

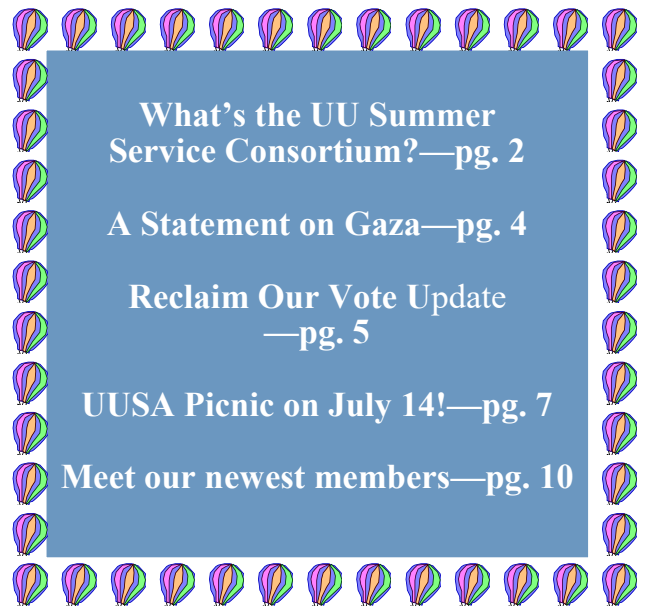
THE AMHERST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST NEWSLETTER

121 North Pleasant Street, P.O. Box 502, Amherst Massachusetts 01004

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



July 2024



Important Information

STREET ADDRESS:

121 North Pleasant Street, Amherst, MA 01002

MAILING ADDRESS:

P.O. Box 502, Amherst, MA 01004-0502

The following staff can be reached by email or by calling the office and leaving a message: 413-253-2848

MINISTER: The Reverend Rachael Hayes

revrachael@uusocietyamherst.org *On sabbatical until August*

CONGREGATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR:

Lea Douville office@uusocietyamherst.org

Office Hours: Tuesday - Friday 11:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

Andrew Coate dre@uusocietyamherst.org

MANAGER OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

Jacy Armenti

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC:

Brenda Miller music@uusocietyamherst.org

BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

board@uusocietyamherst.org

[link to board minutes](#)

Co-Presidents:

Linda Callahan and Jeff Clark

Clerk:

Ashley Carter

Treasurer:

Eric Murphy

Members At Large:

Kate Dahlstedt

Sue Kelly

Nancy Hunter

NEWSLETTER

Deadline for submissions: 20th of each month. Email them to Copy Editor Janis Gray (contact Lea in the office if you need her email address).

Please understand we cannot cut and paste PDF files into the newsletter, so submissions should either be Word documents, rich text files or written in the body of the email. Submissions may be edited to save space or to maintain a consistent style.

Thank you!

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Schedule of Services

In July we will not be holding services at UUSA. We will start services again in August upon Rev. Rachael's return from sabbatical.

August services will be simpler, with readings and meditations in the place of sermons as we ease our way back into another worship year.

Meanwhile, five UU congregations in MA have created a summer service consortium. You are invited to attend these services in person or online!

Sunday, July 7, 10 a.m. — First Parish in Concord (MA), 20 Lexington Road. Website: <https://firstparish.org/wp/>

Sunday, July 14, 10 a.m. — First Parish in Concord (MA), 20 Lexington Road. Website: <https://firstparish.org/wp/>

Sunday, July 21, 10 a.m. — First Parish in Lincoln (MA), 4 Bedford Road, Website: <https://fplincn.org>

Sunday, July 28, 10 a.m. — First Parish Church in Bedford (MA), 75 Great Road. Website: <https://www.uubedford.org>

Other congregations with online options:

[Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring, MD](#) | 10:30am ET | [zoom link](#)

[Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence](#) | 10am ET | [zoom link](#)

[Unitarian Universalist Meeting House of Chatham, MA](#) | 10:30am ET | [zoom link](#)



Check out the UUSA YouTube Channel!

Original content from our own Sunday services is uploaded to our website, uusocietyamherst.org, with optional closed captioning! To view them, click [here](#) — and don't forget to SUBSCRIBE!

Dedicated Offerings

From September to June, our Society donates each month to a dedicated offering recipient and splits 50/50 every Sunday's offering plate with the recipient organization.

The Dedicated Offering Committee selects non-profit organizations that our Society will support with donations from our Sunday collections. We solicit UUSA's members for names of organizations through a form which is available in the office and on-line [here](#). A representative of the chosen organization is asked to speak about it on the first Sunday of the month. We welcome new members. If you are interested in learning more or joining DOC, please contact **Anne Perkins, Mary Beth Seminario, Linda Callahan, Carolyn Holstein, or Brenda Bushouse**.

