

Minister's Annual Report

January 19th, 2026
 Rev. Dr. Leon Dunkley
 North Universalist Chapel Society

Ring the bells that still can ring
 Forget your perfect offering
 There is a crack, a crack in everything
 That's how the light gets in

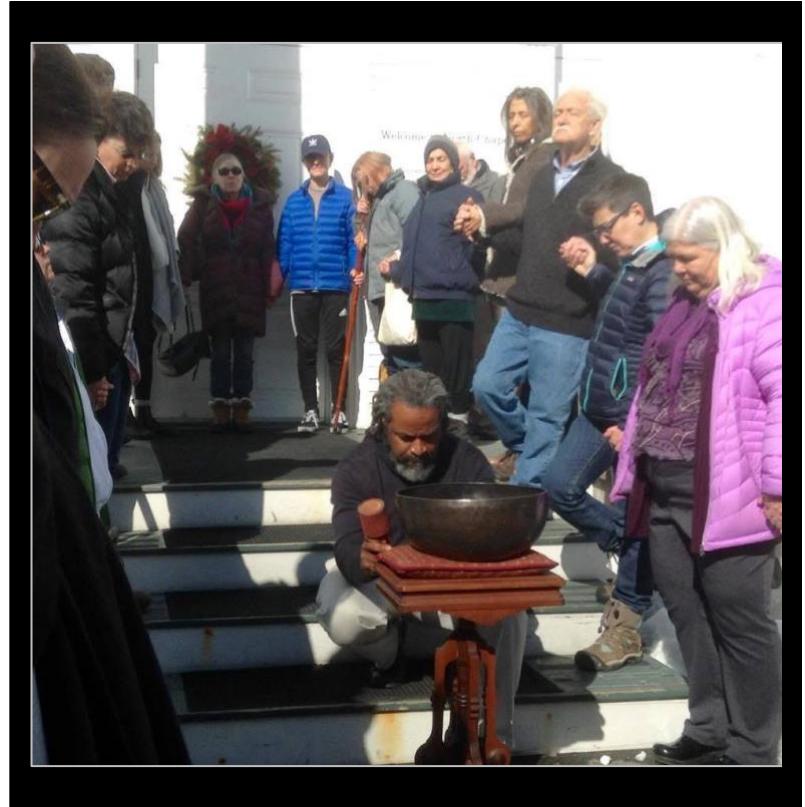
—Leonard Cohen, “Anthem”

Good morning and good Sunday. I hope that this new day finds you well. Today is Sunday, January 25th and the title of this morning's reflection is Annual Report. It is a behind-the-scenes retrospective on 2025. It recaps not the public events at North Chapel—the Sunday Services, the Winter Dinners, the Pizza Days, the Soup Sales on the Green, the Red Flannel Hash Dinner that is a bedrock tradition at North Chapel, weddings and child dedications, the memorial services, the End-of-School Party at the beginning of the summer, the Back-to School Party as summer's end, the Christmas Eve Celebration, etc. Many of us were there for those events. This Annual Report focuses on the events that took place that were not center-stage events but still contribute powerfully to our story.

We lost our sacred Singing Bowl this year. With the Bowl, we have celebrated many joys and we have commemorated many sorrows over the years. We lost our sacred Singing Bowl this year but we have found a new one. Anne Dean had loaned us our last one. She got it on a trip to Tibet or India.

She brought it home with have after her travels overseas. The bell calls us to stillness. Whether we ring it harshly or with gentleness, Spirit doesn't care. We might but Spirit does not. Spirit calls us to joy. No matter what's going on in the world around us, Spirit calls us back to joy.

And in that joyful spirit, when North Chapel returned the sacred Singing Bowl to her, we made sure that the Bowl was carrying a medium-sized bag of Funyons. Funyons are a snack food that is not wholesome in the least. I'm sure that Anne did not enjoy them as a tasty treat. She might tried them but I doubt it. If she did, I'm pretty sure that she would have quickly thrown them away. I can't actually eat them myself but I love the thought of them. I love the name. Most of all, I love the absurd tension between the sacred power of the Singing Bowl from Tibet or India and the utter whimsy of a medium-sized bag of Funyons. I hope that as the story matures, it will call us all to joy. And I believe that each time she rings it, it resounds within our Sanctuary...just as I believe that, each time we ring our new Singing Bowl, it also resounds within the heart of our beloved, Anne Dean. And in the hearts of Chris and Barbara Bartlett, even though they've moved away. And in the hearts of Marcia Peterson and Jill Davies, David



Doolittle and Vassie Sinopoulos, Chris Lloyd and Leah Atwood...in the heart of all who are in our hearts each day. May we call them all back home to joy.

