

the steeple

The Congregational Newsletter of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington
September 2021

From Our Developmental Senior Minister **Big Questions**

By Rev. Patricia Hart



This is not the Fall we were planning for: with COVID infections declining and in-person Sunday worship in the Meeting House. We're still waiting...! Perhaps the good news is that we've become adept at shifting plans, with so much practice over the last 18 months.

Nevertheless...! First UU is still here, and a new congregational year is underway. Here are my thoughts about two big questions:

How is First UU holding up after all these months of pandemic disruption?

The congregation is doing pretty well, in fact. Worship services and Faith Development (FD) programs certainly *look* different, but they are happening every week and people are attending, in a variety of ways. We've managed several transitions – from prerecorded worship services (late March 2020 - early July 2021); to a short, delightful series of outdoor services this August; and now, using the new technology your donations made possible, offering live services every Sunday. Erika has learned that online FD programs don't work well for many children. So she and Margo, along with David Ruffin (FUUSB's new Director of Youth and Creative Arts Ministries) are creating ways for children and youth, parents and other adults to be together on the Meeting House grounds – even at the park! Newcomers join in frequently – especially outside – and the Membership Team has reached out to welcome them.

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Image credit: Erika Reif

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Big Questions

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The congregation's finances are in good shape, with online and snail mail contributions coming in steadily. Rowan Van Ness, our Ministerial Intern, is already working hard, and looks forward to meeting many more of you this fall. It has been a delight to welcome the congregation of Ruach haMaqom to share our space; Rabbi Jan and I hope to offer some combined programs in the coming months. OWL is happening; Circles, teams, committees and Love & Justice Vigils are meeting in person and often on Zoom; Fall Vespers begin (under the canopy!) September 22. Among other things!

It's remarkable to notice all the ways the congregation is alive and well, even without a Meeting House to meet in. We're still learning, and hope to put many lessons to use in the months to come.

When can we gather again in the Sanctuary?

The biggest lesson is that the hoped-for day when we won't need to worry about COVID-19 will never come. Instead, we are figuring out how best to manage the risks while staying true to our UU values. It's neither simple nor straightforward, as we continue to follow science, UUA recommendations and CDC guidelines. As infections, positivity rates and hospitalization numbers decline, we are planning a gradual return to in-person worship: inviting groups of up to 50 people per week (with masks) so there will be plenty of room to spread out in the Sanctuary. We'll let you know when that will begin as soon as we know!

It is such an honor to serve this congregation. I'm grateful for the privilege of working with many of you – your patience and good humor makes all the difference. I have no doubt First UU will grow in strength, creativity and depth as we navigate these unprecedented times, together!

Many blessings,

Rev. Tricia



Butterfly at Sunday Service

At the Meetinghouse in maple-shade we gather to share creative output.

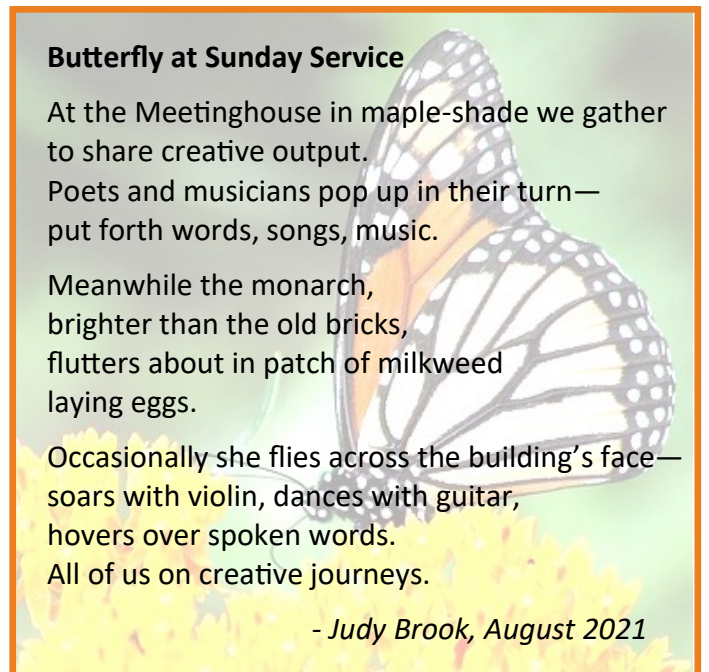
Poets and musicians pop up in their turn—put forth words, songs, music.

Meanwhile the monarch, brighter than the old bricks, flutters about in patch of milkweed laying eggs.