In September 2023, we raised \$1,000 for **UUA Disaster Relief Fund** to support the Montpelier VT UU congregation, which suffered a great loss when the Connecticut river flooded its building; in October \$1,175 for **Maui Strong** to support victims of the wildfires which devastated Lahaina in western Maui, Hawa; and in November \$850 for the **Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC)**.

In December, our Dedicated Offerings raised \$900 for **Etta International, Empowerment through the Arts**. In January, we raised \$1,000 for **Reproductive Equity Now**. In February, we raised \$1,100 for **Heal-**

ing Across the Divides, and in March we raised \$1,200 for **Girls Inc. of the Valley**. We will report in a future newsletter what we raised in April for **Dakin Humane Society** and in May-June for the **Movement Voter Fund**.

Co-President's Letter

I am finishing up my third year on the board and second year as co-president. When I said “yes” to serving, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Having just experienced a major life-changing event and feeling lost, the UUSA gave me what I needed; a place to connect, a place to be of service, a place to grow and change. For this, I am grateful.

Coming out of the worst of the pandemic, I heard several “longings” from members of the congregation during the early days in my new leadership role. Some (most) of us were exhausted. Some of us just wanted things to “get back to normal”. And others (a few) saw an opportunity for transformation. Not having deep historical roots in the UUSA (but having roots in UU), I was not familiar with the traditions of the Amherst congregation. I may have seemed at times somewhat insensitive to the beautiful legacy that this congregation has built over time because I tend to prefer “growth and change” over a “return to normal.”

I think I’ve got a gland that others don’t have. Somewhere behind my left ear (kidding.... well, mostly kidding), I have a radical transformation gland that when I’m faced with a dilemma, crisis or challenge, secretes a hormone that tells me “*Hey, let’s try something new.*” I warned you in my “[thank you for electing me speech](#)” at the annual meeting in June 2022 that I love experiments. I suggested that “*a return to normal is not an option*” and proposed several experiments for the congregation, including trying on the practices of sociocracy.

In my speech (Reverend Rachael called it a sermon), I suggested that “normal” created the conditions that resulted in a global pandemic, a climate crisis, institutional racism and other oppressions, and a world in which 40,000 people die every day from hunger, malnutrition and preventable disease. “Normal” evolved from a white supremacy-based, Euro-centric culture that enslaved Africans and resulted in the genocide of Native Americans. Normal is not good enough. Perhaps spurred on by my radical transformation gland, I proposed we examine our “normal” practices in both governance and ministry through the lens of the Eighth Principle.

Frankly, I can’t think of anything more meaningful or difficult than activating our commitment to “*accountably dismantling racism and other oppressions within ourselves and our institutions*” starting with the UUSA. Toward this end, I’m excited about the revitalized work of our social justice circles and applaud those of you who have already engaged in this important work. As I leave the co-president’s role, this is one of the places I hope to invest my time and energy.

Building on our last two UUA Common Reads, *An Indigenous People’s History of the U.S.* (2023) and *Reparations and Repair* (2024), I’ve become convinced that it is time to take the radical and potentially transformative first step of disassociating the name of our congregation from the harms promulgated by Field Marshal and Lord, Jeffery Amherst, an 18th century army officer and Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in the American colonies. I believe it’s time to “*lose the A from the UUSA*” as a necessary step toward reparation and repair.

Of course, a name change is but a beginning. The [UUA has called on us](#) to “*fight white supremacy individually and together if we hold hope for Beloved Community. There is work to do in congregations and there is personal work to do.*” I look forward to engaging in this important and difficult work with you in the future.

In Beloved Community,
John M. Gerber, no longer co-president of the UUSA

Postscript: if you are not yet a member of the UUSA-Social Justice Circle email listserv and would like to be added to the Google group list to receive updates and announcements of our activities, please let me know and I’ll add you to the list.

The UUSA Board of Trustees would like to hear from you about your thoughts on the leadership, management, and general governance of the UUSA. Governance is a shared responsibility of the Minister, the Board of Trustees, and the many committees, ministries, groups, circles, and teams of the congregation. Please share

your thoughts and suggestions using this [“digital suggestion box”](#) (an email).

Our Congregational Administrator will forward your feedback to the Minister, Board of Trustees, and/or committee leader, as appropriate. Members of the Board will also be available during the coffee hour after the services to hear your thoughts. In addition, you are invited to speak directly to the Board at our next meeting. To be included on the board meeting agenda, please contact either of the co-presidents. We’d like to hear from you!

STATEMENT ON GAZA

The members of the UUSA’s **Racial, Religious, and Ethnic Justice Circle** are heartbroken over the recent increase in violence in both Gaza and Israel. We are heartbroken over the increase in antisemitism and further acts of intolerance relating to Hamas’s attack on Israel and the violent response from the Israeli government. We’re in a very painful, tense moment, and we want the violence to end.

In this very complex and age-old situation, we remember what we believe to be true.