What an amazing year has been. What a joyful (and sometimes tragic) year. When I look back over 2025, I'm so happy to remember our journey. In January, it was deeply meaningful to me to have my beloved friend, Dayna Kuirtz come and share her art with us. Dayna and I met in my home church in Lincroft, NJ when she and I were only 15-years-old. We had sweet, young and idealistic dreams back then. Now, we have bitter, middle-aged and idealistic dreams. Better dreams...and the same dreams, dreams of living life to the fullest. She sings,

Through every storm that blows,
she still loves me though she knows
that I'm a dreamer
Hallelujah, I'm a dreamer

She didn't write these lines, although she lives them...as she asks for us to do the same.

What I love about our friendship that has lasted 45 years is that it did not begin with an exchange of loyalties. We never promised to be best friends forever. Our loyalty, our deep allegiance was to life itself. That is a faith statement to me. I doubt that it is for her and for me, this is a deep expression of Unitarian Universalism, a deep living out of our faith.

Dayna and I met in a UU church in central NJ. We were both in a youth group that did not require an affirmation of traditional faith. Dayna is Jewish. She does not identify as Unitarian Universalist, even as her spirit sings the hell

out of our faith, especially when it comes to the challenges of forgiveness (which is, for me, the great cornerstone of faith). In a song called Invocation, she writes.

I'm cast out of heaven and decades from hell
 I've passed out in the shrines where the beautiful fell
 And I've burned down the silo and poisoned the well
 but, Mama, let me come home

I made back alley deals that were forged in your name
 I was dazzled by gold and the shimmer of fame
 And you knew all the time but you never complained
 Please, Mama, let me come home

Our church, at its best, nurtures friendships that can endure the tests of time and still ennoble us.

In February, I was invited into conversation by Rabbi Ilene Hague about the problem of antisemitism, a problem that has been increasing in intensity in the last few years. By early March, we were engaged in a public conversation that was organized and publicized by Shir Shalom. Wisely, that had invited Dr. Susanna Heschel to be their featured speaker. Dr. Heschel is the Eli M. Black Distinguished Professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College. She is the chair of the Jewish Studies Program and a faculty member of the Religion Department. We might consider reaching out to her to speak at North Chapel. She's eloquent and deeply engaging. Her 90-minute lecture was insightful and academic. It was, of course, an honor to meet her because I am so respectful of her father.

Abraham Joshua Heschel was a friend of spirit to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. King recognized him personally in a speech that he delivered at

the Riverside Church in NYC on April 4th of 1967, a year to the day before he was assassinated. In a speech entitled “Beyond Vietnam,” King said:

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I need not pause to say how very delighted I am to be here tonight, and how very delighted I am to see you expressing your concern about the issues that will be discussed tonight by turning out in such large numbers. I also want to say that I consider it a great honor to share this program with Dr. Bennett, Dr. Commager, and **Rabbi Heschel**, some of the most distinguished leaders and personali ties of our nation.



Dr. King had been called to speak at Riverside by an organization called Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam. Famously, he said,

The recent statements of your executive committee are the sentiments of my own heart. I found myself in full accord when I read its opening lines: “A time comes when silence is betrayal.” That time has come for us in relation to Vietnam.

The power of these words and the power of the meaning behind them are so important for us today.

Twice in the last two years, in December of 2024 and in September of 2025, North Chapel has powerfully engaged that crisis that has befallen Israel and Palestine—directly, in the aftermath of the violence of October 7th of 2023 and indirectly, in the tensions had been growing in the decades since the displacements of 1948. For North Chapel be in close relationship with Shir Shalom at this moment of the world is singularly important.

