



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

Monthly **COMMENT** Newsletter

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

FEBRUARY 2025



FROM OUR MINISTER

“A Time of Decision”

Dear Beloveds,

After watching some videos and reading the transcript of the incoming president’s inaugural address and news accounts of the first day of the administration, I want to be very clear that what we witnessed January 20, 2025 was beyond injustice, it was evil. Evil is not a word I use lightly. We are witnessing a planned, systematic dismantling of representative democracy, human rights, and guaranteed constitutional freedoms.

Immigrants, refugees, and transgender people were dehumanized by executive actions. An attempt is being made to eliminate birthright citizenship guaranteed by the constitution without using the process for amending its contents outlined by the constitution. I want to be very clear about this: There are not good people on both sides. Any government, leader, or law that makes any human being less than equally human with the same dignity and rights as every other human being is evil and should be resisted at every turn.

The task in front of us is to move forward without compromising on the dignity, worth, and human rights of every person, including the people who would dehumanize others. Do not mistake this for a false equivalence. All opinions are not equal. Dehumanizing others is evil. It is immoral. If someone’s opinion is that some humans are less than others, that person holds an immoral, unethical, and unjustifiable position. It is not dehumanizing them to name that and hold them accountable. I truly hope the congregation can engage in the work of communicating across differences especially in the local community, but a prerequisite for our participation must be that all participants in the congregation are welcomed and treated with dignity and respect. We won’t be able to have conversations with people who deny the humanity and human rights of trans and non-binary people. We welcome conversations with people who don’t understand things, but not people who disagree with us on everyone’s common humanity.

We are in the middle of a year of congregational learning about transgender and non-binary people and their experience so that we might make our congregation more welcoming, more inclusive, and more just. The administration’s dehumanizing of trans and non-binary people is in direct opposition to what we are striving to do in our congregation.

I share with you a statement from Alok VAid-Menon from this month’s Soul Matters Sharing Circle resource packet on Inclusion that points out dehumanizing others dehumanizes everyone, including the dehumanizer:

(continued)

“The situation facing trans and gender non-conforming people in the United States right now is really bleak. And I really want to have an earnest plea that people stop framing this as a minority issue and reframe this as a universal attack on self-determination. Every one of us should be able to determine our own gender. No one else should be able to tell us what we should look like, how we should act, and what we should do with our bodies. So we need you to show up at this moment, not just out of an ethics of allyship. That doesn’t feel like enough for me, but out of an insistence and your own dignity, your own capacity to transform, your own love of self.” [Alok Vaid-Menon](#)

You will notice that this month that my monthly spiritual challenge to personal growth and my monthly message both focus on our work of transgender inclusion. My challenge to you is to register for, log in, and actively participate in the online course Trans Inclusion in Congregations. The registration information is in the Spiritual Challenge. I am also only recommending one book this month “Authentic Selves: Celebrating Trans and Non-binary People and Their Families” which is the Unitarian Universalist Association’s congregational read for the current program year. If you haven’t read it yet, please start. If you need a copy, please let me know as the congregation has copies to lend.

To those of us with privilege, especially those of us who are cisgender and heterosexual, I urge us to take sides unequivocally and unambiguously with our trans and non-binary family and friends and the entire LGBTQIA community.

We are living in “one of those times” - one of those times when future generations will look back and judge those who sided with love well and judge those who sided with dehumanization, hatred, bigotry, and violence damningly. As Unitarian James Russell Lowell says in hymn #119 in our hymnal:

*Once to every soul and nation comes the moment to decide,
in the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side:
then to stand with truth is noble, when we share its wretched crust;
ere that cause bring fame and profit, and ‘tis prosperous to be just.*

*Though the cause of evil prosper, yet ‘tis truth alone is strong;
though its portion be the scaffold, and upon the throne be wrong.
Then it is the brave one chooses, while the coward stands aside,
till the multitude make virtue of the faith they have denied.*

It is the time of decision. May we decide forcefully, without apology for truth and for the good. May we decide forcefully and without apology for inclusion, justice, equity, and love.

In solidarity,

Rev. Tony

SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE TO PERSONAL GROWTH
“Learn about Transgender and Non-binary Experience”

I recognize that this month’s challenge does not apply to members of the community who are trans and non-binary nearly as much, if at all, as it does to the rest of us. To the rest of us, I issue this challenge: Learn about the experience of transgender and non-binary people, especially through our congregational learning course on Trans Inclusion in Congregations.

