Invest in a Community of Caring

A Case for Support
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Danbury exists to improve people's lives and it deserves wide support because of its impact both within the congregation and in the wider world. Consider a few snapshots of impact:

- a six-year old girl is working with a little clay, some colored paper, popsicle sticks and a lot of glitter, designing a neighborhood, imagining how people live together in this newly-imagined location;
- a few miles away, a mother of young children picks up canned food items for the next couple of dinners;
- a man in his 80s calls the UUCD Care Team to let them know he's had another fall over the weekend, a fracture this time, and his call prompts a round of meals and check-in visits from friends;
- empty nesters with new space in their lives and a creeping awareness of their social isolation arrive at UUCD for their first visit as they think toward creating community in their next chapters;
- a woman in a difficult marriage continues to attend services and a woman's group as a sort of lifeline, finding among friends the support she needs to reflect on her situation;
- a high school junior, approaching the bridge into adulthood, engages in inquiry with other youths about the values that inform worship services across different faith communities in Danbury.

UUCD members are bound together by a covenant to improve the world, to maintain and enrich the bonds among human beings people and their planet. They share a high ambition to bring about transformation toward justice and equity in society, to appreciate and build upon the pluralism and interdependence that already exist in communities and to live with generosity, sharing their gifts, talents and wealth of all sorts. Individual small acts are magnified and extended through each member's relationship with others who share similar life purposes.

What you are reading is a portrait of the UUCD Congregation and a request for generosity. It is a reminder of what makes UUCD valuable and meaningful in our daily lives. It is a demonstration of what a relatively small group can accomplish with motivation and planning. This case for support attempts to cast a vision for members and to explain what we are doing and why we matter. It isn't a mission statement or a history of our congregation but an attempt to clarify some of our impact. This statement may form a foundation for other member communications and a basis for planning ambitious fund raising. Because it presents a wide-angle view of UUCD, members might refer to it for inspiration or to pull phrases and concepts for newsletters, emails, our website and more. This document may be useful as a prospectus for some larger donors or for in-person member/donor conversations.

Unitarian Universalist
Congregation of Danbury
24 Clapboard Ridge Road
Danbury, CT 06811
203-798-1994
www.uudanbury.org

Children and Youths

The UUCD congregation has intentionally moved children, youths, and families toward the center of shared life. This is not only an assertion that the young are the future; it's a recognition that young people are already full participants in our faith community. We're building communities of belonging for all children, within our congregation and beyond it, so that children can learn through experience that they matter and that community is something we create together.

This mission is in our method, not just our message. Our programs for children and youth emphasize shared responsibility and collaboration. Children and youth self-lead projects that come from their questions and observations about themselves, their communities, and the larger world. All children work on projects, and work time is very important.

SpiritPlay — A Montessori-inspired program to help children make meaning through story, ritual, and play.
Pre-K – 1st Grade

L.A.W.N. (Love and Wonder in Nature) — An outdoor, play-centered, child-led program for connecting and meaning making as we explore life's religious and ethical questions. ***2nd – 7th Grade***

Middle School Youth Group – A social program for connection, support, growing confidence and identity. This group meets once a month after Sunday services.
6th – 8th Grade

Senior High Youth Group — A fun and inclusive community engaged in service, learning, leadership, spiritual exploration, and identity development. ***8th – 12th Grade***

Imagine the value of learning about being a caring person as a youngster, just beginning to deal with the wide world, building relationships while working together on a chosen project. Friendships are formed along with learning the importance of inclusiveness and belonging.

Recently, middle school youths took the initiative to revive the congregation's Christmas pageant, which they collaboratively staged themselves, with a cast that included younger children as well as adult members. In previous years, middle school youths built the benches that now provide the outdoor seating. Not long ago, high school youths initiated visits to neighboring faith communities and elementary-aged kids have been planning social justice projects as well as fundraising for the campus playground. Their most audacious dream is an imaginative playground, accessible to all, including children with disabilities. A recent cost estimate is $30,000 – this dream is achievable with generous funding.