After the shooting spree that took place at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh back in 2018, a small group of us went over the Shir Shalom just to show our love. Tears fell from the eyes of people who did not

know each other. A faith that is beyond us all was suddenly visible, tangible, touchable, hug-able. As fiercely we go after peace in Gaza, we stand by Shir Shalom in the times of violence—in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 2018...in Israel in 2023...in Sydney, Australia in 2025. We have found good ways of not giving up on love. In Love Warriors, Tuck and Patti sing,

We give up on Love so easy
 Any little thing seems to turn us away
 Oh, some say Love is not the answer
 But for those of us who Love, yes
 It's time we got together and take a stand,
 Speak out and tell everybody

I won't give up, my path is clear
 I'll take your hand and walk to the Promised Land

Tuck and Patti sang this in the Sanctuary of North Chapel. We worked with Pentangle to create a workshop for musicians that was pair with the concert that took place at East End Park over the summer. This is faith made real...and beautiful.

In April, North Chapel participated in a 7-day Prayer Walk through the state of Maine, from Bangor to Augusta. The Walk honored the Sacredness and Dignity of Every Living Being. It was A Journey of Peace & Friendship. Indigenous leader/author/activist Sherri Mitchell and highest-level justice worker Tim de Christopher organized this Walk together through the Land Peace Foundation/Wičuhkemtultine in Maine. The Walk drew together committed lay-leaders and concerned clergy throughout northern New England. Sherri and Tim have also been long-term participants as planner and featured speakers for the Brave Light Youth Exchange Program.

In May, I believe it was, North Chapel met one of its most remote active members—Jared Rock, he lives in Madrid, Spain. He is a world traveler. He has lived in Quito, Ecuador and in Beirut, Lebanon. He lived in Seoul, Korea before arriving in Madrid. Jared wrote to us several months ago. The following words are his words:

I started watching North Chapel's sermons back around 2020, when the pandemic moved everything online and when the stillness it brought to my life also led me to look for some more spiritual nourishment. At the time I watched sermons from many different churches, mostly UU and Baptist churches, but North Chapel was by far the one that spoke to me most and I have been following Rev. Dr. Dunkley's sermons weekly since then.

I find Unitarian Universalism's liberal approach to spiritual growth to be more honest in alignment with my own beliefs on spiritual life, and I feel comfortable with the UU tradition. I also find the UU commitment to working for justice and community in our social and ecological world aligns well with my sense of moral and civic/human obligation.

Over the past few years, I have learned quite a bit about UU's history and current form. While I am far from Woodstock, VT, I specifically would like to be a member of North Chapel as it is already where I get weekly spiritual nourishment through the services that are shared online. As I may continue moving around for some time, I imagine I would also feel more anchored in North Chapel through a virtual connection than I would changing churches with each move. I am happy to continue attending online, gaining guidance and motivation for growth through the weekly sermons. While I know membership is not required for this, it feels right for me given how long I have been following North Chapel from a distance.

I am happy to enter the community more through virtual events that come up or when I am back at my family home in the Upper Valley (I often come home in the summers).

Sincerely,
Jared Rock

When Joanne and I first learned of Jared's interest in North Chapel, we asked him to share his thoughts with us. We are so grateful that he did.

At noon on April 9th, North Chapel member Natalie Kramer and I spoke about Brave Light at an assembly at Woodstock High. Hundreds of students were there. I was introduced by North Chapel's own Jane Stout, the President of the Senior Class and a Brave Lighter in the summer of 2023, our first year.

Later in April, I attended a professional conference called Spark: A Theological Convocation. I served on the planning team for a conference that was organized primarily by Rev. David Miller, my colleague from our sister church in Fairfax, VA, the Reverends Lynn Gardner and Wendy Bartel from Schenectady and Rev. Monica Dobbins in Salt Lake City in Utah. Seventy-five ministers from across the country gathered and grappled with what it means to relevant as ministers in the Free Church tradition at the moment in the world, especially now. We asked ourselves and one another about the best, clearest and most current understanding of our ecclesiology—ecclesiology, meaning the way we understand the nature and purpose of our congregations.

