

# the steeple

*The Congregational Newsletter of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington  
September 2020*

## ***From the Board of Trustees*** **A New Congregational Year**

*By Dan House, Board President*



**H**appy New Year from the board. While summer always offers a different experience at the First UU Society, this summer has certainly been unique. The board would like to extend our appreciation to everyone who has helped our beloved community handle our new normal with grace, creativity, and flexibility.

A brief update regarding the board: We held our annual retreat partly in person under the tent in the Memorial Garden. It was a great joy to be with fellow UUs again, even at a distance and with masks. At the annual retreat, we talk about our plans and goals for the coming year. While things will certainly look different, the core of our mission remains the same and is even more important.

A goal of the board is to continue to bring transparency to our finances and budgeting process. We made some steps in that direction last year and hope to continue that process. Please keep an eye out for announcements about an opportunity to discuss our budget situation in October or early November. Our goal with that discussion is to consider how our budget reflects our values and mission. I expect it to be a lively discussion with much input from our congregants.

One other thing that has changed in form, but not spirit, is our monthly board meetings at 6 p.m. on the third Tuesday of every month. Of course

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## From the Board of Trustees

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the meetings have moved to Zoom. All members are welcome to attend board meetings in Zoom format just as before when members could attend any board meeting in person. However, the advent of Zoom does make the process a bit more challenging. If any member would like to attend a board meeting to observe, please contact the board chair (Dan House, [Telenook@comcast.net](mailto:Telenook@comcast.net)) prior to the meeting. If any member wishes to ask questions or present any concerns to the board at the meeting, please contact Dan House at least one week ahead of the meeting, or before the second Tuesday of the month. Of course you can contact the board at any time via email at [board@uusociety.org](mailto:board@uusociety.org).

Thank you all for your continued support and faith in our beloved First UU Society of Burlington. I look forward to seeing you all on Zoom at coffee hour and hopefully in person soon.

Peace,

*Dan House, on behalf of the FUUSB Board of Trustees*



### Minister's Monthly Update

Each month, Rev. Tricia shares a Minister's Monthly Update with the congregation. If you missed the latest issue, just visit our homepage at [uusociety.org](http://uusociety.org) and click on the Monthly Update link under the Stay Connected section.

For all issues of the Update, visit [uusociety.org/publication-archives](http://uusociety.org/publication-archives).



*Silent Vigil for Racial Justice, summer 2020*

## From the Director of Lifespan Faith Development

By Erika Reif



No one could argue that this summer has been like any other, and as we move into fall the one thing of which we can be certain is that we will be following an unfamiliar path.

Everything Margo, Gabriel, and I were working on in March screeched to a halt, and since then we have been trying to reimagine what children's faith development, youth and family ministry should look like at FUUSB in this new and ever-changing time. We have experimented with different offerings with varied levels of success and often measured that success in single digits.

Did we get reports of two children being excited to receive packets from us in the mail and planting the seeds they contained? Success! Did three families mention that they enjoyed visiting the story paths we have installed on the grounds? Success! The YUUth Group, normally dormant in summer, has thrived with six or seven regulars, meeting sometimes twice a week. We collaborated with three other congregations to form a regional middle school youth group, and four kids from FUUSB lit the chalice and played games online with other UUs from across Vermont. Success. Success. Each connection has been valuable to us, a small thread to maintain ties to this congregation and to our faith, even as we are untethered from the familiar routine of Sunday mornings at the Meeting House.

This fall, we will continue to offer resources for parents to use for at-home faith development, related to the monthly worship theme, and maintain our focus on connection over content for our group programming. While the weather allows, the YUUth Group will alternate outdoor in-person meetings with

virtual. For younger ages, expect some one-off events and short series of classes in-person and outside in September and October, giving way to mostly virtual meetings as winter sets in. We know that parents are unsure what "back to school" will really feel like, how it will impact their children or their schedules, so instead of the October through April classes of past years, we will keep our plans smaller and more flexible.