1. Hamas does not represent the views or best interests of the Palestinian people.
2. The Israeli government does not represent the views or best interest of the people in Israel or Jewish people elsewhere.
3. Both Jewish and Palestinian people will continue to reside in the land currently identified as Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank. They are not going anywhere.
4. Jewish and Palestinian peoples have lived in peace in the past.
5. There is much pain. People can begin to connect across political differences by recognizing this mutual pain.

Our guiding question is: how do we fit our response to the conflict in Israel/Palestine within a UU framework? How do we honor our UU values/principles?

The UUSA’s Racial, Religious, and Ethnic Justice circle supports the UUA as it reiterates condemnation of the Israeli military’s ongoing violence against Gaza and joins again with the growing chorus of voices across the globe urging immediate and total ceasefire, the provision of massive emergency humanitarian aid, and the safe return of all hostages and prisoners.

A central issue we’re facing is one of clarification – that being pro-justice for Palestine should not equate to being anti-Semitic. In fact, the values that underlie a pro-Palestine stance (being anti-bigotry/anti-oppression) are very much the opposite of those that drive anti-Semitism. And in the confusion around this distinction, we’re hearing that some problematic behaviors have arisen.

We condemn the anti-Semitism, anti-Arabism, and Islamophobia that have been exacerbated by some of the demonstrations of support for the residents of Gaza who are being besieged by the brutal Israeli over-reaction to the horrific Hamas attack of October 7th. Anti-Semitism, anti-Arabism, and Islamophobia are always toxic, and never appropriate. As a denomination which prioritizes equality, tolerance, and justice, it is our responsibility to be a place of peace and a provider of safety, especially for those who are vulnerable. We have heard that there have been anti-Semitic comments and behavior within the UU community. This demands a response, which must involve a clear stance against bigotry of any kind.

Knowing that understanding, reconciliation and resolution of the situation requires voices of reason and good faith from Jewish and Palestinian communities working together to live together in peace in the places they both call home, we therefore support and applaud the efforts of Israelis and Palestinians working together in groups, like [“Standing Together”](#) and the [“Parents Circle - Families Forum,”](#) to find ways for the people living in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza to live together in peace in the places they both call home, and to deescalate the demonization of the “other”. They are the ones we need to listen to, understand and support.

People here need to have space to express themselves, but how do we do this without becoming even more inflamed? We do not have to agree, but we do need to respect each other. Maybe an outside speaker/facilitator with expert knowledge and skill at moderating would be an important help. But what is clear to us is that remaining silent and passive is itself an active choice—and one that does not cultivate safety or align with our UU values.

The UUSA’s Racial, Religious, and Ethnic Justice circle is exploring ways to help us all learn about this situation so we can act positively in supporting peaceful resolution, and support people of good faith in both the

Jewish and Palestinian communities. We need clarification of the various sides of the issue in order to arrive at a better understanding of the pain on both sides, and thus hopefully to ease or resolve some of the tensions in our community.

Additional resources:

** the [Parents Circle - Families Forum](#) is a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization of over 700 families, all of whom have lost an immediate family member to the ongoing conflict. ~ in the US, the [American Friends of the Parents Circle – Families Forum](#) is a 501(c)3 organization committed to supporting the [Parents Circle - Families Forum](#) through raising public awareness, constituency building and fundraising in the U.S.

** [Standing Together](#) is a grassroots movement mobilizing Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel in pursuit of peace, equality, and social and climate justice.

** NYT article [A Thank-You Note to the Campus Protesters](#)

In Memoriam

Linda Honan

1942-2024

Linda Honan, a beloved member of our congregation, died on June 14 after suffering for some time with heart and kidney failure.

Linda was born in Limerick Ireland April 17, 1942. She received her undergraduate degree in English at University College, Dublin. She then went to England and received a Master's degree in Anglo-Saxon literature from University College London. In 1968 she received a fellowship to Yale University, and a Master's of Philosophy degree in Medieval Studies in 1972.

She moved to Westborough MA in 1973 and was director of Educational Programs at the Higgins Armory Museum. She came to the Valley in 1990 to accept a position at UMass as Program Coordinator in Continuing Education. She retired about 15 years ago.

Her dear friend, **Ellen Kosmer**, said that there were two events that meant a great deal to Linda:

- Coming to the United States where she became a citizen in 2008, at Faneuil Hall in Boston, and
- Becoming a member of the Unitarian Universalist Society here in Amherst, where she joined the Dedicated Offerings committee.



A memorial service will be held at the UUSA in September.

Important update on writing postcards for Reclaim Our Vote

by Anne Louise White

Dear postcarding comrades:

I added up all of the postcard addresses that we have written to over the past few years for RECLAIM OUR VOTE, and we have sent out a whopping **16,622** postcards to voters! Mighty impressive.

However, there is still much work to do, and we will be inviting folks to write postcards to voters of color throughout the summer. All postcards written will need to be held and not mailed until between October 1st and the 15th. So that gives us three months to write.

