

## UUC QUARTERLY REVIEW, Winter 2023

### Minister's Musings

Dear Ones,

As I write this message, we are halfway into the first month of the New Year. Finding a moment to pause has been a bit of a challenge lately. And yet it is so vital to the work we do: to step back, to ponder and to consider where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going.

This is the first January in three years that we have been able to gather in person. These days our sanctuary is bustling with the sights and sounds of vibrant embodied multigenerational community. From the laughter of young children to elders practicing tai chi; from breakdancing and poetry to evening vespers and Sunday morning spirited singing, the UUC is a space filled with the spirit- and fullness- of life. At the same time the ripples of community continue to extend to the many people joining us virtually. As the Sufi poet Rumi says: "Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground."

There is no doubt that the celebration of diversity- across cultures, identities- is at the heart of our community life. At the same time, we have work to do to deepen our understanding of the ways multiple oppressions have impacted our lives and the lives of those around us. We are called to respond to dismantle oppression with soulwork and justice-making. This work begins with sharing our stories with one another and listening to the stories of the people we meet.

The UUC has a history of responding to the calls that arise from our relationships. The work to become an LGBTQ+ Welcoming Congregation arose from personal experience and relationships within this congregation. Similarly, the call to respond to Stamford's housing crisis has arisen from personal experience and relationship. We know from listening to the stories of those impacted and the people that support them that shelters are full. There is a lack of funding and resources- and general concern- for the struggles of those experiencing housing insecurity. Currently, a group of UUC members and friends are seeking ways to advocate and support those working on the frontlines of this issue. You can read more about this work in the newsletter. Please reach out if you would like to get involved.

The risk- and the gift- of becoming a beloved community is that it changes us. It reminds us that our lives are not separate: that what happens to you, impacts me. Our lives are interconnected. As we move forward into this new year, let us continue to welcome and build our community. Whether this is through conversation at a Second Sunday Brunch, or a covenanted Soul Matters group, or over a cup of coffee in the community room warming center, let us remember to take time to share our stories, and to listen to the stories of the people we meet.

I wish us all a New Year full of abundance and deepening. May our relationships in community move and change us to become fully who we are!

In peace,

**Rev. Terri**

## President's Message

In this time of winter, (although, reluctantly, there is no snow) I use this time to look inward to find the things that bring me joy. As I reflect on the Robert Frost Poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and his walk through the woods, it reminds me that this is a time of reflection in my own life.

Some of the things that bring me joy and fulfillment have to do with family, of course, but much of my fulfillment has come through my many years of being a part of UUC. Through the years, I have worn many hats, including being deeply involved in the RE program. I still feel that connection to our children and youth and have lent a hand from time to time. I am grateful to our RE committee and teaching staff who have done a fabulous job of engaging our children on Sunday morning. I am glad that we finally have Sunday morning babysitting for our babies and toddlers so that our young families can enjoy Sunday morning worship.

Some of my duties as UUC president have to do with the "day to day" ---fielding business about this does bring me joy, however, to know that the sanctuary is safe for Sunday morning and that we are providing a service to the community for affordable daycare, "Play to Learn" and affordable permanent housing for up to 10 individual adults who are coming out of homelessness in Metcalf House, housed on our property.

I also need to find time for fulfillment in some of the activities offered at UUC. I have been a longtime member of Soul Matters which has given me time for spiritual deepening and connection each month. I am a member of the group, "Mistakes and Miracles", led by Reverend Terri, which helps me think about ways to help build a multicultural antiracist beloved community. I also enjoy weekly meeting of Fiber Arts to join other UUCers interested in participating in knitting, crochet, or other handiwork. From time to time, I enjoy contributing baked goods for Sunday morning coffee hour.

Robert Frost closes his poem with---"the woods are lovely, dark and deep but I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep." My hope for you is that you will find the time to look inward and reflect on what brings you joy in your own life and find a place to connect to our UUC community.

Warmly,  
**Lynne Lane**

## Religious Education



The UUC Religious Education program has been in full swing since September, with Soulful Home as the core curriculum for the year. We have been connecting activities in the RE classrooms with the Soul Matters themes we hear in the sanctuary. The theme of Belonging brought rich discussion and our 3rd-8th grade group presented their video on a community that welcomes refugees during a Time for All Ages in October.

We also introduced the curriculum, Popcorn Theology, where once a month the children meet as one group and watch movie clips, talk about scenes, connect to UU themes and do fun activities too. So far, we have explored the popular movies *The Lion King* and *Moana*. Next up is *Zootopia*.