This leaves space, plenty of it, for your input. What would work for you and your children in November? In January? In March? How can we nurture our families despite these unique challenges? In a time of isolation, how can we strengthen our community? We will keep asking ourselves these questions, but invite you all to share your needs, your hopes, and your creative ideas!



Image credits: Charity Clark, Erika Reif

## Caring for Each Other

By Lynn Douglas, Care Network Team Chair



A dear friend is fond of saying that people bring their “best selves” to church. Meaning that we bring our warmest, kindest, most active, most courteous selves. And of course all that good will feeds our own souls and is reflected and reciprocated by the folks we encounter in the pews, at coffee hour, in Faith Development classes, and meetings.

We find ourselves living in an alternate universe, not unlike the ones we read about in science fiction. We can remember our time at the Meeting House, but it’s vague and we wonder how to get back there. Since it will probably be another church year before we can gather in large groups, we want to find ways to reconnect and forge new relationships during this enforced distancing.

The Care Network Team is proposing a “match-up” system, pairing folks who would like to reach out with folks who could use a lift or a bit of help. And you might well fit into both categories: Would you enjoy a weekly phone chat, but you could also make an extra casserole during the week to share with a family looking for a break from homeschooling and work?

Ideas for things you can offer or would be pleased to receive:

- Snail-mail pen pal
- Postcards for kids (you know you have a stack from vacations)
- Online pen pal
- Share your kid’s artwork (snail mail or email) to brighten a refrigerator or an inbox
- Weekly phone chat
- Support phone calls (*school is delayed again?!, the house is a mess, I got laid off*)

- Occasionally offer a meal via your front stoop
- Cheer-up cookies or other treat packages
- FaceTime book-reading or other time with kids

Contact us with other ideas to offer or needs you have. The Care Network will do the matching; we will contact you with your new connection. Please contact Lynn Douglas at [herbalwoman@gmail.com](mailto:herbalwoman@gmail.com) or (802) 318-2663.



Flower Communion, May 2020

## Meeting in the Time of COVID

By Christina Fulton, Director of Operations & Finance



As we enter a new congregational year, when we will most likely be meeting mostly by Zoom, I'd like for all of us to think about community. I would say that community is the most important part of

FUUSB. And during a pandemic, community is really hard to come by. Many of our groups have continued to meet regularly during the Stay Home, Stay Safe order, and have been doing it with huge success! So as this new year begins, let us stop and think about how we can contribute to building community at FUUSB.

First let's talk about groups that already exist at FUUSB. If you have a Chalice Circle, Theme Circle, Team or Committee that is already meeting online, how can you make sure everyone is aware of that meeting and is participating? There is, or will be, a group set up in Realm for every Chalice Circle and Theme Circle. Please remember to add your meetings as events for your group in Realm. Even if you have a closed group, it will help attendance if members see these events in Realm. And if you are the Team Leader or Chair of a Committee, these are not closed groups! You should always be looking for new members. One way you can do this is by advertising. Put your regular meeting times as an Event in Realm, and also put a notice in the eNews about your meetings that includes an invitation to new members and a link to your Zoom meeting.

And what about those groups that haven't yet been created? Do you have an idea for a new group? Are you feeling the need for deeper connection to your fellow UUs? Guess what? You can create a group! You can have a group that does book discussions, a

group for gardeners, a group that knits and chats, a group that has deep philosophical discussions. Whatever you are interested in, there are sure to be others who are also interested. Put out a call for interested parties in the eNews and the Facebook group. There are many people who are truly in need of connection during this time. Once you create a group and set a meeting time, contact Mary or Christina so they can set up your group in Realm. And if you want to use FUUSB's Zoom account, contact Christina for a link to your meeting.