Our ecclesiology here at North Chapel is rooted in the free church tradition. In the words of Rebecca Parker, one of the leading theologian in Unitarian Universalism,

By the free church tradition, we mean that our congregations are established by free association, by the free exercise of individual's choices to join the covenant. By the free church tradition, we mean that our congregations are free for preachers to speak their mind faithfully and honestly without censure, free for people to follow their personal search for truth and meaning, freedom from the bondage of past doctrine or dogma or traditions that don't fit the challenges here and now, free to evolve and

change in response to new discoveries of science, new insights from reason and experience, new contexts, new cultural engagements and new people coming into our covenant who bring their traditions with them that have not, heretofore, been in our creative mix.

Although Rev. Dr. Parker spoke for only 35 minutes, I will be reflecting on her words for years. James Moody was a teacher like this. Georgia O'Keefe was a teacher like this. James Luther Adams was a teacher like this. We are wise to listen to them deeply. Dr. Parker continued,

Let us remember what James Luther Adams taught us based on his resistance to fascism in 1930s Germany. Adams was alarmed that liberal religionists too easily accommodated Nazism. Hitler asserted that he was renewing Christianity. He drew on religious tropes to galvanize the masses. Why did liberal people of faith so often go along. Adams lays the blame on a weak ecclesiology—one that was compliant culturally, self-protective and too individualistic. Adams saw neofascism as an American possibility. As Kim Beach has reminded us, Adam's prophetic warning goes something like this [quote]:

When the enemies of freedom come to “rescue” us from the regnant [read: reigning], social chaos, they will not be wearing brown shirts and hailing der Führer. They will come waving the flag and clutching the Bible.

What does that mean for us today? ...especially for places like North Chapel? Lastly, Rebecca said,

We do not know what the fate of our nation would be now. We don't know how severe this turning point is. We are not simply in a political crisis. We are in a religious crisis and...we need to be strong.

Her words have influenced many of the reflections that have been delivered since April...in so many different ways.

North Chapel worked with Linda Treash and the BarnArts organization to bring a musical group called Pamyua to North Chapel. Pamyua

is an indigenous, Innuít soul-blues band from Alaska, deeply entrench the healing story of this land. They originally refused to be a part of the Sunday service. They want to offer only a workshop afterwards. They resisted because of destructive role American churches played in the histories of native peoples. They did some research on us and then, felt comfortable daring the edge of their ethics to offer their music in the Sanctuary. It was deeply healing, more so than I realized at the time.

The leaders of the band are brothers—Qacung and Phillip Blanchett. Their fiercely loving defense of the healing story of our country was intense. And we need fierce love. Qacung wore a shirt on that Sunday morning that that read, “Merciless Indian Savages.” It was a bold, I thought until I realized that it was a quote from the American Declaration of Independence. It reads,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another... We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness... The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations.... He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

We have real healing to do...real healing in many ways.

There have been many losses (not all of which are listed here)—Vassie Sinopoulos, Ron Berenson, Howard “Toppy” Gould (son of Alice Gould and brother the Nancy Bibo), Gordon Worth, Sophia Stone, Floyd van Alstyne and Barbara Darling...the families of whom have all reached out to North Chapel for support. One of the ways in which we can grow is to find a

means of knowing not just those who are here and would choose to attend the Annual Meeting North Chapel, but also those who might see us as one of the beacons of the Upper Valley. Our hearts are brave enough for this. Our souls are beautiful enough for this.

Our Board Retreat was so exciting. I loved watching Delia lead the team through a creative exercise that has informed our good way forward. It was even more fun watch her lead the exercise that we did in the Sunday morning service. Jared Rock from Madrid was in the Sanctuary that Sunday. We broke into small groups to talk about the future and I went around to each group to help if I was needed...and I felt almost like an intruder every time. Each group was buzzing along in easy conversation. Every group had lots to talk about. Not even Jared needed anything from me. He was solidly in a circle of trusting friends. No group needed anything from me. I felt blissfully useless and deeply proud...all because of Delia and the Board's excellent leadership.

In June, we said goodbye to our beloved Music Director, Diane Mellinger. She gave North Chapel a startling 28 years of musical ministry. Every Sunday, I truly felt deeply connected to her. What a spectacular joy she is. From the bottom of our collective heart at North Chapel, thank you, dear Diane.

How wonderful it is that Michael Zsoldos has taken the reins. The choir has grown because of the new and contagious energy that he brings. The choir is finding its new voice and they sound absolutely beautiful.