If you haven’t yet registered for the Trans Inclusion in Congregations course online, here are the instructions once again:

- Go to the course page (<https://transforming-hearts-collective.teachable.com>)
- Scroll to the bottom and select the \$500 option
- Click "Enroll"
- On the next page click the red text "Add Coupon"
- In the box that appears, enter UUDANBURY and click "Apply" (the total will be adjusted to FREE)
- Continue with enrollment

If you have registered but haven’t yet really started watching the videos or reading the articles, please do so.

If you haven’t yet started reading the book *“Authentic Selves: Celebrating Trans and Nonbinary People and Their Families,”* please do so. If you need a copy, please contact me as the congregation has copies to lend.

If you haven’t yet attended the online Zoom discussions about the sessions of the Trans Inclusion in Congregations course, please join us for the next one on the topic of Session 4 on **February 12 at 7 p.m. OR on February 13 at 11 a.m.** We’d love to see you and hear from you.

Here is the calendar of events for the remainder of the year:

- **February 2 at 10 a.m.** Sunday Service Zr. (pronounced ZEE-ster) Alex Kapitan reflects on transgender spirituality. Related to Session 4
- **February 12 at 7 pm & February 13 at 11 a.m.** Zoom discussion Session 4
- **March 2 at 10 a.m.** Sunday Service "4-Way Stop" Related to Session 5
- **March 12 at 10:30 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.** Zoom discussion Session 5
- **April 6 at 10 a.m.** Sunday Service “Mountains and Rubber Tree Plants” Related to Session 6
- **April 16 at 10:30 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.** Zoom discussion Session 6
- **May 4 at 11 a.m.** Rev. Tony leads in person discussion of the book “Authentic Selves”
- **May 21 at 10:30 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.** Rev. Tony leads ZOOM discussion of the book “Authentic Selves”

As always, I’d love to hear from you about your thoughts on this challenge and your experience with it if you undertake it.



February’s theme is Trans Inclusion 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, February 2nd Radical Welcome Zr. Alex Kapitan

In today’s world, being a Welcoming Congregation requires more than simply opening our doors. We are at a crucial turning point—will we live into our commitment to be a home for all those who need Unitarian Universalism? In a political moment that is downright life-threatening for trans people, will we provide sanctuary and show up for trans justice? Doing so will require a welcome that transforms our hearts, our congregation, and ultimately our world. In this service Zr. Alex Kapitan, a queer and trans UU leader, will preach on what it will take to embody this sort of welcome—a radical welcome that can ultimately transform us all.

Zr. Alex Kapitan is a lay community minister, educator, editor, consultant, and activist. A trans and queer lifelong Unitarian Universalist, Alex does interfaith LGBTQ work and supports congregations in becoming places of radical welcome for all. Ze is the co-founder of the Transforming Hearts Collective, the co-leader of the program Trans Inclusion in Congregations (which our congregation is currently engaging in), and the founder of Radical Copyeditor, an anti-oppressive language project.



Our **Share-the-Plate offering will go to Hillside Food Outreach**. Their mission is To deliver high-quality, nutritious food that will enable low-income, chronically ill, disabled and those who are otherwise unable to access a traditional food pantry, to achieve a better quality of life. To positively impact the health and wellness of the individual and strengthen the overall community through access, education and caring hearts.

Sunday, February 9th Inclusion and Everything Ben Lowry

Yale Divinity School Seminarian Ben Lowry returns to reflect on Inclusion.

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, February 16th

Some Goose Chases are Wilder than Others

Rev. Tony Lorenzen

Rev. Tony Lorenzen reflects on the deep intimacy of personal spirituality, the deep community of healthy religion, and recovering from the trauma of spiritual abuse and bad religion.

Sunday, February 23rd

P is for Pluralism

People of all ages are invited to join Jerry Phelps and Revs. Tony and Sierra-Marie for a multigenerational music and ritual-centered celebration of pluralism.

From the Board of Trustees

by Margaret Henderson, President

As I write this it's a cold, snowy day in January, but the Board is considering a proposal from the UUCD kids to build a playground. The children have thought about what kind of equipment they want, and how to make it accessible to kids with disabilities. They even had fundraising ideas! There is more research to be done, but the Board of Trustees would like to thank Mazie Volovski for bringing this idea to us.