Here is what Andrea Miller, the director of the Center for Common Ground, says about the value of

postcarding:

“Sending postcards to targeted populations with the right message and voter information can dramatically increase turnout as evidenced by the 2021 Petersburg 43% turnout among Black voters; we did better with the voters who only got a postcard than we did with voters who received postcards, texts and phone calls (their turnout was 40%).

“I get postcards from campaigns that are utterly useless (Vote on November 8th in a state that has 45 days of early voting). The postcard doesn't tell me where to vote or even where to find out.

“Writing postcards is very effective if you have an informational message and are writing to voters that are not ever contacted by candidates or parties (BIPOC voters who are 0 for 3 or 1 for 3). Parties often don't contact BIPOC voters because they are low-income and won't be donors. We contact individual communities and have them tell us what is important in their community and that is the message that we put on the postcard.”

Due to family medical issues, **Anne Louise** is stepping back and turning over coordinating our efforts to **Susan Rice**. As Susan tells us, “More than ever, I am committed to this effective endeavor at empowering marginalized voters. The current postcard campaign is targeting Florida voters...primarily black women voters in smaller cities and counties to ensure that they are not overlooked. Other groups will be targeting the large population centers.

There are a number of campaigns throughout the summer. All the cards in the various campaigns are to be held until Oct. 1-15th, when they will be mailed closer to the election. If holding on to the cards is a problem, I am glad to do that for you.

I would like to know in the next day or three, how many postcards you would like to take on. I am including some other info (attachments below) that will serve as a reminder about postcard format, etiquette, etc.

ALSO, the cost of postcard stamps is going up (again) to 56 cents on July 14th. You might want to buy early to save a little \$. I have stamps that I am willing to sell until I run out.

Pick-up places for postcard packets:

1. My house 243 W. Pelham Rd. Shutesbury
2. Jeanne Ballantine’s house 90 McClellan St, Amherst
3. Ruth Hazzard’s house 235 Pine St, Amherst

So, here’s what I need from you:

The # of postcards you would like for yourself (and for your postcard group if you have one).

Where would you like to pick them up?

Deep thanks to all of you working on this important action. Please call [**Susan**] if you have any questions.

Our Caring Ministries 

Please let Caring Team leaders **Fran Plumer** or **Catharine Porter** know if you or someone you know would like a phone call or visit, perhaps a ride or a meal. Our mission is to see that no one goes unnoticed and everyone in our community gets the help they need. Other team members are **Charlie Atwood, Pete Rogers, Carol Johnson, Rob Fuderich, Jeanne Ballantine, Carolyn Cave, Mary Latham, Linda Callahan, Sophie Hermann, Lynn Sussman, Kate Dahlstedt, Gordon Wyse, Lauren Croce, Karen Mack.**

Social Events

Thank you to **Candi Talley** for hosting a beautiful gathering in her garden on June 23 to celebrate the end of the 2023-2024 worship season! And thanks to all who came out!

If you missed this one, please mark your calendar for picnics July 14th (Mill River) and Aug 17 (Groff Park). See next page for details, or watch for emails from Lea.



More Social Events!

Men's Breakfast at 7 A.M. each Wednesday, at Stables Restaurant, Hadley. This is an informal group - no need to "RSVP" - just show up (*?s: contact **Pete Rogers***)

Women's Circle at Noon on 2nd Thursday of each month in person in conference room, and at Noon on 4th Thursday on Zoom. To subscribe to this group and receive reminders, email: uusa-women+subscribe@uusocietyamherst.org

Community Breakfast Wednesday mornings from 8 - 10 A.M. Breakfast co-sponsored with Craig's Doors in our Social Hall. *Volunteers welcome (?s: contact **Sophie Rogers**) or just come to eat and chat.*

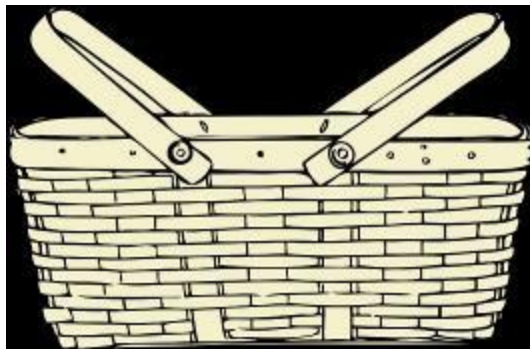
Sunday, July 14, noon -3 p.m. at Mill River Recreation Area, North Amherst. **UUSA Picnic** hosted by the Caring Team in the Pavilion. Come enjoy a potluck picnic at Mill River with all your UU friends! Play on the playground, sit under the trees, throw a frisbee, enjoy the breeze (hopefully). Picnic will happen rain or shine. Potluck sign-up here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Jy07E-DkZkYvZYT19ltUNUWJEFTtacNFvyswlMSmCeI/edit?gid=0#gid=0>

Tuesday, July 16, noon: Book Group All are invited to the book group in the Conference Room. The book is **The Personal Librarian** by Marie Benedict and Victoria Constance Murray. Feel free to bring your lunch. Questions? Please email or call **Nancy Hunter**. Thanks!