By summer, we were focusing on Brave Light. For those of you who are new, Here is an explanation of Brave light. For the past three years, the Brave Light Youth Exchange Project has brought two groups of high school

students together, one group from central Vermont and another group from the Boston area. Through Brave Light's summer conferences, these groups have formed sustained and fruitful relationships. The different life experiences of rural Vermont and urban Boston have provided an interesting backdrop as Youth Exchange participants engage with issues of climate change and sustainability as well as issues of race, class and social difference. We have completed three years of this program and are now in a planning period wherein we are reflecting about the past three summers and thinking about what's possible in the future. The future of Brave Light has international implications.

Brave Light began because of the ambitious leadership of the original group of dreamers (Chris Bartlett and Judy Williamson, chief among them). It benefited from the wise counsel and financial leadership of Denise Lions and Richard Schramm. It came into being because of the inspiring thoughts of the youth themselves. Their voices helped to shape the original grant proposal, an initiative that North Chapel began more than five years ago. What an achievement, North Chapel!!! Huzzah! Huzzah!! Huzzah!!!

In September, another congregational year began. Truly, there is so much more to talk about. I direct your interest to the Board Reports that are available online. Many events are described—from Red Flannel Hash to the freeing of Mohsen Mahdawi. I do feel the need to highlight two final events. Members of North Chapel went on a bus tour to Boston. It is fun to explore our history. We visited Walden Pond, the UU church in Concord, Harvard Divinity School and the Mount Auburn Cemetery where many a prominent Unitarian Universalist is buried. Above the gates of the cemetery were written these words from Ecclesiastes.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was
and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it

We visited the site where Ralph Waldo Emerson is buried. We visited the site where Henry David Thoreau is buried. We visited the site where Hosea Ballou is buried. Hosea Ballou lived here in Vermont. He and his family owned a house in Barnard near Silver Lake. Ballou was famous for writing Notes on the Parables (1804), A Treatise on Atonement (1805) and Examination of the Doctrine of a Future Retribution (1834). He preached in Barnard, Bethel, Norwich, Bridgewater and Woodstock while he was active.

Finally, a great tragedy that occurred on Bondi Beach in Australia on the first night of Hanukkah. Many lost their lives in terrible hour. Gun violence persists, all around the world...and so do signs of bravest peace. They also persist. Less than one week before that tragedy, Bob Williamson had organized a public conversation at North Chapel about gun violence through an organization that he helped found called GunSense Vermont.

GunSense Vermont is Vermont's only independent, non-partisan gun violence prevention group. We are a movement of Vermonters focusing on transformation at the state level, because that is where laws are being changed and individual action has the most impact.

This public conversation was lead by (l to r) Senator Alison Clarkson, Senator Becca White, Representative Charlie Kimbell and Senator Joe



Major. Such great leaders speaking out on such an important issue. In ministry circles, they say that churches tend to function either as beacons or as bunkers.

It's a blessing when they are able to do both.

Each time we gather, we strengthen and we deepen our commitment to ourselves and one another. Looking around the Sanctuary every Sunday morning we see the living art of true community. Who we strive to be is so important in the world. Who we are, in deepest humility, is a blessing.

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Music & Worship Committee Annual Report 2025

The Music and Worship Committee has 7 members:

Rev. Leon Dunkley, Mary Blanton, Jayne Hufferdine, Anne Marinello, Mollie McHugh, Anne Macksoud and (our amazing “taker of the minutes!”) Hope Yeager.

2025 was a year of change for the Music and Worship Committee.

First and foremost, our much loved and multi-talented choir director, Diane Mellinger, retired after 27 years of service. During those years, she built a fine choir, served as organist, pianist and accompanist and creatively guided and participated in the Sunday services. Her last day as Director of Music was Sunday, June 29th. On that Sunday, Diane gave a reflection about her time at North Chapel that had us laughing and crying at the same time.

Diane's tenure was a great success and a great gift to North Chapel. We miss her!

Lucky for North Chapel, our **outstanding musician** (and Board Member) Michael Zsoldos has taken over as choir director. Also longtime congregant John Atwood has taken over as organist and accompanist. This new arrangement is working out very well and several new people have joined the choir.

Our own minister, Rev. Leon Dunkley, led dozens of fine services during 2025. When he was away, or on break, we were fortunate to have a collection of guest reflectors - some from our own congregation and others from the wider community.