This is an example of how we CAN build personal connections between kids and adults at UUCD - something that I think is vital to our future. When REMT changed their name to the Family Ministry Team last year, they were saying that kids - and parents - are and must be an integrated part of our congregational life. If the children and youth program is soloed off in its own area with its own adult caregivers, everyone suffers the loss. UUCD needs more bridges between generations, more events like old-fashioned picnics were, where kids AND adults can be engaged and have fun side by side.

As the Board considers this, we are exploring the idea of "co-ministry," or making use of Sierra-Marie's skills as an ordained minister and making her a co-minister with Rev. Tony. This would be a big change and we are only starting to ask if it makes sense in our situation. But it's possible that UUCD would benefit if Rev. Tony and Rev. Sierra-Marie, both half-time employees, were to shift some duties around to maximize their strengths.

If you have questions you'd like us to look into as we explore this, please let a Board member know.

**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, February 2** - Regular Sunday morning programs
- **Sunday, February 9** - Regular Sunday morning programs for preK-7th grade and Evening Game Night for 8th-12th Grade; Group for Parents/Caregivers of LGBTQIA+ People
- **Sunday, February 16** - Regular Sunday morning programs depending on RSVPS, as it is also a school vacation week (Rev. Sierra-Marie is away)
- **Sunday, February 23** - Multigenerational Sunday Service (no programs)

Sunday Services

Sunday, February 23: P is for Pluralism - People of all ages, please join Jerry Phelps and Revs. Tony and Sierra-Marie for a multigenerational music and ritual-centered celebration of pluralism.

Upcoming Events



UUCD Men Conversing over Coffee meets on the second Wednesday of each month. Our next meeting is on Wednesday, February 12th at 10:00 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall Lower Level. For more information contact **Jeff Asher** or **Joe Gillotti**.



Saturday, February 8th - **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.

DON WHITE



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2025

4pm

There is no one-word description for what Don White does. He has survived and thrived for more than twenty years, bringing his audiences to laughter and tears in his live performances, studio recordings, and on the printed page. He is a storyteller-comedian-author-troubadour-folk singer-songwriter. He is a walking challenge to the phrase "file under." Best to just sort him under "Don White."

If it were up to me – the whole world would know Don White! Oh boy do I love Don – I always have. No one can bring you to such beautiful emotional extremes more than Don. His shows are like a dirty fix and a saving grace all within a few minutes. I think watching him perform is when I decided I'd much rather affect an audience than entertain them – I knew I probably couldn't do both – but somehow Don does. And exceptionally well."

– Lori McKenna, award winning singer/songwriter



www.musicattheridge.org
24 Clapboard Ridge Road, Danbury, CT
\$25 in person/\$20 streaming
TICKETS THROUGH EVENTBRITE
Tickets at door cash or check only



Ministry/Team News



Our Caring Circle is Available

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

Joan Campbell is the contact person for 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.

From the *Social Action Council*

Soup Kitchen Corner

by Judy Lacker

On Saturday, February 1st, some members of Soup Kitchen Team B (Team Leaders **Bruni Edward & Yvonne Ruddy-Stein, Joanne Davidson, the Parr Family, the Bonansinga/ Twombly Family, the 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.

PLEASE NOTE: ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT YET ABLE TO SERVE THE GUESTS AS WE USED TO INDOORS, WE ARE ABLE TO HAVE THEM TAKE AND EAT THEIR MEALS THAT ARE HANDED OUT AT THE DOOR, INSIDE TO THE SHELTER AREA. FOR THIS, WE NEED EXTRA VOLUNTEERS TO SUPERVISE THAT AREA FROM 3-4:30 FIRST SATURDAY OF THE MONTH., WHEN OUR TEAMS ARE PREPARING THE MEALS IN THE KITCHEN AREA. PLEASE CONTACT [judylacker48@gmail](mailto:judylacker48@gmail.com) IF YOU CAN HELP.

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

News from the UUA

30 Days of Love - January 17 through February 14 - Brought to you by [Side With Love](#)

Every year the UUA offers us 30 Days of Love, ending on Valentine's Day. This campaign is run by their public advocacy group, Side With Love, whose goal is "to harness love's power to stop oppression." There are bite-size materials in various formats to help ground you in love, released each week on Tuesday. This year's theme is "Inhabiting Our Freedom Dreams" - the introduction included the sentence "We are the antidote to our fear," which I really like! Check them out at [SideWithLove.org](#).



UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY
BALTIMORE • JUNE 18 - 22, 2025

Join us in Baltimore for GA 2025, June 18-22! - The annual gathering for all UU's will be live in Baltimore, MD this year. Join us in person June 18-22 (Wednesday night thru Sunday morning), or register for virtual access only and join us from the comfort of your living room - although anyone who's been there will tell you it's more fun in person!

Go to <https://uua.org/ga> for details. Registration is in the fine-print options right below the video.

Bad news: Registration costs \$540 if you're 25 or over (\$275 for youth and young adults)

Good news: Until the end of March, it's only \$410!

Bad news: That's still a lot of money

Good news: UUCD has *dedicated funds* to help pay! -- And if you identify as BIPoC (Black, Indigenous or a Person of Color), you are especially encouraged to apply. For details, ask Bruni Edwards or Margaret Henderson.

Bad news: The registration cost doesn't include room and board

Good news: UUCD can help you pay for that too! All you have to do is submit a written request to Sherry (our admin), or Carl Tichler.

Bad news: But I may not know anyone there

Good news: There are at least 4 other people going from UUCD!

Bad news: What about transportation?

Good news: Register before March 31 and you can ride with others for the 5-hour drive!

Now go share the good news, and **register early** as hotel rooms often sell out!

Notes on Two Hundred Years (and More)

by Douglas H. Parkhurst

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury (UUCD) will celebrate its 203rd anniversary later in 2025. A variety of accounts have been written about UUCD over the past two centuries. These include historical narratives; 19th and 20th century articles and essays that now can be considered historical pieces; and an autobiography that includes a reminiscence of the congregation in the mid-19th century. It should be noted UUCD has been known by perhaps six different names since it was organized in 1822. Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury was adopted in 2003.

The Congregation's most comprehensive history to date was prepared for UUCD's 175th anniversary in 1997. This is Reverdy Whitlock's 132 page *The Story of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Northern Fairfield County, 1822-1995* (UUSNFC). The author was a New Haven bookseller and historian. This book, available in both hard and soft-cover, begins with chapters summarizing Universalist and Unitarian denominational history. It then surveys the first 147 years of the congregation in Danbury, including the 1964 organization of the Unitarian Fellowship of Ridgefield, and merger of this group with the Danbury UUs in 1966. The narrative concludes with UUSNFC's 1970 move to an old farm property in West Redding and a detailed picture of life and people at "the Barn" through the mid-1990s. The book is illustrated and contains a list of clergy, from Thomas Farrington King to Daniel Simer O'Connell, who have served the congregation. Society member James Ramey provided the inspiration for *The Story of the Unitarian Universalist Society*.... Herrick Jackson, long-time friend and supporter of the West Redding UUs, arranged for the services of author Reverdy Whitlock, and secured funding for the research, writing, and publication of the book.

Going back to early days, a description of the Danbury Universalist Society appears in the 1835 Annual Report of the General Convention of Universalists. It was prepared by R.O. Williams, likely Rev. Rufus Orland Williams, who at the time labored in Connecticut. He reviewed Universalist activity in towns in each of the eight counties in the state and wrote this about Danbury:

"Here is a flourishing society, consisting of twenty-nine members, and a church [organization] connected with the society. The brethren here have recently erected a large and beautiful house of worship. They have now no settled clergyman, but usually they have employed one half the time. The brethren are steadfast, persevering, and increasing in numbers, and meetings are generally well attended."

George H. Deere came to Danbury in 1849, an aspiring clergyman of twenty-one, and was ordained that October. He ministered to the local Universalists for two years. Rev. Deere went on to a long and successful career in ministry that included a pioneering Universalist pastorate in Riverside, California, beginning in 1881. Near the end of his life, George Deere penned his *Autobiography* in which he devoted three chapters to his time in Danbury. Here are two brief excerpts:

"My parish work was mostly with the young people and the children, who drew close to me and brought their elders. The Sunday school, of which I was made superintendent, I worked with the best results, adopting and adapting Bro. G.L. Demarest's methods...of general drills in memorizing Scripture, and the Rhode Island Universalist catechism." [See note below.]