And don't forget our Virtual Coffee Hour, which begins at 10:45 a.m. on Sundays. We gather and chat all together until about 11 a.m. when we break into smaller groups so we can have more in-depth conversation. The smaller groups switch up two or three times in the hour, so you get to chat with lots of people. Many people have commented that they like Virtual Coffee Hour better than Coffee Hour in the Parlors! It's easier to hear each other talk, for sure. You can find the link to Virtual Coffee Hour in "The Links" which is emailed to everyone on Saturday evenings.

The Links is our weekly publication with the goal of sharing links to all online meetings for the week (Sunday-Saturday). If you would like the link to your meeting to be included in The Links, please email your meeting description and the link to Christina at [xina@uusociety.org](mailto:xina@uusociety.org) by Saturday morning.

So many people are experiencing extreme loneliness during this time. Our community has the ability to help with that. If you have any questions or want help setting up a group, please contact Christina.

# Climate Justice Team Update

By Jud Lawrie, Climate Justice Team Chair

In February we had a kick-off meeting to announce the formation of a new Climate Justice Team at FUUSB. Since then we've had monthly meetings (virtual). We have organized into six focus areas, or "action groups" as follows:

1. Putting Our UU Values Into Action
2. Networking and Connecting With Faith Communities
3. Legislative and Policy-Based Advocacy
4. Collaboration With and Support of Local Climate Groups
5. Climate Justice and Racial Justice
6. Other (e.g., developing a presence on the FUUSB website, and involving UU Youth)

Each action group has already had at least two UU members who have stepped up to work with that group. We could use more.

At our last meeting we discussed a proposed mission statement for the team as follows:

*"Drawing from our UU values and principles, the FUUSB Climate Justice Team is called to address the escalating climate crisis through education which inspires personal and community change, advocacy, political action, and collaboration. We are further committed to explore and address the connection between climate justice, environmental justice, and other social justice issues such as racism."*



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Image credit: Jud Lawrie

So far, this mission statement has received only positive feedback.

The climate crisis, already serious, is only going to get worse. The more we can do to address the issue up front, the better off we will be. Therefore, please give serious consideration to joining us, not just for our own benefit, but for all those who follow.

*"This we know. The Earth does not belong to us, we belong to the Earth. All things are connected, like the blood that unites one family. Whatever befalls the Earth, befalls the children of the Earth. We do not weave the web of life, we are only a strand of it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves."* - Chief Seattle

Please let me know if you are willing to get involved in some way. If you have questions, please contact me at [jud@lawrie.com](mailto:jud@lawrie.com).



## The Wisdom of Chalice Circles

*By Hope Baker-Carr, Chalice Circles Coordinator*

When I first moved to Burlington sixteen years ago and was looking for a spiritual community, I decided to check out the historic Meeting House that graced the top of Church Street. My experience with Unitarianism was limited, yet I knew that it was more progressive and less structured than other religious denominations. My son, a UVM graduate with a minor in Religious Studies, told me that he really liked the minister, which was extraordinary in itself.

On my first visit I felt immediately at ease with the spiritual focus on this world and the belief in the worth and dignity of every human being. Yet as Sundays passed I was overwhelmed by the size of the congregation and (as an introvert) the prospect of stepping foot in the Parlors for coffee hour. So I sought out other ways to meet and get to know members, signing up for an adult education offering organized by M'ellen Kennedy called "Practicing Our Faith." By the end of the 5-6 sessions, the other participants and I were so delighted with our "exploration" together that, at M'ellen's suggestion, we continued meeting as a Small Group Ministry group, joining a program that had been going at FUUSB for a number of years.

This new group became my anchor in the community. We met twice a month for two hours in the early evening, at first in the Meeting House and later in members' homes, and on Sundays I could look around the Sanctuary or walk into the Parlors and find at least two or three faces of people I knew. I finally felt that I was settling in.

Many UU societies across the country have Small Group Ministry programs (most often called Chalice Circles or Covenant Groups) and many say that these groups have transformed their congregations.