The Family Ministry Team, led by director Sierra-Marie Gerfao, listens carefully to families and develops programs that meet their needs. One clear message from the families has been that our ministry should not be confined to Sunday mornings or to those already inside our walls. Our constituency is really the Greater Danbury area. That outward-facing commitment matters. When families said they needed it, we created a group for parents of LGBTQIA+ individuals of all ages, open not just to congregants but others in the community as well. As ICE activity increased in our region and the immigrant community asked, our congregation responded by supporting ministry with families impacted by ICE. We partnered with *Danbury Unites for Immigrants*, offering resources including staff time, fiscal sponsorship, meeting space, and volunteers.

Supporting these ministries is an investment in shaping a different moral ecosystem for generations, in contrast to the fear, cruelty, and isolation of our time. Belonging is essential, care is mutual, and responsibility for one another is learned across generations. This is how we live our faith, not abstractly, but through daily practices that help children and adults alike learn how to stay connected, act with courage, and show up in solidarity and love.

Adult Programming

Many of UUCD's activities are for all ages, but while the children and youth members of the congregation are in the activities described in the previous section, adults are engaged elsewhere. Sunday morning services, coordinated by the Sunday Services Team and minister Tony Lorenzen, include music, ritual and thoughtful sermons from our ministry team, guest speakers and members of the congregation. Often, content of these services follows monthly themes recommended by the *Unitarian Universalist Association* – themes such as Cultivating Compassion, Practicing Resistance and Paying Attention. On other days of the week, in person and online, members gather in a range of configurations.

Chalice Circles are groups of 6 to 12 people that meet monthly for spiritual reflection related to the monthly theme. Some Chalice Circles use Parker Palmer's Circle of Trust method in which everyone practices deep listening, progressively creating a safer space and building relationships among the participants.

Book Study Groups have formed, and a particularly long-running community has studied Eckhart Tolle's books *The Power of Now* and *A New Earth*. Led by Joe Gillotti, this study engages in slow reading and reflection, aiming to help participants initiate a transformation in consciousness. More recently, minister Tony Lorenzen has begun meeting with readers of books recommended by UUA as a foundation for the Study Action topic Abolition.

Topical Groups is a broad way of naming the gatherings of members that come together to study, discuss and act upon a shared interest, often in response to political and social currents of the day. The Palestinian Group, for example, kept abreast of developments during the 2024-26 Gaza crisis, considering, among other things, the question of whether the actions of the state of Israel amounted to genocide and apartheid. Deciding that the evidence was strong that the terms genocide and apartheid were appropriate, they presented a resolution stating as much to the congregation's membership, and the members adopted the statement – the only UU Congregation in the United States to do so.

Another topical group considered the congregation's relationship to Native American tribes in our region. Our Sunday service typically includes a land acknowledgement statement, but this group wanted to go beyond acknowledgement. The group has been in touch with the Clan Mother of the Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe, Shoran Waupatukuay Piper and also reached out to the Institute for American Indian Studies in Washington, Connecticut for ideas and guidance. They proposed a plaque honoring the connection of indigenous people to the land on which the congregation now meets, along with an indoor display consisting of a combination of more detailed information than would be on the outdoor plaque, and artwork commissioned from a local Native American artist. They have invited Sunday speakers from local tribes, arranged a field trip to the Institute of American Indian Studies, submitted comments to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in support of federal recognition for the Paugussett Tribe, and promoted UUCD members' attendance at powwows and Native American markets.

Men Conversing Over Coffee is a monthly gathering of men where participants mutually explore experience and the world, learning from one another and fostering growth and understanding. The group, usually meeting downstairs in the Fellowship Hall, determines topics ahead of time with an eye toward becoming better acquainted and clarifying their individual stances and responses on subject matters of interest to men spiritually, emotionally, and sometimes related to congregation matters or current events. Group leaders moderate the conversation and facilitate mutual decision-making. Men also gather for lunch or dinner. Some only show up for meals, others just for coffee/discussions and most take advantage of both opportunities.

Women's Gatherings also meet monthly in the downstairs area of the Fellowship Hall; one group meets during the day and another in the evenings. Meetings often begin with individual sharing of something beautiful, something causing discomfort, and something waiting to bloom. Then, smaller groups allow more intimate conversations on a previously chosen topic. All women are welcome and all are invited either to share or to remain quiet. The group considers it a safe and sacred place where stories will only be shared among those present in the room.