"My parish calls were on business. However informal, after I had studied the family, I carried in my mind some message, some information, suggestion, or request....I was on my feet out of doors most of the time, carrying my work along in my head as I went about among the people at Bethel, Wildcat, Grassy Plain, Mirey Brook, Plumtree,

Sleepy Hollow [perhaps Sugar Hollow], the Boggs Mill Plain, or into the solitude of Thomas Mountain, Tamarack Woods, or the woods and cemetery north of town." [See note below.]

Copies of some nineteenth century records of the Southern Association of Universalists of Connecticut (Fairfield, New Haven, and Middlesex counties) are in the archives of UUCD. These contain brief assessments of local Universalist groups within the Southern Association, including the Danbury society:

"1866 - No stated preaching for a year, but occasional services and lay meetings in the intervals. More money has been raised, and with greater ease than ever before, but not enough for a pastor's support...."

The situation improved a few years later:

"1871 - We are united and strong in the faith. Have added 14 members to the church during the year. Our average attendance at S.S. [Sunday School] is 45....Are strengthening in working power and zeal. Rev. D.M. Hodge is pastor."

The Danbury Universalists had their share of ups and downs:

"1887 - Reported by Bro. Dibble and Rev. W.J. Crosley. While the parish is small there is good hope that the new pastor [Crosley] may be able to do good work and help to build up the society somewhat. Not strong numerically, nor financially, but strong in the faith. Good missionary field."

The substantial *History of Fairfield County, Connecticut*, was compiled under the supervision of D. Hamilton Hurd and published in 1881. The town of Danbury merits eight chapters in this work, totaling close to ninety pages. The chapter on Danbury's Ecclesiastical History includes a section on what is called First Universalist Church. The source is given as the columns of the *Danbury Republican*, editor F.W. Bartram. Universalist activity in Danbury before 1822 is described and the twelve organizers of the local society are named. The narrative continues:

"After 1807 occasional services were held in the town by various itinerant ministers, among others the Rev. Solomon Glover, of Newtown. At this time the social ostracism, amounting in some cases to actual persecution...fell to the lot of the American Universalists. Their testimony was not taken in court; they were pronounced little better than atheists; were charged with being haters of religion and teachers of immoral doctrines. One of the twelve men who organized the society in 1822 attended the meetings for some time in secret, 'going across the swamp to the court-house, in order not to be seen,' as he often afterwards confessed....Those were the days when good, pious, Christian souls, not doubting that Universalists were infidels and were doing the work of Satan, prayed that the Lord would 'uncover the bottomless pit and shake the Universalist minister over it until he repented of his errors.' "

This history goes on to provide a comprehensive list of names and dates for clergy who served the Danbury society during its first half-century, the names of First Universalist's lay leaders at the time of writing, and something of the progress of the congregation.

[Note - G.L. Demarest was a prominent nineteenth century Universalist minister, author, editor, and denominational official.]

[Note - The town of Bethel was set off from Danbury in 1855, a few years after Rev. Deere's departure. The places mentioned are areas and districts in Danbury and Bethel.]

To be continued in March 2025...



THANK YOU!

Thank you to all who wrote a holiday greeting to our fellow UUs experiencing incarceration. Beth Murray from the Prison Ministry Team at the Church of the Larger Fellowship passed on these thoughts from two folks who received holiday messages:

Thank you for remembering us with holiday greetings. You are part of my family of choice. I feel so welcomed and accepted as a UU just as I am. What a priceless gift. ~ Donna, California

Thank you for making those of us incarcerated feel included and valued. ~ Brett, Colorado

Beth adds, "Because of your willingness to write, we sent thousands of messages. To be exact, 208 volunteers sent 7,685 holiday messages. That means our members experiencing incarceration received multiple messages, making them feel more connected to kindness and our Unitarian Universalist faith." We here at UUCD sent 50 greetings this season! Thank you again and, remember, for information on becoming a Free World Pen Pal, visit <https://worthynow.org/pen-pals>.

*Thank you so much for featuring
Camella's Cupboard as a charity at
your fall auction. The money raised
will be used to purchase a much-
needed walk-in freezer.*

*We are so appreciative of your kindness
and generosity. Thank you again -*

www.camellascupboard.com *Angela*

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 March Comment –
Friday, February 21st.

