there are All Peoples UU groups in Fort Worth, Texas, and Louisville, Kentucky. Kalamazoo and Ludington, Michigan, each have People's Churches, and The Peoples Church is in Cedar Rapids, Iowa [see note below].

Some UU groups have adopted colorful names with geographic references. There is Outlaw's Bridge Universalist Church in Seven Springs, North Carolina; Headwaters UU Fellowship of Bemidji, Minnesota; UU Congregation of the Shoals in Florence, Alabama; and Big Sky UU Fellowship, Helena, Montana. Others are known by the streets where they live. One example is Allen Avenue UU Church, Portland, Maine. In Bethesda, Maryland, there are two such UU Congregations, Cedar Lane and River Road. Arlington Street Church is in downtown Boston, Massachusetts.

UU congregations can be named after people. Follen Church, Lexington, Massachusetts, memorializes 19th century abolitionist Rev. Charles Follen. Money to build Pullman Memorial Universalist Church in Albion, New York, was given in part by 19th century industrialist George Pullman to honor his parents. There are at least two Starr King groups, one in Plymouth, New Hampshire, and another in Hayward, California. They carry the name of the eminent Universalist and Unitarian minister Thomas Starr King [see note below]. Throop UU Church in Pasadena, California, is named for its member and benefactor Amos Throop, founder of California Institute of Technology.

There are UU churches maintaining names of traditional religious or historic significance. St. Paul's Church of Palmer, Massachusetts, and St. Paul Universalist Church in Little Falls, New York, are two. King's Chapel, founded in 1686 in Boston, Massachusetts, was originally Anglican and kept its name when it became Unitarian in 1787. There is St. John's UU Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. Unity Temple in Oak Park, Illinois, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, is the home of Unity Temple UU Congregation.

Other UU congregations have given up their traditional religious or historic names. First Church of the Messiah was predecessor to the present-day First Unitarian Church of St. Louis, Missouri. The Church of the Divine Paternity became Fourth Universalist Society in the City of New York. Unitarian Universalists of Mt. Airy, Pennsylvania, used to be the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Restoration. What was once St. John's Universalist Church is now Universalist Unitarian Church of Joliet, Illinois.

There are some unique names, as well, in our denomination. Freethinker's Hall is home to Free Congregation of Sauk County, Wisconsin. Organized in 1852 as a Free Society by immigrant Germans, the Congregation became Unitarian in 1955. In Austin, Texas, there is Wildflower Church UU, organized in 2001. The former First Universalist Society, Cincinnati, Ohio, is now Heritage UU Church. Members of All Souls UU Church in Brattleboro, Vermont, meet in West Village Meeting House. And, do you know there is a UU church named for

a mythological Norwegian maiden? This is Nora UU Church, Hanska, Minnesota. Founded as a Unitarian church, it was previously known as Nora Free Christian Church. Religiously liberal Norwegian settlers of Lutheran background organized Nora Church in 1881.

Our attention will be on Washington, D.C., this month, with the presidential inauguration coming on January 20. In the nation's capital we find All Souls Church UU; Universalist National Memorial Church; and Washington Ethical Society. Three UU groups within a few miles of each other, all with very different names (and histories)! The above is but a sampling of the diversity of Unitarian Universalist congregation and building names in the United States. Now we will look at Danbury and Connecticut.

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury has had more than a few appellations during its almost 203 year history. Early on it was known as the Universalist Society or First Universalist Society. By the 1850s, after construction of its first and second buildings, the group was commonly called the Universalist Church. These names were interchangeable for many years. For example, the Danbury Directory for 1871-72 lists simply Universalist Church. A membership list from 1881 uses the name The First Universalist Society of Danbury. The church constitution of 1892 states, "This church organization shall be known as the Universalist Church of Danbury." There is reference to the Universalist Church Society in the deed of a neighboring property on Main Street. The printed program for the congregation's 100th anniversary celebration (1922) recognizes the founding of the First Universalist Society "in" Danbury, Connecticut.

The UUCD was incorporated on November 19, 1957, with the name The First Universalist Church of Danbury, Connecticut, Incorporated. In December 1960, "Universalist" was amended to read "Universalist-Unitarian" (with hyphen), reflecting the soon-to-be completed consolidation of the two denominations. Six years later, after the merger of the Danbury UUs and the Unitarian Fellowship of Ridgefield (formed in 1964), the name was changed to The Unitarian-Universalist Society of Northern Fairfield County, Incorporated, (again with hyphen, though the hyphen disappeared in common usage). Then, on September 9, 2003, the legal name of the group became Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury, Incorporated. And so it remains today.

Connecticut has had its share of historic and traditional Universalist church names. There was Society of United Christian Friends in the Towns of Norwich, Preston and Groton [see note below]; Church of the Messiah, New Haven; and Church of the Redeemer, Hartford and later West Hartford. St. Paul's Universalist Church was in Meriden and Second Universalist Society in Stamford. A Universalist group formed in Southington in the early 19th century was called First Society of United Brethren. The historic Unitarian society in Brooklyn, Connecticut, was known as First Ecclesiastical Society. The First Congregational Unitarian Society was organized in Hartford and its early building was called Church of the Savior. UU groups in the state today include Shoreline UU Society in Madison; Mattatuck UU Society, Woodbury; and All Souls UU Congregation in New London. [See note below.]

[Note - Rev. Dr. Linda Hansen, UUCD's settled minister from 2003 to 2008, previously served Peoples Church in Cedar Rapids.]

[Note - Rev. Thomas Farrington King, father of Thomas Starr King, served Danbury Universalists as a circuit-riding preacher in the early 1820s.]

[Note - The Norwich group later became First Universalist Society in Norwich. A former building was called Church of the Good Shepherd.]

[Note - The Southington group is extinct. Otherwise, the historic Connecticut churches and societies mentioned above live today with successor names.]

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 February Comment –
Friday, January 17th.

