

Issue

May 2020

The Foreword



UU AMHERST

*Fostering Justice
and Compassion*

The Newsletter of the
Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst
6320 Main Street, Williamsville, NY 14221
634-3010 (x101 for office)
Office Hours Tues.—Fri. 9am to 2pm www.uuamherst.org

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Minister Emerita

Rev. Maureen Q. Thitchener

SUNDAY SERVICES MAY AT 10:30 AM

We will continue to meet virtually each Sunday morning. Rather than projecting ahead with anticipated sermon titles, we will continue to be flexible and offer a word of hope and encouragement each week. It doesn't seem like the time to be offering services "about" a topic.

May Worship leaders:

May 3 Rev. Michelle

May 10 Rev. Michelle

May 17 Rev. Michelle

May 24 Kristina Church

May 31 Angela Warren

Our Sunday worship services are online. As we learn the technology, we are making adaptations to how the online services are delivered. Please check our website, www.uuamherst.org, on Sunday morning for the most up-to-date information to tune in. Thanks for your patience and understanding as we learn and grow! Past services are available on our YouTube channel. Click the SUNDAY SERVICE LIVE 10:30 button in the upper right corner of the UU Amherst website at uuamherst.org.

Our Covenant

*Together we promise:
To gather in compassionate
community,
To celebrate diversity of thought and
unity of spirit;
And to seek wholeness for ourselves,
our children, and our world.*

Don't forget to call your minister!

With health privacy laws, hospitals no longer call churches to let us know when someone has been hospitalized – so it is up to you to contact us if you or someone you know is experiencing health challenges and may want to be contacted. When in doubt, call!



MINISTER'S CORNER

Anyone else feeling like their 'learning curve' is a series of loopde loops? We've been learning-as-we-go with regard to online worship, virtual small group ministry, and creating non-traditional ways to connect with family and friends. The question of 'who are we not reaching' is more pertinent than ever. I don't want anyone to feel like their church has forgotten them.

This desire to connect people is what led to the creation of the Villages; a structure that encourages each person to reach out - to give and receive, as needed. We sing, *From you I receive, to you I give, together we share, and from this we live*, and now we have an opportunity to live into that relationship in beloved community.

We know that The Church is not the building - it's us, the beloved community. The separation and isolation that we are experiencing in the COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity to understand this truth at a new level. We are together, even when apart. We are One.

Be well,
Rev. Michelle

Kristina Finishing Internship

Our ministerial intern, Kristina Church will be finishing her internship with the UU Church of Amherst at the end of May (although you might see her at Planet Thursday gatherings beyond that). Our original plan was to have a big party following her last day of preaching on Sunday, May 24, which is now unlikely with continued coronavirus restrictions. So how can we show our love and appreciation for all she has brought to us in the two years of internship?

Let's flood her mailbox with cards and letters filled with messages of love! Send your expressions of gratitude and good wishes to: c/o UU Amherst, 6320 Main St., Williamsville, NY 14221.

Help When You Need It

This is a reminder that if you are experiencing financial hardship, you can reach out to Rev. Michelle (minister@uuamherst.org) for assistance from the Minister's Discretionary Fund. This Fund is made possible by the generosity of fellow congregants, and just one more way we demonstrate that no one is alone. We care for one another.

Connections:

Zoom - Lunch with Friends

Each Thursday at noon. See the Weekly Update for the link.

Zoom - Shared Caring Circle

Saturdays at 9:30 am. Thirty minutes of prayer and care. See the Weekly Update for the link.



New furniture has arrived for the church lobby along with fresh paint now freshening up the walls. We can't wait until we can open the doors and have everyone enjoy our spaces again!

MINISTERIAL INTERN NOTES



Well, here we are at the beginning of May. The buds are blossoming, the sun is (sort of) shining, and graduation season is fast approaching. And guess who is one of the people who will be graduating this year?

Yes, you guessed it. I'll be taking part in the 175th Commencement Exercises at my seminary, Meadville Lombard Theological School, on Sunday, May 17th, just a few weeks away! And the very next week, I will be ordained by a triumvirate of congregations: the UU Church of Buffalo, the UU Church of Amherst, and the UU Church of Hamburg on Saturday, May 23rd. All by Zoom, of course. So if you're interested in attending yet another Zoom meeting, I will be happy to send you an invitation to one or both events, which may be enjoyed from the comfort of your home.