From Goodreads:

"The remarkable, little-known story of Belle da Costa Greene, J. P. Morgan's personal librarian—who became one of the most powerful women in New York despite the dangerous secret she kept in order to make her dreams come true, from *New York Times* bestselling author Marie Benedict and acclaimed author Victoria Christopher Murray."

Sunday, August 17, noon -3 p.m. at Groff Park, South Amherst. **UUSA Picnic** hosted by the Ministry of Welcome and Membership.



Great news for “our” Afghan Refugee Family— but help is still needed

Dear UU Friends,

Last year, a group of folks from Mt. Toby Friends Meeting, the **Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst**, Northampton Friends Meeting, and the Jewish Community of Amherst formed a Circle of Care to help the Shirzads, an Afghan refugee family transition to life in the U.S. Many of you came to know about the Shirzads through their food enterprise, Faqiri's Kitchen, which was based in our Unitarian Society Kitchen. Special thanks to the many UUs who volunteered to help cook meals with the family.

Our Circle of Care has wonderful news! After much effort in putting their application together, the Shirzad

family has won the Habitat for Humanity lottery for a three-bedroom house, to be built in Northampton! It will be about a year before the house will be completed. In the meantime, we would like to invite you to join us in raising funds to support the increased rental costs that the family will soon face. As you know, local housing costs have skyrocketed, and their rent has increased significantly in the last two years. Despite dad's full time employment, the rent is currently beyond their means, and it will go up another \$300.00 in September.

We are appealing to members of our faith communities, to join us by contributing to this one-year, rent relief fund. We know that many of you care deeply about welcoming our newest neighbors, and this rent relief fund will help the family immeasurably. We hope to raise \$6,000, which would enable us to give the family \$500/month for a year. The children would thus be able to continue at their current school, and Ismail and Farzana will have more time to do their sweat equity for the Habitat house.

To make a tax exempt donation, **write a check to Mt. Toby Meeting of Friends with Rent Relief/ Immigrant Support Fund in the memo line**. Checks should be sent to Kate O'Kane, 6 Taylor Hts., Montague, MA 01351. (It is our understanding that checks are most safely sent when dropped directly at the Post Office.) Kate will record donations and send the checks to the Mt. Toby treasurer, who will set up monthly payments to the Shirzads.

A little background information: Ismail, Farzana and their four young children moved to Amherst over 2 years ago, after leaving Kabul when the US forces pulled out. Ismail served the U.S. military as a skilled mechanic, but all of his credentials were lost in the haste of the evacuation. He has just graduated from a Franklin Tech adult training program, which will help him to regain his credentials and hopefully improve his earning capacity. Both parents are also working diligently to improve their English by taking classes from the Center for New Americans and meeting with tutors.

We appreciate your taking the time to consider this request. We hope you will help in whatever way you can. No donation is too small!

In community and with gratitude,

The Shirzad family Circle of Care: **Anne Louise White, Jeanne Ballantine**, Sallie Deans Lake, Seth Cable, Laurie Coursin, Jane Costello, Kate O'Kane, Sharon Raymond, Kathleen Winkworth

Social Action



With many students away, Not Bread Alone (NBA), a local soup kitchen in Amherst, is short-staffed. Volunteers work under the direction of the experienced kitchen manager. On Saturdays, cooks are needed from 9:30 -12; servers 11:45- 1:15; and clean up 12 - 2. On Wednesday and Sunday, come an hour before the meal to help cook and a little before the meal starts to help serve. NBA is located in the lower rear of First Congregational Church off Spring St.

Any time on any of these days is most appreciated! For information contact **Mary Beth Seminario**. For additional details, read on...

Volunteering with Not Bread Alone

Location: Ground floor of the First Congregational Church, 165 Main Street, Amherst
The dining hall is downstairs; parking in the back.

Not Bread Alone serves 3 meals each week throughout the year.

We need help on: Saturdays and Sundays, 9:00am-2:30 pm & Wednesday 1:00-6:30 pm (Shorter shifts are available if need be; however, many choose to stay the full time, which is recommended when possible.)

Tasks may include: Setting up tables and chairs, bagging groceries (only on Saturdays), chopping vegetables, cooking, serving, sweeping, washing and drying dishes, mopping, general cleaning of the space, organizing food and cooking supplies, etc.

What to wear: Closed-toed shoes, long hair tied up

What NOT to wear: Shorts, short skirts, low-cut or sleeveless shirts, or anything with potentially offensive images or writing. Conservative, comfortable dress is best!

Valuables: Leave in the car or keep on your person! Coats should be hung up inside the kitchen. Please note: While we rarely encounter theft issues, we cannot guarantee the safety of your possessions when you bring them to NBA.

