

The Pulse

February 2021

VIRTUAL SUNDAY SERVICES ON ZOOM, 10:00 AM

The Meeting ID# 819 313 1486 Password: uuchurch

Feb. 7 – Community Gathering – *Heart Health*

In addition to celebrating Valentine's Day in February, it is also American Heart month. Join the discussion about what keeps your heart healthy in so many ways.

Feb. 14 – Rev. Larry Smith - *Human/Nature*

It seems that there's nothing new in "the theology of the liberal church," as it was called in theological school. But there is something that has always been there and is still something new at the same time, reasonable and mystical.

Feb. 21 – Trish Concannon – *Secrets*

Feb. 28 – Gail Costanza – *Pledge Sunday*

This is our annual pledge service, asking you what you can give to the church to support its programs.

List of DDUUC Officers 2020-2021

President – Christina Sturgis
Vice President – Mary Watterson
Secretary – Jennifer Steffee
Treasurer – John DeMasi
Religious Education – Trish Concannon
Social Action – Kara DeRose
Sunday Service – Joan Spengler

**The Pulse is the newsletter of
Dorothea Dix Unitarian Universalist
Community.**

It is published monthly, September through June. Articles are solicited from members and friends. The Pulse is edited by Pete Costanza.

SOCIAL ACTION

Special thanks to Raquel Parker, Christine Wright, Kirsten and Clarissa De Luca, Marian Hofmann, Patricia Concannon, the Hustises, Joan Spengler and everybody else who has helped us provide meals for families in need. For January, we were able to provide meals for 60 people (including 9 kids, 2 toddlers, and 2 babies). For next month, we could use individual apple sauce cups, large paper bowls, granola bars, microwavable cups of soup, baby food puree pouches, and large brown bags with handles. We could also use baby wipes and size 3-month diapers. Thank you all so much for your help and for your generous donations! I'm hoping that by March, the COVID #s will be lower, and we can start providing cooked meals again, and making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the kids. For now, because COVID #s are still high, we are staying on the safe side and sticking with the nonperishable\sealed meals.

I have found out about a great opportunity for DDUUC to get free milkweed plugs through a program from the University of Kansas. The retail price for each flat is \$100-\$160. We will mostly likely plant it in the DDUUC garden bed on the side since it hasn't been used in a few years, and along the parking lot. I filled out an application for the milkweed, and will keep everybody posted!

Kara DeRose

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

For RE, we are most likely not meeting for the month of January. We all met last month (December) at the farm to do the mitten tree. This month, we felt like the numbers were too high due to all of the indoor family gatherings that occurred around the holidays. We are setting up a virtual RE class soon. Then in March, we will hopefully be able to meet in person/outdoors again. Fingers crossed!

Kara DeRose & Trish Concannon

In a recent letter from Mike Skaggs, director of Soaring Eagle in Billings, Montana, he wrote that since the Elders could not celebrate Christmas with outside family and friends due to COVID, they shared Christmas memories from their youth as they ate their holiday meal.

Joyce Knows His Gun remembered one Christmas when her grandmother had only rice to cook for dinner. She added red food coloring to the rice, and the kids thought it was the best meal ever! Elder Joyce and her siblings found joy in the smallest of blessings - a survival technique we could all use.

Betsy Young

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

The DDUUC Book Group will be discussing “Becoming” by Michelle Obama via Zoom on March 11, 2021 at 7:00 PM. Contact Barbara Kotch with any questions.

FUNDRAISING

Thank you to everybody who purchased items through the fundraiser we had last month. We only made \$175 from it but every little bit counts! I plan on trying to do another fundraiser with plants in the spring, will let you all know more details soon!

Kara DeRose

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

As an RE teacher, Roger’s service on January 24 reminds me of the Janus lesson we usually do the first Sunday every January. We look back and talk about the past year then look forward to what we’d like for the new year. We either draw or write about our ideas on an outline of the two-direction headed Janus. After Roger’s service I did that “Janus thing”. Certainly, the Pandemic looms large in my 2020 as well as some more serious complications with an eye problem. But the Pandemic also dragged me into the 21st century with the purchase of an iPad and an iPhone so that I could be CONNECTED. And I have discovered who and what are most important to me, including my Dorothea Dix and Washington Crossing UU communities.

January brought my 80th birthday and the certain knowledge that whatever I want to accomplish, I’d better get started in whatever way I can! The vaccine, physically meeting loved family and friends, helping in person where I am needed and drinking a cup of coffee at the Golden Dawn diner are all on my 2021 agenda.

Betsy Young

DDUUC has services every Sunday at 10:00 AM from the Sunday after Labor Day through the end of June. Informal Sunday services are held on selected Sundays during July and August. Sunday services are provided by guest ministers, outside speakers, or members and friends of the congregation. DDUUC has an ongoing religious education program for children. We have many activities in which to participate, and are also involved with the Greater Bordentown area through our sponsorship of an Interfaith Dialogue and many social action tasks.