The Caring Circle arranges meals, transportation, calls and visits for members' short term needs. Congregation members are made aware of the contact for the Caring Circle each month through the newsletter *Comment*.

Arts and Culture

The UUCD Choir, led by Music Director Jerry Phelps, is a welcoming community where voices come together to serve, grow and inspire. Designed for singers who love music but value balance, the program offers a manageable and fulfilling commitment: rehearsals just twice per month, a monthly performance within Sunday services, and a special annual Music Sunday service that celebrates the power of music. The choir provides a supportive environment focused on musical excellence, spiritual connection and joyful collaboration. Rehearsals are engaging and efficient, emphasizing healthy vocal technique, thoughtful interpretation of meaningful repertoire and the shared experience of creating something beautiful together. Singing in the choir is more than participation in music – it is an act of service and fellowship. Members build genuine relationships, contribute directly to the life of the congregation and experience the unique fulfillment that comes from leading worship through song. The annual Music Sunday is a highlight of our year, offering a deeper, more expansive musical experience that unites the congregation in celebration.

Music at the Ridge is a live acoustic music series which presents concerts in UUCD's Fellowship Hall one Sunday afternoon per month. Between Fall of 2022 and Spring of 2026, nearly 40 national touring musicians have enriched the community through these concerts. A percentage of ticket sales for each monthly concert go directly to UUCD. The series has its own website – www.musicattheridge.org – and a livestream of each concert. Congregation members provide coordination for the concerts, along with tech/sound and refreshments for intermissions. The Sunday afternoon concerts are now a tradition which many of our members and other music lovers look forward to each month. Performances are already booked through 2027.

Movies with a Message. These showings, from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm on the second Saturday of each month, consist of one to five short films that explore big questions about life and living, such as: *Why are we here? Where are we bound?* and *What can we become when we live at our highest potential?* Participants watch the movies together and, afterwards, engage in reflective discussions guided by the facilitator's prompts. Popcorn and water are provided.

Social Action for a Better World

Shared values of love, justice, interdependence, equity and pluralism lead Unitarian Universalists to join together in attempting to act for a better social world, to help neighbors within and outside the congregation. UUCD's Social Action Council coordinates a range of activities focusing largely on helping and protecting the most vulnerable members of society. Teams monitor and respond to state and federal policies regarding healthcare for trans youths. Members gather to collaborate on making signs for protests and demonstrations, and to coordinate travel to events. When national, state, and local groups summon others to days of action in which citizens contact representatives with focused messages, congregation members communicate about the opportunities and coordinate action. Study-action groups have gathered in the interests of protesting harm to innocent Palestinians, of abolition as a principle of criminal justice reform and of supporting parents of trans youths. Once per month, the funds collected from passing the plate on Sunday morning are split evenly with a local charitable organization whose activities align with UU values.

In one example of an organization that receives support, UUCD has enjoyed a more-than-40-year partnership with Danbury's Dorothy Day House in feeding the hungry in our immediate area. On the first Saturday of each month, our congregation provides a hot meal and sandwich bags – 70-140 meals – at the Dorothy Day Hospitality House on Spring Street in Danbury. It is a commitment we have kept for more than 40 years. Across the month, volunteers also bring grocery and toiletry donations and each Sunday service includes a moment when the congregation gathers donations for Dorothy Day House.

Indeed, helping our community remain on active footing for responding to the needs of our local and global community is a light that shines across all of the activities of the congregation.

Physical Space

Maintenance and management of the physical space and grounds is undertaken by a surprisingly few members, who spend a significant number of weekly hours at these tasks, some of which are shared with paid contractors. A couple of acres must be mowed, trees trimmed and plantings cared for. In winter, driveways and parking spaces have to be plowed and salted. When most members arrive, the drive is safe, parking spots are clear and the grounds are attractive.

The congregation's two buildings – the Cottage and the Fellowship Hall, including space for children's activities as well as the main services, must all be heated or cooled. Maintenance of the property, like any property, includes cleaning, servicing, and repairing. The congregation has emergency alarms maintained by the same facilities team. The team also nurtures the relationships with police and fire departments.