How the Meal Works: The meal is facilitated by one of our Kitchen Leaders; Bob Stover, program supervisor, or Alexis Batra. The Kitchen Leader comes prepared with a menu, but your ideas and creativity are encouraged in this collaborative cooking process. At noon on weekends (and 4 pm on Weds), volunteers sit down with guests to enjoy the meal, before heading back to clean up. This is often the most rewarding part of the experience! **We actively try to break down boundaries between those serving and those being served in order to foster a respectful, inclusive environment that welcomes everyone to help prepare and enjoy a meal together.**

Signing Up: Some volunteers come in once a week, others twice a month, and yet others come in more rarely. Bob schedules volunteers in advance. With groups, more advance planning is generally needed due to the increased number of volunteers. The volunteer schedule sometimes fills up quickly, so we cannot guarantee that a shift will be available on the preferred date. The schedule tends to be more open during school vacations and summer months. But, it's always worth checking!

IMPORTANT: If You Need to Cancel Your Shift

Please let Bob know at least 4 days in advance if you will need to cancel a shift. If an emergency comes up on the day when you are scheduled to volunteer, he asks that you please **call the Kitchen Phone at 413-256-0128** at the start of your scheduled shift to inform the kitchen leader that day.

Other ways to volunteer include playing music during meals, occasionally picking up food donations from Whole Foods on a Saturday morning, leading a workshop, organizing a food drive with your group, office or organization, etc.

So, let Bob know how YOU might like to get involved, and we can solidify details! We look forward to having you join our ever-growing, diverse community! Contact Bob Stover at rstover@chd.org.

ION Corner

ION — our Interfaith Opportunities Network — held its June meeting the Jewish Community Center as well as available via Zoom. Rabbi Weiner opened the meeting reflecting about Juneteenth and quoting a scholar who said that living with challenge requires us “to cross the narrow bridge without fear.”

To learn more about one another we are continuing to share our own faith journeys. Last month Peter Blood talked about his life growing up as a Quaker and the changes in both Quakerism and his practice during the 50's and 60s and today. His ministry during the past twenty years included teaching, which was important to his development as a Quaker.

ION has meant a lot to his journey.

At our June meeting, Jacki Bearce shared her story. As a black child, she was usually the only black person in her class. Because the education provided in public schools for blacks was very poor, her parents enrolled her in a Catholic elementary school. And while she was still the only black child in her class, the education was good. When she was older she had a mentor who helped her select her focus in life in counseling. She grew up Catholic, had relatives who were devout, but as she matured she explored different faiths, including our UU when we had a black minister, before finding a home at Hope Community Church and singing with the Amherst Area Gospel Choir.

ION regularly sponsors events which are in keeping with our mission. In June, we were a sponsor of Race Amity Day, whose purpose is to raise consciousness of the oneness of humankind and particularly across race relations in our own community. ION is a sponsor of the Frederick Douglass speech

‘What to the Slave is the Fourth of July’ community reading on July 5.

Respectfully,

Mary Beth Seminario, UUSA ION Representative

New Member Recognition Ceremony

May 19, 2024

The Ministry of Welcome and Membership scheduled three signings this year, and a fourth was added to accommodate folks who couldn't make the scheduled dates. During the 2023-2024 worship season, we signed 21 new adult members(!).

October 29, 2023

Jyl Gentzler
Jacob Torres

February 11, 2024

Erik Barnes
Pat Brinkman
Emily & Matt Holloway
Hillary Matheson
Mimi Mayer
Michelle Medeiros
Kat Nowicki
Sarah Puckett
Jess Rocheleau
Larry Schwartz
Iris Sowlat
Nova & Grover Wehman-Brown
Lisa Williams

April 14, 2024

Maddie Adams & Daniel Nicolai

May 5, 2024

Nancy Hunter & Brett Parker



Our largest membership book signing in memory!



Jyl Gentzler writes: *"As a little girl, I loved being embraced by a Lutheran community in which my grandparents, great-grandmother, and great-aunt played an active role in the religious education of children. They spoke of Jesus's unconditional love toward all of us, and how we should emulate this model in our own lives. They led us in song. As an adult, I couldn't embrace Lutheran doctrines and creeds, even as I deeply valued the loving (and singing) community my dear ones supported. I have wished for, but didn't know where to find, a community that would share my values and challenge me to live them more fully, but that didn't also commit me to endorsing doctrines about God that I saw no reason to accept. Over the past year, I have found that community in UUSA. I have joined the choir. I am so delighted to have the opportunity to give to as well as receive from this blessed community."*



Jacob Torres writes: *"I love the UUSA community... It has brought a new and wonderful community that I missed when I left the religion I was raised in and I am quite grateful for that."*



Michelle Medeiros

[Not pictured: Erik Barnes]