Occasionally she flies across the building's face—soars with violin, dances with guitar, hovers over spoken words.

All of us on creative journeys.

- Judy Brook, August 2021



From the Worship Associates Team
Summertime Reassessment

By Judy Brook



Summertime, with its long days, slower pace, breaks in routine, and opportunities for adventure, is a great time to reassess one's role in the UU. So it was for me in the summer of 2018.

I had been wanting to do more than warm a pew on Sunday and had been thinking of several options. August found me in my kayak, exploring the headwaters of the Connecticut River in far-northern New Hampshire. As I poked about in the rich marshy areas and paddled rhythmically down the open lake, my mind was on its own journey trying on different roles. Worship Associate (WA) came to the surface.

I don't mind speaking in front of a group though I often get the jitters just before. I enjoy reading aloud. I like sharing responsibility for a project. I wanted a commitment but not an every week commitment. I could handle one team meeting per month. And I thought that I might be able to bring my love of being creative to a new venue—Sunday worship.

I paddled over to one of my UU paddle-buddies, floated my idea, and asked her if she thought that that might be a good fit for me. She did. Told me to let it steep a bit like a bag of good tea and to talk to our minister. I did. The rest is history.

Being a WA is a good spot for me. I like being part of the team that crafts a Sunday service. I like the people with whom I work. And, I have been surprised. You might have seen me doing watercolor paintings as I tell stories of Indigenous Peoples. I have never done that before... public painting or storytelling, much less putting them together. Being a WA encouraged me to take a risk and experience such joy. You probably have something completely different to offer. If you are interested in joining the WA team, call me. I'd love to answer any questions you might have and help you assess if this is a good fit for you.

Judy Brook
(802) 865-0557



Image credit: Judy Brook

From Our Ministerial Intern

By Rowan Van Ness



Hello! I am thrilled to be joining you all this year for my congregational internship. After being raised Unitarian Universalist in Washington state, I spent most of my twenties in Massachusetts

as a UU religious professional, working for faith-based social and environmental justice, coordinating youth programs, and serving as a Director of Lifespan Religious Education at a UU congregation before deciding to pursue ordained ministry.

How does one become a Unitarian Universalist minister? While congregations have the exclusive right to ordain ministers, a committee of the Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA) Board, called the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) actually decides whether a candidate for ministry is fit to be a minister. The MFC holds the exclusive right to admit and remove ministers from ministerial fellowship with the UUA. In other words, a congregation can choose to ordain anyone, but when a person is admitted into fellowship with the UUA, the MFC has recognized an individual as meeting the basic skills and fitness they believe qualify a person to be a minister, allowing congregations to more easily trust that ministers have some benchmark of training and screening.

What are the requirements the MFC has set out for candidates for ministry? Initially, one completes a criminal background check, earns a

Master of Divinity, and finds a congregational sponsorship. This sponsorship assures that an individual is engaged in UU congregational life and has the support of a UU congregation in pursuing ministry.

The next step is to become a candidate for ministry. This individual undergoes a two-day career assessment and psychological evaluation to make sure that ministry is a good fit professionally for the individual and vice versa. Each aspirant or candidate for ministry needs to complete one unit (400+ hours) of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and an internship, which is often in a congregation. I did two units of CPE, spending a summer working at the Massachusetts General Hospital providing spiritual care to people in acute medical crises, and another eight months at Hebrew Senior Life during the pandemic, working with older and/or disabled adults in both independent living and long-term care. I am now beginning my internship at the First UU Society! My final step is to submit an extensive packet in advance of an interview with the MFC, at which point, they'll decide whether I am ready to enter into preliminary fellowship as a minister.



By Rev. David Ruffin



I'm writing to formally (re)introduce myself as your new Developmental Director of Youth and Creative Arts Ministries. For those of you I haven't met, I'm an artist, with a love for music, espe-

cially singing, a passion I pursued professionally along with theater in my twenties. I'm a lover of the natural world, which led me, along with my affinity for working with young people, to the world of outdoor education. And, I'm a life-long spiritual seeker with a calling for working with folks at the level of the heart. This led me to divinity school and then ordination, and then away from and back toward ministry, anew—a story you all have played a role in.

I look forward to supporting the ongoing development of the strong youth programming which Gabriel Ely has led these last two years. I'm also excited to be able to focus on the integration of the creative arts into community life, such as through alternative worship programming like last year's Vespers services.