The RE program would not be possible without our wonderful, dedicated volunteers. They each bring their unique gifts and talents to the classroom that bring our UU principles to life with our children.

The RE Coordinator search is still underway. Please spread the word to folks you know who would be interested in leading our RE program.

The RE Ministry Team (REMT) is beginning to explore additional programming for next year and beyond, especially the Our Whole Lives, sexuality education, and Neighboring Faiths, world religion exploration.

Please stay tuned for more to come from the REMT about these opportunities.

## Sunday Services

All our Sunday services are meaningful, but two in December and one in January were noteworthy!

### The December 11<sup>th</sup> Winter Holiday (Part 1) Service

Paula Torres and Diana Martinez brought us the religious festival of Las Posadas celebrated in Mexico, commemorating the journey that Mary and Joseph made from Nazareth to Bethlehem.



The children, in costume, depicted the story of Mary and Joseph focusing on the theme that “There Is No Room at The Inn”. Various reasons were given for this, similar to what landlords might say today. The children responded to Diana’s questions about how that felt and what was wrong about it with insightful responses. Rev. Terri picked up on this and talked about homelessness and what we have recently learned about the social services network in Stamford and Connecticut. (See following report on page 7-8) There is work to be done! The service also included the Posadas tradition of breaking a piñata; a presentation from Elizabeth Jenkins-Sahlin about St. Lucia Day- including the full roll-out of a Swedish flag from our choir loft; and an impressive breakdancing demonstration led by Norman Katchings! Norman offered a fun breakdance workshop on January 29<sup>th</sup> after service for middle schoolers and up!

### The December 18<sup>th</sup> Winter Holiday (Part 2) Service

On Sunday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, our lay-led service began with Lynne Lane lighting a Menorah and singing the Maoz Tsur. The Time for All Ages featured Amy Greenberg, ably assisted by Diana Martinez, who told the story of Hannukah with the audience loudly booing whenever the villain, Antiochus, was mentioned. In celebration of the winter solstice, the UU Wellspring group shared poems and readings about darkness and light, and some shared personal stories of dark times. It was a very moving experience. The service ended with the singing of “God Rest Ye Merry Paganfolk” - an uncommon reversal of Pagans borrowing traditions from the Christians!

### Blessing of the Child (Oliver)

Christopher and Alex Mann and the congregation welcome Oliver into our midst! A picture is worth a thousand words!





## Social Souls



UUC's Social Souls group continued to bring people together by inviting UUC congregants, newcomers, visitors, and friends to its community-building gatherings and social outings.

Two noteworthy Social Souls gatherings in 2022 were the Saint-Lucia-Day-themed Bonus Baking and Bonding gathering and The 3rd Annual December 13th Saint Lucia Day Celebration and Procession. Those who came for Bonus Baking and Bonding made Swedish saffron buns ("lussekatter"), treats

for Coffee Hour, and dishes for a surprise family-style dinner. Attendees of the Saint Lucia Day Celebration on December 13th were treated to traditional Swedish mulled wine ("glögg&quot;); gingersnaps ("pepparkakor"), and traditional costume accessories for the candle-lit procession ("luciatåg").

Social Souls also invited group members to a number of other regular gatherings hosted by UUC congregants and, in doing so, provided UUC congregants and friends the opportunity to create social rituals that foster new friendships.

The themed Community Potluck gatherings fostered meaningful connections between newcomers, members, easing newcomers' transition in their spiritual growth and journey. The gathering also provided congregants the opportunity to welcome friends and family from outside of our spiritual community.





In addition to organizing regular gatherings that were open to all who could benefit from and contribute to the purpose, Social Souls extended invitations to congregant-led social outings, such as an outing to the Mianus River Park for hiking or an outing to the Fairfield Theatre Company for a benefit Concert for Special Olympics.

Stay tuned for more Social Souls invitations via the Social Souls Community Listserv (“Google Group”)

and UUC’s Weekly Announcements (“E-blast”)!

**The Longest Night Interfaith Memorial Service** is held annually at the Bethel AME Church on Fairfield Avenue on December 21st. It commemorates the homeless, the voiceless and the unseen. Rev. Terri gave the Opening Prayer. Representatives of many faiths had a role in the service and Mayor Caroline Simmons gave the keynote address, outlining some of the issues that surround homelessness. Pacific House’s video of lives changed was impressive. Leadership from the local social service agencies participated in the lighting of candles to remember the 46 homeless men and women who died this past year in the Stamford area.