Developed by a group of UU ministers (including M'ellen Kennedy) the purpose is "intimacy and ultimacy": intimacy implying a depth of personal connection that may be achieved, and ultimacy, the questioning and discussion of topics that deal with meaning in our lives and lead to spiritual growth. Both the structure of the meetings and the way in which they are conducted contributes to the creation of this sacred space. The manner in which individuals bring themselves to the circle, being fully present, listening to and honoring each other's stories, and sitting with periods of silence, is as important as what is shared.

A year ago there were ten active Chalice Circles at FUUSB, some of which had been going for 12 or more years and others which were fairly new. In March, when the coronavirus prohibited Chalice Circles from meeting in person, many of the groups transitioned to using Zoom to stay connected. The ability to see each other's faces and to share how we were managing felt like a lifeline of support.

Thinking that there might be others who would benefit from the connection that a Chalice Circle can provide, I started a new weekly "Drop-In" Chalice Circle this spring. Initially there were six people who dropped in, with a few returning frequently, and two continuing now on an ongoing basis. From the start this circle felt extraordinary. Whether this could be attributed to meeting new people, the shared frustration of being in quarantine, any commonalities, or the level of sharing, I'm not sure. It seems that there is a great deal of value in joining circles with people we don't know. If there is interest, new chalice circles may be formed this fall.

Email [chalicecircles@uusociety.org](mailto:chalicecircles@uusociety.org) for more information.

## Covenant Sunday

By Nancy Hellen, Healthy Congregation Team Co-Chair

*Covenant is the thread that joins Unitarian Universalist congregations, communities, and individuals together in a web of interconnection. The practice of promising to walk together is the precious core of our creedless faith. Covenant is both a noun and a verb, a written agreement and the way we engage. (from UUA)*

Covenant Sunday is an annual practice at FUUSB. The Healthy Congregation Team has participated in this service, as it is at the core of our purpose: to foster the overall human relational health of the FUUSB congregation, embodied in our covenants, as we endeavor to fulfill our mission. In the past, Covenant Sunday has explored what covenant is, how covenants are created, who uses covenants at FUUSB, and shared various groups' covenants. We have had a tradition of new members signing the covenant.

As we approach this year's Covenant Sunday on September 27, we wonder about how covenant is meaningful to our FUUSB community. If a covenant is a promise, how are we doing with that promise? How do we remind ourselves of that promise? If we as individuals are searchers for truth and meaning, if we are committed to work toward justice, equity and compassion, does our covenant hold us accountable? Does covenant support our community's growth, change, and the uncomfortableness that might be required to truly be a Beloved Community? Does our covenant belong in a more prominent place in our Society, both physically and in practice?

This FUUSB covenant was written in 2015:

*We gather together with the intention of creating a vibrant, healthy, liberal religious community. To this end, we make the following promises to each other:*

1. *To come with open minds and hearts so that we can welcome new ideas, new people and new possibilities.*

2. *To listen carefully to each other, to speak openly and respectfully, and to assume good intentions, especially in times of disagreement.*
3. *To participate actively in the life of the Society by being present, serving/volunteering, and providing financial support.*

*We recognize that there will be times when we will fall short of these ideals. We will be accountable to each other and forgiving of each other.*

We look forward to Covenant Sunday and hope these wonderings have sparked interest, questioning and ideas. See you on September 27.

Healthy Congregation Team: Co-chairs: Nancy Hellen ([nbhellen@gmail.com](mailto:nbhellen@gmail.com)) and Noah Patullo, Members: Stuart Graves, Brian Haas, and Marty Garrett



Late Summer Vespers Service, August 2020



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# the steeple

**Interested in writing an  
article for *The Steeple*?**

The next issue of *The Steeple*  
will be published in November.  
The deadline to submit articles  
is **October 26**.

*If you would like to write an article  
or have questions, please email  
[mary@uusociety.org](mailto:mary@uusociety.org).*