I had the chance to dive in with a group of 8th-10th graders last spring, leading a Covid-adapted, outdoor "Coming of Age Intensive," and was so impressed by the way the youth participants showed up. In just four Saturdays they co-created a shared sense of belonging within which they could explore and grow together. More work with youth like this sounded pretty darn good.

And in Vespers services last year, many of us discovered the power of open-hearted presence to get us through tough times. How meaningful it was to share our creative gifts, particularly, from that place. Whatever the year ahead had in store, how could we not find a way to sustain and build upon such good work?

My position is "Developmental" to support the integration of these ministries with the work of this developmental season at FUUSB. I welcome the creative invitation in this, and the reminder that, hopefully, we're always seeking to keep "developing." I welcome the opportunity to support the youth's development and follow their lead as they help the rest of us keep growing, too. And I welcome the chance to invite you all to share the creative gifts of your hearts and souls, which can keep us going and growing like breath and daily bread.

In these unpredictable times, I'm grateful to be able to continue to "play" on such a team as FUUSB. Thank you for your ongoing welcome. Don't hesitate to reach out at

DavidRuffin@uusociety.org.

Visit the online Staff Directory
uusociety.org/information/staff

From the FUUSB Board of Trustees

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By Hope Baker-Carr, Board President



Greetings to all members and friends of First UU Society of Burlington. I am honored to serve as the president of your Board of Trustees for the next two years. I'm also delighted to

be working with this particular board which includes: Rebecca Gurney as Vice President, Leandre Waldo as Secretary, continuing Board Members-At-Large, Charity Clark and Rodney Lowe, and four new Board Members: Melissa Sallée, Amelia Schlossberg, Peter Clavelle, and Mark Kuprych. We all attended two meetings in July and early August, an orientation for new members and a retreat, in which their eagerness, energy and commitment were on full display. Each one of them brings diverse experiences from our Society and elsewhere to the table and aren't afraid to let us all know where they are on issues and what they're thinking. Many thanks to the Nominating Team for their hard work!

This is a critical time, a time of profound change in the world. First UU has weathered the social and technological changes brought on by the pandemic extremely well under the nimble and capable leadership of Rev. Tricia Hart, backed by Christina Fulton, and all the staff. We are so fortunate to have them. Having completed two out of the four years of developmental ministry, our Society is now poised to take the first steps in the search process for a new settled minister. Somewhere in the March-May, timeframe, FUUSB will engage a transition coach from the UUA, and the Board will begin its work to canvass the entire membership of our Society to gather input in selecting members of a search committee. The final selection will be presented at the annual meeting nine months from now, for congregational approval.

In the months leading up to this, the board will be working in partnership with our senior minister to evaluate our progress on developmental goals and identify work that still needs to be done, while continuing the work of monitoring,



FUUSB Board and staff - front (left-right): Hope Baker-Carr, Leandre Waldo, Charity Clark; back: Mark Kuprych, Melissa Sallée, Rebecca Gurney, Christina Fulton, Rev. Tricia Hart, Rodney Lowe, Peter Clavelle, Amelia Schlossberg

reviewing financial statements, and providing input on budget decisions. In addition, we will be engaging in deep conversations with the congregation, as your thoughts are vitally important in helping to inform our decision-making. So stay tuned. It's going to be a great year. If you have questions or comments please email us at board@uusociety.org.

From the Finance Team

By Kameron McConnell, Treasurer



Hello from the Finance Team! Each summer we take a two-month hiatus from meetings and this year was no different. As we return to regularly-scheduled meetings, there is much excitement

for the new fiscal year, and a whole lot of gratitude that we finished last year in a strong financial position. Keep an eye out for the September video installment of “Two Minutes With Your Treasurer” for a report on exactly how we did in Fiscal Year 2021. Until then, here are a couple of messages we’d like to share:

- 1) We’re thrilled to have Zoe Hart joining this year as Assistant Treasurer!
- 2) Make sure to log into [Realm](#) and confirm that your Fiscal Year 2022 pledge was entered correctly.

Your Treasurer,
Kameron McConnell



Outdoor Worship Service, July 25, 2021; image: Christina Fulton

From the Healthy Congregation Team

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Why Listening Matters

By Nancy Hellen, HCT Co-Chair

The [Healthy Congregation Team](#) (HCT) focuses on practicing and facilitating communication skills that enhance growth, connection, and widening our understanding of others and their experiences.