Pat Brinkman writes: "Growing up in a military family, moving between army bases in the deep south and Germany- and family in northern Minnesota and Germany - I have been looking for "home" my whole life. Moving to Amherst in May 2020 I think I finally found it. We had sold our house in Lincoln, MA in March 2019 to move to a cohousing community farming in Bethany, CT. The move-in date of May 2019 kept shifting. By March 2020, after leaving our community of 30+ years in July 2019 for 5 storage units in Naugatuck, a friend of a friends extra bedroom and the uncertainty of joining and creating a new cohousing community, we knew we needed to return to Massachusetts. As members of First Parish in Concord we cherished, and were sustained, by our connections there. Arriving in Amherst, I immediately sought out UU "family" - and found the UUSA Women's group. I joined a Small Group Ministry that needed new members. I joined a committee that called to my need for Social Action. I love this community of people - so how could I not join???"



Holloway Family: Emily & Matt
with Freddy (b 2019) and Larson (b 2022)

Matt Holloway writes: I was raised in the Leominster, MA, UU Church and have a deep appreciation for the values and beliefs that I learned there. Professionally, I am a long-time special education teacher and administrator. For fun, I enjoy reading, traveling, and spending time with Emily and our kids. Since moving to Amherst in 2019, I have found a lot of satisfaction in serving on various town boards and committees. We are thrilled to have joined UUSA as a place to build community for ourselves and our kids."

Emily Holloway writes: "I was born and raised in Maryland, moved to Boston where I met Matt, and together we moved out to Western Mass where I earned my MBA at UMass Amherst. Like so many others, we fell in love with the area and decided to make it our home. My parents were Catholic and I knew early on that it wasn't for me but never felt compelled to explore other religious traditions until having children and thinking about the kind of community and values I wanted for them. We have had so many great experiences with UUSA so far (enriching RE programming, winter pageant, second Friday fun, etc.) and are looking forward to many more. Thanks for welcoming our family with open arms."

"My name is **Hilary Matheson** and I relocated to Amherst at the end of 2023 from Wales to join my wife, Kay Flatten & dog, Herbert. Moving here had not been part of my future life plan but COVID changed all that & here I am! Amherst spoke to us because we had lived in Springfield in the 1990s and now our son & his wife live in Boston - so much better to be 2 hours drive away from us than a 7 hour flight! My introduction to UU had been in Fort Myers and so becoming a member here is a natural progression. I love to golf and walking Herbert as well as camping & pickleball - who said being retired was for sissies!! Sometimes I even pretend I'm an angel ;) I look forward to joining in and learning more about my fellow congregants."



Mimi Mayer writes "I moved here from Ohio a little over a year ago, and after visiting UU churches in three states, I have found my new UU home here at UUSA. I have been a UU for over 40 years and finding the right fit for me was job #1. I am so delighted to have found you! I moved from Ohio to start a new chapter after my husband's death. My son and his family had been long time residents in Greenfield and we decided to build a three generation home together, and have found our little bit of paradise in Gill. I retired after a career in educational administration and am looking for ways to live my values and make a positive difference in my new community. I look forward to getting to know you - my new UU family!"

Kat Nowicki writes: "Many years ago, one of my part time jobs as an undergraduate was singing in the choir at First Church, a Unitarian Universalist congregation in Boston. My spiritual journey took different turns after that first exposure to a UU community, centering on eastern mindfulness practices, dance, yoga, connection with nature, and mindful music-making. But I always remembered feeling a special connection to UU services, and sporadically visited UU's throughout the years. Recently I reconnected with the UU tradition, and was an active member of First Parish UU Church in Plymouth, Mass. When I relocated back to the valley in 2023, I again searched for the right community for socially engaged spiritual practice. After trying a few different congregations, I immediately was struck by the kind & welcoming community at UUSA. I am happy to have reconnected with music at UUSA - a nice full circle of my initial interaction with the UU world! I am so grateful to have found such a kind, caring, and thoughtful community at UUSA!"



Sarah Puckett writes: "I started attending UUSA in October 2023. My relationship with religious communities in the past has always been from having been hired as a church musician, so I really wanted to try being a congregation member. This congregation has a really special energy that I already feel very connected to. I'm so glad to be here!"



I'm a classical pianist, piano teacher, vocal coach, and music director with experience working in universities as an accompanist and vocal coach, and I'm a writer with professional experience in high school curriculum design. I also live with multiple chronic health conditions that have contributed to the very nonlinear career and life path that I've been on.

I have professional training and long-term, ongoing practice in several bodywork and energy work modalities which have been profoundly helpful to me as a musician and a human. These experiences have inspired me to direct my focus toward individual and collective healing work. I'm particularly interested in exploring systemic injustice and the relationships between individuals and society, and in learning how to live my values in an ever more embodied way both in my individual life and together with others in community. It feels like there are definitely some like-minded folks here at UUSA, and I'm excited to connect with you all."