### **MLK Event at Bethel AME - January 16<sup>th</sup>**

The rally/march was a beautiful and energizing community gathering that brought people together across lines of difference — racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, etc. 16 UU’s participated, lending their voices to the occasion. Highlights were singing "This Little Light of Mine" with an interfaith group at Bethel AME Church and marching through the streets of downtown Stamford while singing civil rights era songs and Stevie Wonder’s version of the happy birthday song.





## Membership



We welcomed new members, Katy Fetzer, Lisanne Franco, Leonard Hoover, Don Perley, Rajesh Singh and John Umlauf on Sunday, November 13<sup>th</sup>. Katherine Molina and her children, A.J. and Alma, had previously joined on Zoom, but signed the book officially with the others.

The next New Member Ceremony will take place on Sunday, March 5th. [Contact Rev. Terri](#) if you are interested in signing the book to officially join the congregation.

## Emerson Hall Foundation

We were disappointed that the Pro Bono Partnership turned us down because of the religious entanglement, but we have identified an attorney who will get us incorporated in Connecticut and help us with By-Laws. We still need an accountant to apply to the IRS for our non-profit designation. One step at a time!

## Above & Beyond

Our thanks go to Norris Wakefield for the beautiful hand-tied big red bow that decorated our Choir Loft for the December holiday season. Here is Norris in his role as Bing Crosby at the Villa Italia Restaurant. A multi-talented gentleman!

**Social Action** – Members of UUC’s ad-hoc Social Action on Housing Task Force have been hard at work learning about the issues of homelessness and housing in our community. We are working to build relationships with community partners, congregations, and advocates who share our concerns. The CT Coalition to End Homelessness states that there has been a 40% increase in homelessness throughout the state of Connecticut over the past three years. On January 11<sup>th</sup>, Rev. Terri, Bonnie Currie, Bob Nixon, Lynne Lane, Robin Stein, and Jay Fountain met with the Stamford Police Department’s Behavior Health Unit, and several community organizations that offer assistance to those experiencing housing insecurity and/or homelessness. We heard from representatives from Inspirica (women and family shelter),



Pacific House (men's shelter and supportive housing network), Building One Community (immigrant services), Jewish Family Services, and the City of Stamford's Department of Social Services about the lack of affordable housing, adequate staffing and resources, and emergency space which are impacting an increasingly vulnerable population. We also heard personal stories. Leroy Jones, Outreach Worker at Pacific House, recently counted 41 people, including elderly women and undocumented immigrants, sleeping in the train station. Shelter waiting lists are long, with the average individual stay exceeding six months, with far fewer landlords accepting housing subsidies following the pandemic moratorium on evictions.

We discussed possible ways we at UUC, along with our interfaith partners, might be able to help. The possibilities are endless - from educating landlords to encouraging United Way to employ staff with Spanish language skills for the 211 hotline. The need for a fully staffed overnight warming center space was highlighted. Rev. Terri is discussing this further with other Stamford faith leaders, as we are discerning how our combined efforts might make a difference. **(For a full detailed report of this meeting, please contact Bonnie Currie).**

Bob Nixon, Bonnie Currie, and Rev. Terri also met with leaders at Pacific House and toured the shelter. According to director, Rafael Pagan, they don't turn anyone away, even if it means only a chair for the night. They have 14 housing units with individual apartments for their "graduates," with 4 more in the works. Each unit serves multiple clients and is self-sustaining, not dependent on grants or city budgets. The main facilities were renovated last year and everything is of good quality. There are several ways in which we can partner with Pacific House. **On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, UUC will be preparing a meal for 70+ clients and serving it on site. If you are interested in participating, please contact Rev. Terri.**

Finally, we had a promising Zoom meeting with the CT CAN End Homelessness Coalition. This advocacy organization is working on the state level to:

- Address chronic under funding of providers and staff wages,
- Annualize funding for 211 system infrastructure,
- Annualize desperately needed cold weather funding,
- Create a flexible funding pool to bridge the gaps in available services.

They highlighted the importance of constituent advocacy for this funding. They stressed that the emergency response system works well when it is fully funded: prior to the pandemic, homelessness had decreased by 67% over 10 years. **Look for opportunities in the next few weeks to contact our legislators to push for full funding in this year's state budget!**

Thank you to all those who have volunteered for UUC's daytime warming center and donated hats, gloves, food and \$\$ to the Ministerial Discretionary Fund. We can all do small things with great kindness to care for those in need. **If you would like to get involved with upcoming social action efforts on housing, please contact Bob Nixon, Bonnie Currie, or Rev. Terri.**