An HCT video, “[Why Listening Matters](#),” is now available on the [FUUSB YouTube channel](#). This video was created as part of the June 6, 2021 service, which lifted up listening as a tool integral to a Radical Welcome Back after a year of many hardships and changes due to the pandemic. It explored how listening can build connections and expand our understanding, by listening to each other's experiences during this past year and giving space and attention to what people are feeling as they consider the transition to the opening of the Meeting House.

In the video, HCT members share their thoughts on the importance of listening and being listened to, and stories of personal work on strengthening listening skills as a communication tool. Deep Listening and Reflective Listening practice, as well as Deep Listening Circles, are offerings the HCT provides to the congregation.



From the Immigration Justice Team

By Sal Millichamp

Perhaps you remember when we all met together for Sunday services inside the Meeting House. Often after the service the [Immigration Justice Team](#) (IJT) would be waiting in the Parlors to reach out to everyone to support Pastor Steven Tendo.

Steven escaped from Uganda to save his life, for he was tortured for supporting the basic human right to vote in his country. When Steven arrived in the United States to request asylum, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) put him in detention, which was a prison. Steven stayed in for almost three years, and now that he has been released, he speaks of his gratitude to our congregation for the postcards, letters and financial support that he received from so many of you. (For more details about Steven's long journey, please look up "Mother Jones Magazine, Steven Tendo.")

While Steven was in captivity in our country, he was unable to get the food he needed to stay healthy, for he has diabetes and began having problems with his eyesight. Covid was also running rampant and became another dangerous aspect of his life. It was a debilitating time in his life, and the guards were often cruel in their comments about Steven being sent back to Uganda. Steven talks of receiving the cards and letters from so many people around the world and feeling hopeful that people cared about what happened to him.

When Steven was finally released after so much outcry from so many for his freedom, he was



Pastor Steven Tendo, IJT welcome party in the Memorial Garden, June 24, 2021

sent to live with his sponsor in Texas. He then requested to move to Vermont, "where people are kind," he said.

Steven has moved to Vermont, and his asylum claim is being processed. He is excited to be working on his ministry, and he wants you all to know how much you helped him survive such a terrible experience. We will see Steven either on Zoom or in person in the future.

There are many more individuals striving for freedom in ICE detention and at the border. We have much work to do.

The Immigration Justice Team meets via Zoom on the third Monday of the month at 5 p.m. If you would like to participate in our next meeting, please call or text Bernie Carver at (802) 310-5594 to request a link to the Zoom meeting.

From the Property Team

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By Chip Patullo

The east access to the Meeting House is now completely replaced and improved. With a whole lotta volunteer effort we did it, following Covid masking restrictions for most of the project. The structure is now safe for children, with ballusters now at less than 4-inch spacing; the ramp is now truly accessible, as it meets the proper grade for use and has a wide enough landing before turning back to rise to the entry; and the steps are a less-steep climb at 6 ¼-inch height. The decking itself is recycled plastic with an anticipated 20-year lifespan. Fasteners are stainless to resist corrosion of the pressure-treated wood and the salt spread in the winter. The framing is now larger and closer together than the old deck was. Now it is 2x8s, 12" apart, instead of 2x6s, 16 to 24" apart.

Just about a year ago, I started laying out the post locations, and we finished staining the wood on August 15, 2021. With a bit of care, it should last another 20 years. I want to thank everyone who helped: from David McFeeters for his coordination and help ordering materials; to Warren Baker for permitting help; to Charlie Delaney for digging post holes and concrete work; to David Foster for his many, many days of help with carpentry expertise; to the joint work of the Property Team volunteering for several days each – John Davis, Mary Gade, Jim Lawson, and Jonathan Sands; to Property Team emeritus, Mark Kuprych, for welding and installing the handrails; to volunteers like Rodney Lowe, for a variety of carpentry and



Image credit: Nancy Knox

staining over several weekend days, and my son, Noah Patullo, for his help staining in August.

We needed everyone's time to make this happen – I figure somewhere over 750 hours to do it all. It wasn't cheap at over \$23,000, as Covid led to price increases, though we beat the initial rush with most of the lumber and Trex decking purchased near the beginning of the shortages. But without the help of all the folks listed above, it would have been more than double that cost.

Thanks to all who helped, and their families for putting up with us all busy on this project. Finally, thanks to all of you for your contributions to the Society to make it possible to replace the entry and have it accessible to all.





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Anti-Racism Interfaith Vigil at Pride Parade, September 5, 2021; image: Zoe Hart



New banner in the Sanctuary, created by Claire Graham-Smith