“In order of appearance:”

Writer and Dancer Taylor Barnes, Diane Mellinger (2 reflections). Liz Cassell brought her Ukrainian colleague, Lada Kolomiyets, and Lada's two sons. Lada gave the reflection and the boys played Ukrainian folk music on their accordions. We heard from our Spiritual Exploration leader, Tatum Barnes and the founder of BALE (Building a Local Economy) Chris Wood, who spoke about Elderhood. We heard from

Lyn Swett Miller (Photographer & environmentalist), Peg Brightman and The Moving Spirit Dancers. Shari Borzekowski spoke about Homesharing, Gwen Groff, our much loved and sometime interim minister, gave two splendid reflections. Sustainable Woodstock's Executive Director Jenevra Wetmore spoke about Climate Change and Poet and former congregant, Laura Foley read several of her recent poems.

Rabbi Dov Taylor spoke about the deep suffering and deep injustices perpetrated in Gaza and the West Bank. We welcomed Artist Judith Taylor, Environmental Lawyer, Ansley Davis, our own Clinical Psychologist, Neil Marinello, and Peace Traveller and Community Builder Deb Greene.

- Special thanks to the many Service Coordinators who are essential to our having a smooth and organized service
- Special Thanks to Choreographer Peg Brightman and the Moving Spirit Dancers (Hope Yeager, Suzy Malerich, Nicole Conte Taylor Barnes, Karen Chalom and Laura Leavitt) who have added so much to our services over many years.
- Special Thanks to Jayne Hufferdine for her thoughtful collection of monthly themes for the service. 2025 services greatly benefitted from her time consuming work.
- Special Thanks to Mary Blanton for keeping track of all the things that Diane Mellinger used to take care of for this committee.
- Special Thanks to Joanne Boyle, whose gifts of organization, graphic arts, common sense, dedication to North Chapel and sense of humor keeps everything going for our committee and for the church in general.

Music and Worship Committee members are very grateful to all those who have helped keep our Sunday services rich and rewarding.

Respectfully submitted by Anne Macksoud on January 22, 2026

December 12, 2025

Pastoral Care meets monthly to identify needs facing members of our community. We also are able to follow up on concerns brought to us in-between meetings.

We are a small group and work with Leon to support our church. Sometimes this is developing resources for needs - as well as responding to individuals. Some outgrowths of our work include the Wednesday evening pasta dinners last winter; the caregiver support group; and Listening to our Lives.

Please feel free to speak with any of us if you have a need/concern.

With loving care,

Leon Dunkley

Mary Blanton

Judy Williamson

Tambrey Vutech

Joanne Boyle

Richard Schramm

Anne Marinello

Welcoming Engagement and Membership Committee

WE&M is a volunteer committee. Members do not need to be a North Chapel member.

WE&M is welcoming as we greet each Sunday. We engage with attendees in conversation and invite them to coffee hour. We stitch name tags. Circle dinners are organized so one might attend outside of the church and deepen relationships. We willingly help with set ups and clean ups for potlucks and memorials and receptions.

WE&M inherited a to-do list when Diane left. We have assumed many duties that make Sunday mornings more enjoyable.

We will be reconvening classes that introduce UUism, North Chapel history and an introduction to committees that are the workings of North Chapel. These will be open to those contemplating membership or those members who are still wondering!

FYI There is a very informal way of counting active members. If one has not contributed time, talent or treasury in the past 3 years they are considered inactive. As of now the total membership is 176 with 93 active.

Sherry Belisle, chair

Fran Lancaster

Judy Williamson

Barbara Abraham

ad hoc from the board, Ann Wynia

Director of Spiritual Exploration – Annual Report

This year's work in Spiritual Exploration has been defined less by dramatic change and more by thoughtful integration, deepening trust, and steady growth built on a strong foundation.

Compared to last year, the program feels more connected to the wider life of the church, more supported by clear systems, and better positioned for intentional development.

Systems & Support

One of the most meaningful improvements this year has happened behind the scenes. I am now more fully integrated into the church's scheduling and communications systems, which has allowed for clearer coordination around my absences, greater awareness of upcoming worship themes, and more intentional selection of stories to share during services.