Jess Rocheleau writes "I grew up in rural Ontario, Canada and moved to NH as a teenager. My husband Jason and I have lived and worked in Central/Western MA for the past 15 years. We have two kids: **Lyla and Owen**. I recently started yearning for more community and spirituality in my life. I was delighted that my daughter, Lyla, was interested in exploring faith communities in the area, and after our first visit to a UUSA service, we both knew we wanted to come back. I'm a Biology professor at UMass Amherst, and I'm passionate about making scientific research accessible and exciting for students from all backgrounds. I love gardening, hiking, biking, and trying to live simply during such complicated times. I feel like the UUSA community is the perfect place to continue my own personal growth, to connect with a vibrant spiritual community, to broaden my impact through social justice work, and to support my kids' development. Thank you for giving us such a warm welcome!"



Larry Schwartz write: "I have literally been a pauper, a poet, a pirate, a pawn, and a king (pirate and king are of course metaphorical... aaargh!) I like dogs more than I like most people, but I love you all! My strongest belief? Love just is! That's probably why I passed through those doors!"

"Hello, I'm Iris Sowlat! I'm originally from Chicago, Illinois, where I spent my 20s working in professional theater, before starting graduate school at UMass Amherst in 2021. Now, I'm about to graduate from UMass with my MFA in Theater Directing. I started attending UU services about two years ago, initially over Zoom and then more in person by the end of 2022. I was drawn to UU because of its welcoming and affirming values. I really appreciate how UU actively works towards supporting social justice and the rights of women, LGBT folks, and other disenfranchised groups. Though I only recently officially became a member, I am about to leave the Pioneer Valley area to embark on the next steps of my career journey."



Grover Wehman-Brown writes: *"I am a writer, social justice communicator and proud parent of my two kiddos - Lyrrin and Ember - and partner to my wife Nova. I grew up in a church community that had some great parts (humans need to sing together! to sit still and reflect!) and many harmful aspects as well. As our kids grew, we knew we needed them (and us) to have a broad and regular in-person community to share values and grow with purpose in community. We're so glad we found this here! When I'm not working or parenting I'm in my garden, growing food and stewarding the land we live on in South Amherst or reading a book on the couch with our cats."*

Nova Wehman-Brown writes: *"My wife Grover and I moved to Amherst a few years ago from CA. We had previously lived in Ashfield for a few years and knew we loved the area. We live in South Amherst with our two children, and had been looking for a spiritual home, and a place that can help us teach our kids some of the values that we saw in UUSA by living them in community. I work from home as a design director. I am a member of the Pride Chorus in Northampton, a Girl Scout troop leader, and I love to make things with my hands. Singing, writing, cooking, crafting and building things, being outside, reading, and being with my family and friends all bring me great joy."*



Lisa Williams writes: *"After meandering from my Southern Baptist childhood through various liberal Protestant congregations, I found my place at Heritage UU in Cincinnati, and spent years playing a wide variety of roles there. When I moved to the valley a decade ago, I was excited to find a new UU home, but it proved much harder than expected until I finally made my way to UUSA. Since that was just weeks before pandemic paralysis set in, small groups on Zoom were my principal way of engaging for many months. But small groups are wonderful, and the caring, smart, interesting people provided a welcoming, fantastic introduction to this lovely community. As anyone who's seen me knows, I'm a compulsive—and usually creative—knitter. I'm also a besotted grandma, a fur-covered pet parent, and a part time teacher/consultant/mentor in nonprofit management. I'm excited to become more involved!"*



Dan Nicolai writes: *"I am a secular humanist who cares about indulging in and supporting the arts. I listen to tons of music and play instruments (currently learning piano). My partner (Maddie Adams, not pictured) and I love visiting art museums around the country and the world. I also care deeply for my friends, who I make a concerted effort to keep in touch with."*

What brought us to the UU is we were looking for an officiant for our wedding, but what has kept us here is the Sunday sermons, and how they remind us how we're members of society who ought to care about social causes. Second, the music provided during your services is gorgeous, as is the stained glass window. We also really like Reverend Rachael and the energy she brings to the services, as well as all those who fill in for Sunday sermons."





Nancy Hunter writes: *"Brett and I discovered Unitarian Universalism when we lived in Texas. The worship services felt like a breath of fresh air and the principles resonated with us both. After an overseas stint in Germany, we settled in Stony Brook, NY, where we were members of our UU congregation for 25 years. We relocated to Amherst to be closer to our daughter and her family. Our other daughter lives in Washington, D.C. Brett is a research physicist at the Magnet Division at Brookhaven National Lab where he designs magnets for accelerators around the world. I am a retired biology teacher and volunteer with the ESL Literacy program at the Jones Library. Here at UUSA, I have joined the Wednesday morning breakfast team, the Women's Circle and the book group. We have felt warmly welcomed by the congregation and look forward to becoming more involved."*



*A heartfelt welcome to all of our new members
Our circle is stronger for having you among us!*