After two years as your ministerial intern, I'm ready to fly out of this comfy congregational nest and try my wings someplace new. I'm finally finished with the intense work of ministerial formation, which we often compare to a caterpillar forming into a butterfly inside its chrysalis. No matter what nature metaphor you prefer, it's time for me to go...but first, I must tell you how warmly I'll always remember my two years here in Amherst. And what a privilege it has been to serve as your intern, learning from and with your talented minister, your inventive Director of Faith Development, and the rest of your wonderful staff. And my supportive ministerial internship committee: Amy Malachowski, Barry Kent, Eric Groat, Marie Evans, and Rosalind Sulaiman. And of course, all of you...the wonderful people of this congregation.

It's time to say what's in my heart: I'll miss you all as I move on down the path of ministry, but I know that Unitarian Universalism is a very small denomination, and our paths are likely to cross again! While goodbyes are winsome and bittersweet, I'm happy that we have had this time to be together. It's meant the world to me to have a safe and supportive place where my ministry could begin to take shape. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for being that wonderful place for me.

The congregations I serve as a minister may eventually be many. But there will only ever have been one Teaching Congregation in my life. I'm so glad it was UU Amherst!

Many blessings to you!

AMHERST LITTLE FREE PANTRY UPDATE

There are two large green Pantry Donation bins in the back of the church by the back doors (main entrance) where donations may be dropped off. If you have a large quantity to donate, please contact the Office at 634-3010 to arrange a time for you to drop off items.

You can now make a financial contribution to the Pantry online at the website, www.uuamherst.org. Just be sure to designate Pantry as the recipient of your funds. Checks are also accepted by snail mail sent to the church with Pantry written in the memo line.

Donations of basics are a priority: cereal, tuna, canned fruit and fruit cups, canned or boxed soup, juice/milk drink boxes, pasta (including lasagna), pasta sauce. Non-perishables only and no glass.

For questions or comments please contact Maria Ceraulo at amherstlittlefreepantry@uuamherst.org. Like us on Facebook: [amherstlittlefreepantry](https://www.facebook.com/amherstlittlefreepantry)

FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Dear members and friends,

I miss you all. I miss standing at the Faith Development station in the lobby of UUCA each Sunday morning and seeing each and every one of your beautiful smiling faces come through our doors. I miss gathering in the chapel for service. I miss being sung out to classes. I miss seeing families gathered at play quietly in the atrium. I miss checking in to see who is gathered with Miss Beverly in the nursery. I miss my church friends.

Though we are grateful to be able to connect virtually during this time for work and school and church, this brings a whole new set of challenges to everyone. I have heard from some people working from home that they feel more inclined to work every second of each day. There is no more interaction in the break room, no one stopping by the desk to break up the day. In some cases, your coworker may have been replaced by your child who needs help with online learning, or a snack, or or or. . . Though I sure do miss the snuggles of my own littles at this time, I can't imagine how challenging it must be to adjust to all of these new demands of juggling all that needs to come straight out of the home right now. Instead of arriving back home at the end of a school or work day, all of it is being generated in one place. THAT is a LOT of energy!

Our FD Team and I are concerned with being able to offer families the connection they need with our beloved community. Attendance in Spirit Play on Sunday morning has been low. Perhaps we are offering it at the wrong time. Perhaps it is just that "one more thing" that families don't have the bandwidth for. We tried an evening story hour with Devon Southall and family with the same result. Though we don't want to discontinue programming for the youngest of our community at this time, it seems we do have to reimagine it. Part of the reimagining will be to have Spirit Play within our 10:30 am service more often, so be watching for this!

The FD Team will be reaching out to all of our families with the main question, "What do you need from your church community at this time?" Also, "How can UUCA be respite for parents at this time?" You are welcomed into helping us come up with creative solutions for these difficult days.

Young Adult programming will continue virtually at noon on Sundays. Our Youth will continue to meet virtually on Sundays at 1:00 pm. Creativity will be needed here as well. We will be looking to engage in some spring and summer activities as we may be able to "open back up," though it is difficult to imagine the exact time and breadth of what this will look like.

GRATITUDE CORNER

During these challenging times, our church community has shown amazing resilience and generosity. Our annual pledge drive has commitments of \$204,593. We have hit our goal and there are still a few pledges yet to be received.

Every contribution brings us closer to being able to maintain and perhaps expand our current programs. Given the uncertainty we as a country face, your generosity and care are amazing! We will get through this crisis as a church community with care, compassion, commitment and shared values.