UPCOMING EVENT

Announcing the UU FaithAction NJ (UUFANJ) Gala Friday, March 5, 2021, 7 to 8:30 PM

UU FaithAction NJ's (UUFANJ) **UU Justice Gala 2021** will be our fun annual fundraiser. We started out expecting to hold a gala dinner in Princeton, expanding on the first gala held in Summit. With the pandemic, we have shifted to a virtual event that will be presented via Zoom on Friday, March 5, from 7:00 – 8:30pm. **Racial Justice** has been chosen as the theme to highlight the overarching goal of the dismantling racism work across all our Task Forces.

The gala is a great chance to celebrate what we have accomplished through Faith Action and where we are going. You will be hearing about the work of UUFANJ from Task Force Leaders, and the new UUFANJ Youth Caucus will have a segment.

We will be honoring Rev. Craig Hirshberg and Ms. Kim Gaddy at the gala. Rev. Hirshberg is our early Executive Director who led us in establishing UU FaithAction NJ (then called the UU Legislative Ministry of New Jersey). Ms. Gaddy is a coalition partner and longstanding activist with Clean Water Action, the Department of Environmental Protection, and her hometown of Newark.

The gala will also have music, a breakout activity to get people moving, and bidding via the UUFANJ website before the event for Task Force themed gift and food baskets, delivered to the winners' doorsteps. There will be a drawing for a door prize from among event attendees.

Money to run UUFANJ comes from congregations, from grants, and a significant portion from individuals. There will be a sliding scale registration fee for the gala - youth and friends of UUFANJ are warmly invited too! Please save the date and look for details and the registration link by the end of January at <https://www.uufaithaction.org/>.

Participating in the gala is a great opportunity to support UUFANJ and its important social justice work, as well as join together for an evening of fun and friendship. We look forward to seeing you at the UU Justice Gala 2021!

In faith,

Elaine Nigam and Lynne Quinto, Co-Chairs
UU Justice Gala 2021 Planning Committee

Auto parts, another local "Pulse" and the essential self

When Joan Spengler and I worked as delivery people for C&M Auto Parts, we both listened to the radio a lot, especially long-form radio journalism on the public radio stations. I don't know if Joan is still listening to these programs, but I have recently drifted back to them. If I had to guess, I would say Joan probably has returned to wraparound programming of her favorite rock group, Yes, in the car.

Due to the internet, however, I have found myself listening to a chunk of a long-form radio piece in the car and then finding the remainder on the station's website and finishing it. Last week it was an episode of "The Pulse" on WHYY radio in Philadelphia. The show hosted by Maiken Scott clearly stole its name from DDUUC's newsletter and probably owes us big bucks!

For example, last week I listened to a chunk at the middle of a 48-minute episode called, "Who We Are At Core," exploring whether human beings have a fixed "essential self" that endures throughout all the changes of a lifetime. At first, I thought, "Of course we do!" and after listening to the entire program I was less certain. Such is the power of long-form radio. Scott introduced the piece with a brief interview from a former colleague with whom she worked in radio directly after high school in her native Germany. She was surprised to hear him say he found her largely unchanged from the days when she wore big jewelry and loud fashions, and frequently showed up late to work because she had partied the night away.

He said what he remembered most about her was her sense of humor as shown in fake press releases they used to write for each other on slow news days. He confessed he was a young father in those days living a rather dull life and the way she brought constant drama to their newsroom may have been a welcome distraction.

This bit of information piqued my interest Maiken Scott so I have invited her to join my network on [Linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com), where I see we have eight mutual contacts and Temple University in common. She has two degrees from Temple, but I have only one. Will she exclude me from her contacts on that basis? Time will tell.

The episode included segments about the advantages of self-awareness, a piece about a self-described bully who reformed herself, a look at the essential self from the vantage point of ethics and a very sad segment about a daughter's experience of her father's decline and death from early onset Alzheimer's disease.

The daughter, Esther Honick, said she decided to stop visiting her father, Jordan, when his illness made him paranoid and combative. She said she feared the visits

were laying down disturbing new memories of him that were destroying her sense of him at his best. He did not go without care as a result of her decision.

She said she thought if he had been able to understand the issue, he would have agreed with her decision. Days after hearing it, I am still considering this conundrum, partly because it reminds me of how much Joan was affected by her mother's decline and death from Alzheimer's disease. In the end, I think I support Esther's decision because I don't want judge a person in whose shoes I have not walked. Either way, it demonstrates the power of longform radio.



Commonality

I was thinking about what I would say in my February Pagan Perspective and of course I thought of Imbolc, the celebration of the very first inkling of Spring. It is also a day of weather divination like Ground Hog's Day. And I thought of the translation of Imbolc. One source says it means sheep's milk. Another says it means in the belly. Both of these refer to sheep being pregnant (in the belly) and sheep nursing their young (sheep's milk). So, which is it?