For the most part, the facilities team is also the tech team. Every Sunday service is available through a Zoom link. This way, members and friends can attend and enjoy the wisdom and joy of the service without being physically present during the actual service. *Music at the Ridge*, since it involves the Fellowship Hall transforming into a professional music venue, requires a higher quality sound setup.

Team Green. Since Unitarian Universalist values include interdependence with all life on earth, UUCD's approach to facilities involves choices that support sustainability. The Fellowship Hall roof holds solar panels, the buildings are thoughtfully and efficiently insulated, and heating and cooling come from efficient

heat pumps. The grounds feature a pollinator garden and a composter processing scraps from the kitchen as well as from members' homes. Produce from the fenced garden is gifted to the Dorothy Day House. Members have supplied an enclosure that surrounds the cottage fireplace, improving its efficiency, as well as draft stoppers that seal outer doors and provide sound insulation between the kitchen and meeting room. Team Green members encourage people to donate mugs to be used for coffee and tea instead of paper cups. Assorted recycling containers, dishes, metal silverware and glasses are also in common and constant use. The congregation earned a Green House of Worship Designation in 2017.

How it works behind the scenes

Board of Trustees, consisting of seven elected members, governs the congregation's business. They establish the congregation's goals, procedures and policies; have general charge of property and finances; make decisions about staff and coordinate the work of other committees and councils. The board establishes a regular set of congregational meetings, which are chaired by an elected moderator. During the year to come, the board will be in conversation with the congregation about some potential revisions to governance processes and structures.

The Membership Team provides for the welcome, orientation and stewardship of potential, new and current members and friends. They make sure there is a welcoming face at the doors to greet visitors and connect them with seasoned members. They direct new people to the place that speaks the most to them at the time they meet us, fostering connections and community. They support visitors towards membership, including the coordination of the Pathways through Membership course. Once an individual has become a member, the membership committee continues to support them in cultivating more connections and making sure someone is keeping an eye out in case the new members drop out of sight. The committee believes that every member needs to be seen and to find a place for belonging, so that they in turn can welcome new people in the future.

The Safer Congregation Team helps to create a community where everyone can worship, learn and connect with trust and care. The team develops and reviews policies that support safety, healthy boundaries and right relationships. Members and friends seek out this committee for concerns related to any aspect of safety and preparedness, from bullying or misconduct to facilities hazards to child abuse. Members offer education for leaders and congregants and serve as a confidential resource when concerns arise. When an issue is reported, the team responds with compassion, fairness and clear process, prioritizing the well-being of all involved.

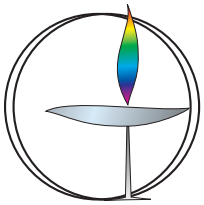
Communications and Coordination. The nerve center for the congregation is in many ways the part time office manager, Sherry Kyriacou. She answers emails, maintains the calendars, prepares and sends email announcements and all publications. In addition, she maintains the directory and database, interfaces with UUA, formats and prints all printed matter and prepares slides for Sunday services, manages files, posts and website content, including weekly recordings and carries out all financial transactions. Obviously, with a single part time staff member, the congregation's business affairs are extraordinarily efficient.

Revenue and Expenses. The largest and most important revenue stream for UUCD is the annual pledged contributions from members, which covers approximately 65% of the congregation's expenditures. The organization also has a few supplemental sources of income. Planned gifts (bequests left in members' wills or trusts) provide funds in perpetuity, some which the board can use as needed, and others for specific purposes. The interest from these gifts makes a significant contribution toward annual expenditures. A more detailed account of typical revenue sources as well as expenses:

Revenue	Pledges	65%
	Interest/dividends	16%
	Auction	7%
	Rental, programs	6%
	Endowment distributions	3%
	Collection Plate	3%
Expenses	Staff	62%
	Mortgage, insurance	15%
	Building & grounds	12%
	Ministries (family, Sunday)	4%
	UUA + Share plate	4%
	Office/business	3%

These percentages attest to the leanness of the organization and the good use to which donors' money is invested. The congregation has committed to efficiency in the interest of the impact that can be made – making every dollar go a long way.

Considering the broad range of activities UUCD members engage in for the betterment of their communities, their neighbors' lives and a sustainable world, giving to UUCD is a highly effective way of touching the world profoundly through a lean but deeply caring community of action.



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