Staffing support has also grown stronger. We recently welcomed Victoria Lester as a regular substitute—a colleague of mine from Hartford Parks & Recreation with a background in education and special education. Her presence brings consistency, competence, and care to the classroom, and builds on the continued generosity of parents and community members who reliably step in when needed. I am also deeply grateful for the ongoing assistance of Pluto Beirne-Freiman, whose leadership, responsibility, and wisdom continue to enrich our program. Efforts are underway to compensate them for their remarkable contributions, and I look forward to seeing that work honored more formally.

Program Stability & Youth-Led Learning

Attendance, engagement, format, and overall content have remained largely unchanged this year. Maintaining a consistent structure has allowed trust to deepen over time and has created space for youth-generated content to emerge organically. Within that container, children have led us into meaningful conversations about grief and loss, including the death of beloved pets; belief and doubt, often explored through spirited debates about Santa Claus; and even how to construct thoughtful, evidence-based arguments about Taylor Swift's musicianship and philanthropy. These moments affirm that our approach is working. Children feel comfortable enough to be authentically wild, silly, impatient, curious, and deeply thoughtful all at once.

Looking ahead, I hope to complement this responsive, youth-centered approach with more intentionally structured lessons, particularly around world faith traditions, mindfulness practices, and the history of Unitarian Universalism. My goal is to add depth and breadth to our curriculum while preserving the flexibility that allows children's real questions and interests to guide our shared exploration.

Family & Community Connections

In the coming year, I am excited to collaborate with David Freiman to restart the much-loved *Parents as Primary Sexuality Educators* program. Existing online curricula do not adequately address the age range represented in our community, so together we will be developing a customized offering that better reflects the needs, values, and lived realities of North Chapel families.

This year also marked the beginning of a new collaboration with the Woodstock Afterschool Program. I am pleased to report that we have coexisted smoothly, with no issues related to space, scheduling, or culture..

Worship & Visibility

I am eager to spend more time in the sanctuary sharing stories and creating opportunities for the congregation to hear children's voices more regularly, whether they are answering big questions, thinking deeply, or joking wholeheartedly. These moments strengthen intergenerational connection and serve as a reminder that children are already active participants in our shared spiritual life.

To support this visibility, I hope to invite Victoria Lester, also a talented photographer, to help document our Spiritual Exploration classes. This would allow us to populate a long-empty classroom bulletin board and update our website with images that more fully reflect the joy, movement, and authenticity of children's experiences in our program.

In Gratitude

It remains a privilege to serve as Director of Spiritual Exploration at North Chapel. I am grateful for the trust of families, the support of colleagues and volunteers, and the openness of our children. With strong systems in place and a clear sense of direction, I look forward to continuing to build a program that is welcoming, thoughtful, and very much alive.

Overview of Buildings & Grounds Committee Activities in 2025

The Building and Grounds Committee in cooperation with the Board of Directors conducted an assessment of needs and worked to get 'ahead' of issues by implementing a preventative maintenance approach made possible by generous gifts bequeathed for the care of our wonderful North Chapel and Parsonage. This list below is a summary of work performed over the past year.

1. Repaired and replaced rotted clapboard, trim and sills on the north and west side of the sanctuary, office and rear entry.
2. Established a priority-based program to repaint the North Chapel in stages using best practices, professional painters and quality materials recognizing that this investment will provide better protection from the predictable impact of Vermont's climate and save money in the long run. An assessment of the Parsonage is planned for 2026.
3. Established a routine of pumping the grease trap and keeping the outflow lines clean to avoid overflow into the kitchen.
4. Hired a commercial HVAC specialist to address issues with the heating system. Additionally, they assessed the chronic problem of condensation during the spring and summer throughout the basement level and installed a commercial grade dehumidifier to address the issue on a permanent basis.
5. There has been an ongoing problem of toilet backup on the lower level which has required vigilance. This will require further investigation to address the issue in a more permanent way. However, it is likely that like the kitchen situation, the shallow pitch to drain waste and water into our septic system pump station is the primary cause.
6. A review of North Chapel's fire and emergency alert system by State and local inspectors as part of securing a license for the Woodstock after school program resulted in the discovery that the battery back-up emergency lighting modules weren't functioning. The antiquated and broken lighting units have been replaced, and the system is fully compliant.