I really don't know. But for years we have been celebrating Imbolc by going out for ice cream sundaes or Belgian waffle sundaes, with lots of whipped cream and sprinkles. One year I even brought my own sprinkles in case they didn't have any. This year we will be celebrating at home with milk shakes. So, I guess I'll go with sheep's milk as the translation I use.

But this brought up a comparison between Unitarian Universalism and paganism. The common saying "Ask 4 Unitarian Universalists a question and you will get 7 answers" also refers to paganism. Paganism is very similar. Since there is no one accepted authority on the topic we all have the freedom to follow whatever path we choose. As Evergreen CUUPs often says "we are our own spiritual authority".

I find the commonality between the two fascinating. As UUs we don't have a creed or dogma that we are required to believe. Actually, being a UU is harder than just memorizing words and reciting them on demand. We have to try to live by our principles. And that can be hard.

There are many paths in paganism. Some do require lots of reading and learning about various gods and goddesses. Or memorizing the Charge of the Goddess. My path does not require these things. It does require that I be present in the moment and observe and incorporate the lessons of the natural world into my life. My path requires that I appreciate the beauty that is all around us both outside of ourselves and within our very essence. And this can be hard too.

"The story of the human race is war. Except for brief and precarious interludes, there has never been peace in the world." Winston Churchill

My new year's celebration began on Inaugural Day, a euphoric day, a day signifying great relief for our country. The assault on our democracy is over. But the assault on our very lives continues—in the microscopic form of a virus, the likes of which we have not seen in over a hundred years, a virus whose death toll was compounded by a world war, and a president who did very little to stop it. And now, even on Inauguration Day, the new president is going to war on the virus by signing an executive order making all government workers wear masks for a time.

And what a year 2020 was. We had a war on the coronavirus, POTUS had a war on anyone who disagreed with him (well over 60% of the population). We had a lot of skirmishes in the form of demonstration for human rights, especially the BLM movement, the Women's movement, treatment of immigrants. And the list goes on. Never-ending.

Remember the war on poverty? The war on drugs? The Cold War? Geez, always some kind of war. For years we've had a war between Democrats and Republicans. And the casualties were truth, integrity, honesty, and, really, the citizens of the United States. Barack Obama had to put up a fierce fight to get passed his universal health care, or Obamacare. The enemy? Mitch McConnell, the Tea Party, and the Republicans in Congress.

For you old-timers: remember Pogo? By Walt Kelly? One of his characters wisely said, "We have met the enemy. And it is us." And so it is. And it is so sad to think that the enemy is the enemy not for "the content of his character..." But for the color of his skin, the religion he happens to belong to, the country he comes from, the political party to which he belongs. So, yeah, there will always be a war of some sort. You know very well that if everyone were the same color and the same religion, etc., people would be picking on short people, on "fat" people, on "retards." Oh, wait. We do that anyway. And really, if we find ourselves okay with the world, our neighbors, our family, there will still be a war going on, with ourselves. Our psyche might start a pitched battle. And if nothing else, our immune system might turn on us! Always something.

But, if you believe in the God of the Old Testament, the God of the Flood, of the Plagues in Egypt, Job, you should believe that Donald Trump and COVID-19 are just His way of keeping us from destroying ourselves and the earth with us, His way of keeping us humble, respectful, grateful. I just wish He would do a better job!

Happy New Year, anyway!

Democracy

de·moc·ra·cy: (1) a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives;
(2) control of an organization or group by the majority of its members;
(3) the practice or principles of social equality.

This past month, democracy in our country, as defined by (1), has been under siege. Democracy is a basic good, even when not related to national government, as is evident in definitions (2) and especially (3). Two examples come to mind in the realm of religion: democracy in Buddhism and in Unitarian Universalism.

In Buddhism, everyone is thought to have the Buddha nature: no one is better than any other. Buddhism is not an authoritarian religion. Buddhist masters don't lord it over any one because that person has not awakened to the oneness of all. They do not dictate what must be believed. Members are free to seek their enlightenment independently. Buddhist leadership varies by sect and by region. There is no central administrative body that governs all Buddhists. The association between sects and national governments also varies. Definition (3) is the dominant guideline.

In Unitarian Universalism, a major principle is the inherent worth and dignity of every person. All seven principles were decided democratically. The fourth principle says everyone may seek their spiritual path independently. The fifth principle is the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large. All administrative decisions are made by elected Board members chosen democratically. The parent organization (UUA) does not dictate beliefs or dogma.

However, most Christian denominations are not democratic. Beliefs and dogmas are dictated from above. The individual is dictated to by the priest or minister, who is to obey the bishop, the archbishop or the Pope, and ultimately God. It is an authoritarian hierarchy that resembles a monarchy, which is contradictory in a democratic republic. The individual does not rule.

Belief in democracy as embedded in a religious or philosophical path of life is essential to fully appreciate democracy at the governmental level. I doubt there were any Buddhists or Unitarian Universalists that stormed the Capitol last month.

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