On behalf of the Finance Committee, thank you for your prompt response as well as your heart-felt contributions to support the church mission. You all have rocked it! We now have the opportunity to create the budget in a timely fashion. We have much to look forward to!

In appreciation,
Karen Thompson
On behalf of UU Amherst Finance Committee

VOICE BUFFALO UPDATE

The Buffalo Police Dept and the DA are reviewing a policy draft and the Memorandum of understanding to go ahead with LEAD (law enforcement assisted diversion) program. The group needs to find funding.

Juvenile Justice Coalition is reviewing data collected by the Burns Institute and a contracted partner to review data regarding the disproportateness of arrest, detention and probation issues. Next they will review the suspension rates and determine the next steps.

Erie County holding Center held a Radical Love Campaign to collect money for commissary ,& phone calls since the holding center has extremely high rates for those citizens awaiting their, outcomes. In partnership with the WNY Peace Center, Just Resist, SURJ,& VOICE Faith Caucus Leaders held a vigil in December to honor the lives lost in the holding center and also in support of their loved ones. The next step is to work on improving the intake process and ending solitary confinement.

The DMR (Disproportionate Minority Representation Group) is partnering with Family, Court, Dept. of Social Services, Child Protective Services and Child and Family Services to host restorative community dialogues. These restorative practices provide understanding, identify solutions and how to restore the harm that has been done.

VOICE has had Research Action Meetings with School Board Chair, Phil Rumore, who supports Restorative practices and VOICE, is working on a proposal and funding to set up two pilot schools, one grade and one high school.

VIBE is a group of young people, from high school and college, that are working intensely on GET OUT THE VOTE. VOICE has a program, from FAITH IN ACTION, and it has provided lap tops and all the necessary materials since one of the organizers has been trained in the GET OUT THE VOTE process.

This is just a sampling of the many plans and actions VOICE is working on at present. At that annual meeting the organizers listed all the lives, events, and actions that is has influenced. Our UU Amherst would be proud and excited about what this organization has done and intensifies over the years. If you are interested in any of these projects, please see Margot Shoemaker or Pat Burke.



UU GENERAL ASSEMBLY

This year's UU General Assembly that was to take place in Providence, Rhode Island on June 24 to 28 is moving into a totally virtual format. "Rooted, Inspired, & Ready" will remain its theme. We are in touch with our theological roots, we are engaged in transforming our faith, and we are fired up to take action in the wider world. Online registration is open. Here is the direct link: <https://www.uua.org/ga/off-site/registrants>. The Ware lecturer is Naomi Klien, climate activist extraordinaire. You can also find opportunities to volunteer on the UUA website. This might possibly be the most well-attended GA in our faith history.

MINISTER'S OFFICE HOURS

May change through May

Tuesday-Thursday

Fridays, sermon writing @home

Monday: Rev. Michelle's day off

HAVE AN ANNOUNCEMENT?

Email: administrator@uuamherst.org

For Newsletter: by 10:00 am on the 16th

For Order of Service: by 10:00 am Wed prior

For Website: two weeks prior to event

For all church list serve: daily during the week.

For Weekly Update: Fridays by 10:00 am

Office Hours: (subject to change)

Tuesday through Friday—9am to 2pm

BOARD NOTES

Dear UUCA members and friends,

We're reaching that time of the year where the necessary business activities of the church must be completed. We have to approve a budget for 2020-21, and elect new trustees and new members of the Nominating Committee. Normally, we do this via a congregational meeting at the church in June. We have no expectation that such a meeting can be held in-person this year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But the show must go on, and like everything else these days, we'll hold the meeting virtually, online. We'll send further details as the time approaches.



I have a number of things to report regarding the church's finances. First, we are no longer benefitting from the weekly plate collection, but that shortfall can be addressed — please look for the email from Yvonne Stocker describing how you can make your plate collection using your phone, either via text, or using an app. There's a bit of setup needed beforehand, but once that's done, you can make your donation in an instant. If you're unsure how to do it, just write to me or Yvonne.

Second, we've had a surprising amount of success this year with the canvas; this outcome owes very much to the hard work of the Finance Committee, led by Karen and John Thompson. I say "surprising" because of fears of repercussions due to the shutdown of the economy. However, we expect to be short on funds, due in some part to uncertainty about our usual fundraisers (in addition to the plate collection), which are an important part of the church's total income. A couple of members have made pledges structured to encourage others to increase theirs, or more importantly, have allowed some members to maintain their affiliation with the church. But still, you may expect that we will present a deficit budget when we bring it to the congregation for approval.

Third, there is pleasant news to report: it seems that the church is carrying some non-negligible "float" in our bank account, resulting from prudent frugality of many prior boards. The determination of the amount is complicated by vagaries of the cash flow (e.g., timing of members' pledge payments), and we are working to get a handle on it; we have been stymied in this effort by a series of unfortunate events, culminating in the shutdown. Regardless, these funds will help us stay afloat while working with a budget deficit.

Fourth, we have submitted an application for a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) grant, which takes the form of a forgivable loan that allows small businesses (like us) to keep paying salaries of its workers through the shutdown. The first Congressional allocation was spent before we got to apply, but there's a new bill coming through Congress that should renew it, and we expect to be among the first in line. For getting this done, we can thank the truly heroic efforts of Don Tucker, who had some help from Cindy Becker, as well as support from Hella Jacob, Karen Thompson, and the church staff (Camilla and Elaine). If this succeeds, it will help us a lot in getting through the coming year.

Finally, I want to make sure everyone appreciates the remarkable fact that we have kept functioning in this extraordinary situation. We're holding services every Sunday, the office is operating, and people are staying connected (and even more is happening in this direction too). A lot of people have contributed to this outcome, but none more so than our Reverend Michelle. She has handled truly difficult situations with grace and skill, and left us all with hope, and appreciation for each other. We've transitioned from live services with nerve-wracking glitches to clever, creative, and beautiful recorded segments that bring in a lot of the church community. This has been accomplished with hard work not only from Rev. Michelle, but also DFD Angela.

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Warren and Intern Minister Kristina Church, as well as Michelle's husband Les and the rest of the tech team – Kim Connolly, Devon Southall, and Scott Harrigan. Les has had a couple of late (4:00 am) nights/mornings pulling together the pieces of the service in time to present them for everyone at 10:30 Sunday morning. This accomplishment has been crucial to the continued vitality of the church

The Board is grateful to Rev. Michelle for the dedication, leadership, patience, and wisdom she brings to the church every day in her service to the congregation. Even in these difficult times (actually, especially in these difficult times), we cannot let this go unacknowledged. Rev. Michelle has been underpaid by the standards of the UUA, and especially by comparison to all of the ministers who preceded her (all with larger salaries). That float we are carrying represents funds that could have been used to pay her closer to a proper level. Anticipating what the Board was thinking, and recognizing the difficult times we're in, Rev. Michelle said that now was not the time to address this. The Board respectfully disagreed. Accordingly, we have voted to provide Rev. Michelle with a bonus for the current year, and we expect to include a raise for her (and the staff) in the 2020-21 budget we bring to the congregation. We hope that you will agree that this is not only a good investment in UU Amherst, but is also the right thing to do.

Stay well, and I'll see you online soon.

Yours in service,
David Kofke, Chair, on behalf of the UUCA Board of Trustees

NOTES FROM THE COMMITTEE ON MISSION

In the coming months, you will be hearing more and more about our new Committee on Mission (COM). The committee's job is to review the various ministries of the church to see if we are fulfilling our mission "to challenge ourselves and the community to foster more compassion and justice in the world." Initially, we plan to meet with the various ministry teams to gather information and feedback, and eventually expand our scope to other areas of church life.

The process will be collaborative, positive, and transparent, with the goal of helping the church to live up to its full potential and improve its ability to fulfill the mission among ourselves and in the wider community. This process will be an ongoing part of our church culture, with different ministries being reviewed each year. At the Annual Meeting, the COM will summarize and report its findings.

The Committee on Mission consists of three members, appointed by the Board of Trustees for a 3-year term, plus one representative from the Board of Trustees as a liaison. The 3-year terms of the COM will be rotated, with one member being replaced each year. The COM currently consists of Suzanne Christ, Diane Bofinger, and Barbara Gauger Kent. Barbara will be rotating off at the end of May.



What are you doing to make the world a better place during the pandemic?

Elaine H. and Dian T. have been making protective masks for family and friends! Great job!

Have you been doing something to make the world better?

Email the office at administrator@uuamherst.org, and include pictures if you can!



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CHURCH OF AMHERST

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